

## **Richard Strauss**

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was a prominent composer in the Romantic period who was known for his operas, *Lieder*, tone poems, and other orchestral works. He was born in Munich, Germany, and also became a well-known conductor in his time. He composed over 200 *Lieder* for the voice and piano. The genre of *Lieder* is built upon the foundation of the German language and the inspiration that composers found in poetry.

Op. 29, no. 2 titled “Schlagende Herzen” was composed in 1895 to a poem by Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865-1910). The piece is in binary form, without the traditional tonic-dominant relationship: the “A” section begins in G-major while the “B” section modulates to B-major. The use of arpeggiated patterns, tremolos, and driving sixteenth notes give the feeling of growing anticipation. The rhythmic syncopation and frequent leaps in the singer’s range depict a lighthearted tone.

“Ich schwebe” Op. 48, no. 2, was composed in 1800 to a poem by Karl Friedrich Henckell (1864-1929). In contrast to the lighthearted opener, this song depicts a lament with a floating melody over delicate accompaniment, like a lullaby. The 3/4 meter gives the feeling of a waltz, but Strauss’s consistent syncopation in the accompaniment causes the listener to feel certain phrases in two.

“Ständchen,” Op. 17, no. 2 is set to a lively and uplifting 6/8 meter. Strauss composed opus 17 in 1886 as a set of six *Lieder*. His melodic setting of this poem by Adolf Friedrich von Schack (1815-1894) is syncopated and unpredictable, demonstrating youthful love. The harmonic support of the piano seamlessly fits into the shimmering vocal line that is almost operatic in nature.

Strauss chose another text by von Schack to set the final piece of this set, “Breit über mein Haupt” op. 19, no. 2. He uses diatonic block chords underneath the first stanza, and in the second stanza the piano outlines the chords with simple eighth- and quarter-note values. The entire piece is only nineteen measures long, but contains elements of word painting throughout, helping the audience visualize the beauty of the person being described.

## **Dominick Argento, *Six Elizabethan Songs***

Dominick Argento (1927-2019) is the only American composer featured in this recital. This 1957 song cycle alternates between fast and slow tempi, and includes six songs set to poetry by various literary figures from the Elizabethan era (1558-1603). Not only was the time period a source of inspiration for these six songs, but themes of changing seasons, love, and nature all play a role.

The opening song, “Spring,” is set to a text by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). Though the phrases in this piece are short, the natural rhythmic inflection proves to be even more emphasized by Argento’s cheerful melody. The piano continues a running sixteenth-note pattern throughout, and the voice offers slight variances during each repetition. Argento makes short shifts in tonality during the third line of each stanza.

“Sleep” is composed in a *lentamente* 8/8 time signature. The text, by Samuel Daniel (1562-1619), is from his collection of fifty sonnets titled *Delia*. Each phrase is highly chromatic and includes unpredictable intervals such as recurring tritones. Despite the harmonic ambiguity, Argento gives the listener a sense of tonality in the final measure with a D-flat major into B-flat major cadence, suggesting a tonal center of D-flat.

“Winter” is set with a tempo marking of “fast and lively.” The text is taken from Act V Scene ii of William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Argento suggests a tonality of E major in the majority of the vocal line. The composition offers dramatic changes in dynamic level, meter shifts within phrases, and contrast of texture ranging from sharp textual emphasis to rich and *legato* accompaniment.

“Dirge” is a simple arrangement, with chords formed in the accompaniment that are reminiscent of church bells. Argento uses the tritone relationship again between the voice and piano, reflecting mysteriousness through sparse accompaniment and rhythmic minimalism. The text is from Shakespeare’s *The Twelfth Night* (1623).

“Diaphenia” shifts the audience again into a joyful atmosphere. It opens with a brisk piano introduction, similar to “Spring.” The time signature suggests a childlike playfulness through a 9/8 lilt. The text by Henry Constable (1562-1613) presents a vivid array of emotions for a singer to express, between excitement in expressing love, to declamatory statements of admiration.

In “Hymn,” Argento selected a text by Ben Jonson (1572-1637). This particular poem was taken from Jonson’s 1600 satirical stage play *Cynthia’s Revels*. The poem is addressed to Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt. The representation of the Queen as Diana was a common portrayal in art and literature. The accompaniment provides scarce opportunity for the singer to develop a rhythmic or tonal center. Chords underneath a chromatic vocal line create a majestic and ominous atmosphere.

#### **“Les oiseaux dans la Charmille” from *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* by Jacques Offenbach**

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880) was a German-born composer who is often considered the “father of the operetta.” He became an accomplished cellist and composer, and was hired to conduct the *Théâtre Français* in 1849. With a libretto by Jules Barbier (1825-1901) *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* is described as an *opéra-fantastique* due to the focus on artistic content versus entertainment. It is based on three tales by E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) and takes place in early nineteenth-century Italy. Hoffmann tells the story of his three loves in separate acts: Olympia, Giulietta, and Antonia. Olympia’s aria occurs in act one during a party at the house of the inventor Spalanzani. Coppélius and Spalanzani create a life-sized mechanical doll named Olympia. Coppélius arrives at the party and sells Hoffman a pair of glasses that make Olympia appear human. She sings “Les oiseaux dans la charmille” and Hoffmann is smitten.

The aria depicts generic images of love and beauty while the phrasing allows the music to reflect a robotic character. The tessitura famously requires a flexible coloratura or lyric-coloratura soprano, with the ability to comfortably ornament and extend the phrasing in the second verse. The waltzing meter and accompaniment of flute and harp mimic the mechanical sound of a music box.

### **Reynaldo Hahn**

Reynaldo Hahn (1847-1974) was a Venezuelan-born composer, conductor, and writer. These two songs demonstrate Hahn's consistent use of vocal restraint and simplicity, allowing the music to serve the text. Unlike an operatic aria, the *mélodies* composed by Hahn relied more on lyrical sensitivity than on ornamentation or virtuosic performance. Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote the poem that inspired the first piece, "Si mes vers avaient des ailes!" The mention of birds, gardens, the contrast of night and day, and overall theme of love reflect imagery of the Romantic Movement. "L'heure exquise," is the fifth song of Hahn's seven-song cycle *Chansons Grises* (Gray Songs), a set composed in 1893 to poems by Paul Marie Verlaine (1844-1896). Verlaine was a prominent writer of the Symbolist and Decadent movements which were characterized by emotional expression through symbolic and figurative language.

### **Joaquin Rodrigo, *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios***

Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999) was born in Sagunto, Spain to a family of ten children. His music is considered one of the best representations of romantic and impressionistic trends of twentieth-century music in Spain. In addition to being a virtuosic pianist, Rodrigo composed chamber music and numerous works for voice, guitar, choir, and piano. This set of four songs was composed in 1947, and was heavily influenced by early music and folk poetry. He selected these madrigals from the 1560 collection *Recopilación de sonetos y villancicos a quatro y a cinco* by composer Juan Vasquez (c.1500- c.1560). Rodrigo preserved the cultural distinction of the folk poetry in these songs as well as the influence of the *vihuela*, a stringed Spanish Renaissance instrument.

This song collection explores the various emotions associated with love including despair, admiration, excitement, and wonder. "¿Con qué la lavaré?" is a reflection of sorrow, as the narrator observes women who are surrounded by love and luxury as she is left feeling hopeless and alone. The second piece titled "Vos me matàsteis" reflects the devastation that the narrator feels after seeing a beautiful girl on the banks of a river. Songs three and four, "¿De dónde venís, amore?" and "De los álamos vengo, madre" both reflect a different side of love. The excitement and assurance reflected in these two poems and the lively tempo markings offer a contrast to the solemn first half of the set.