

**Witches, Britches, And Love Along The Way:
A Mezzo-Soprano Recital**

Maggie Ramsey, Mezzo-Soprano
Ruth Locker, Piano

Cherrydale United Methodist Church
Saturday, August 23
7:30 p.m.

The Program

Werther (1887)

Music by Jules Massenet (1842-1912)
Libretto by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann
“Va! Laisse couler mes larmes” (“Go! Let my tears fall”)

Matthäuspassion (St. Matthew Passion) (1727)

Music by J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
Libretto by Picander (1700-1764)
“Erbarme dich, mein Gott” (“Have mercy on me, my God”)

“Come again, sweet love” (1597)

Music and lyrics by John Dowland (1563-1626)

Giulio Cesare (1724)

Music by George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Libretto by Nicola Francesco Haym (1678-1729)
“Svegliatevi nel core” (Awaken in the heart)

Le nozze di Figaro (1786)

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838)
“Voi che sapete” (“You who know”)

Liederkreis, Op. 39

Music by Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Poem by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)
“Waldeggespräch” (“Dialogue in the forest”)

Rückert-Lieder (1901)

Music by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)
Poem by Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)
“Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen” (“I am lost to the world”)

Erlkönig, Op. 1, D. 328 (1815)

Music by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Oh! quand je dors, S. 282 (1842)

Music by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Poem by Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

Ouvre ton coeur (1860)

Music by Georges Bizet (1838-1875)
Poem by Louis Delâtre (1815-1893)

La mort d’Ophelie (1842)

Music by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)
Poem by Ernest Legouv   (1807-1903)

The House of Life (1903)

Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

“Silent Noon”

Songs to the Moon (1998)

Music by Jake Heggie (1961-)

Poem by Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

“The Haughty Snail-King (What Uncle William Told The Children)”

Just a Closer Walk With Thee

Traditional American Song, Arr. Richard Walters

A light reception follows in the church parlor.

Program Notes, Texts, and Translations

Perhaps most famous for the “Meditation” from his opera *Thaïs*, Jules Massenet studied at the Paris Conservatoire beginning at the age of nine. A pianist and percussionist, he worked in orchestra pits and as a teacher to earn his living. He later taught at the same conservatory where he studied, until the death of his teacher Ambroise Thomas, when he decided to focus on composing exclusively.

Initially, *Werther* was not well-received. According to the *New York Times* after the U.S. premiere in 1894, "If M. Massenet's opera does not have lasting success it will be because it has no genuine depth. Perhaps M. Massenet is not capable of achieving profound depths of tragic passion; but certainly he will never do so in a work like *Werther*".¹ The libretto, a joint effort by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, is based on the popular novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe.

The final scenes of this opera take place at Christmas, but it's not a happy holiday. Charlotte's aria "**Va! laisse couler mes larmes**" is her outburst to her younger sister Sophie. Charlotte has been re-reading the letters Werther wrote to her, trying to find some comfort despite his absence and despite the fact that they cannot be together, but when Sophie speaks Werther's name, Charlotte can no longer contain her grief.

Werther

Va! Laisse couler mes larmes

Va! laisse couler mes larmes
elles font du bien, ma chérie!
Les larmes qu'on ne pleure pas,
dans notre âme retombent toutes,
et de leurs patientes gouttes
Martèlent le coeur triste et las!
Sa résistance enfin s'épuise; le coeur se creuse...
et s'affaiblit: il est trop grand, rien ne l'emplit;
et trop fragile, tout le brise!

Werther

Go! Let my tears flow

Go! let my tears flow
they do me good, my darling!
The tears we do not cry,
in our souls all fall,
and with their patient drops
Hammer the sad and weary heart!
Its resistance is finally exhausted; the heart
hollows and weakens: it is too big, nothing fills it;
and too fragile, everything breaks it!

J.S. Bach's industry and prolific output came about as a career necessity. As cantor at St. Thomas in Leipzig, he not only needed to write new music every week, but also composed for other churches. The St. John and St. Matthew Passions were written for Good Friday, and these are the only two Passion settings of his that survive. In the **St. Matthew Passion**, Peter's aria "**Erbarme dich, mein Gott**" comes at the moment Peter realizes that what Jesus foretold has come true: By the time the cock crowed on Good Friday morning, Peter had denied him three times. In addition to the vocal solo, there is a violin part that features prominently, recreated in the piano part in this arrangement. The text of the entire work includes both unparaphrased German translation of Chapters 26 and 27 of the Gospel According to St. Matthew (the Passion text itself), plus free verse written by Picander, the pen name of poet Christian Friedrich Henrici.

Matthäuspasion

Erbarme dich, mein Gott

Erbarme dich, mein Gott,
Um meiner Zähren willen!
Schaue hier, Herz und Auge
Weint vor dir bitterlich.

St. Matthew Passion

Have mercy on me, my God

Have mercy on me, my God
For the sake of my tears!
Look here, heart and eyes
Weep for you bitterly.

¹ "The Sorrows of Werther", *The New York Times*, 20 April 1894, Page 5

John Dowland is such a popular composer that even Sting has covered his songs, featuring them in the album *Songs from the Labyrinth*. In addition to being a lutenist and composer, Dowland was a singer. He served in both the French and Danish royal courts before finally securing a position in England, ending his life in the service of King James I. Dowland's songs can be played on lute or even guitar in addition to piano. **"Come again, sweet love"** is a saucy love song in Elizabethan style. Artists singing music from this time period are called upon to create ornaments and/or variations on the second verse.

Come again, sweet love

Come again, sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces that refrain
To do me due delight
To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die
With thee again in sweetest sympathy.

Come again, that I might cease to mourn
Through thy unkind disdain
For now left and forlorn
I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die
In deadly pain and endless misery.

George Friderich Handel was born in Germany and received his musical education from organist Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow, but settled as an adult in England, where he became a naturalized citizen, started three opera companies, and eventually composed his most-famous *Messiah*. He was fortunate to have commercial success in his lifetime, wealthy when he passed and buried in Westminster Abbey following his state funeral.

The character of Sesto in Handel's **Giulio Cesare** is a travesti role, a mezzo-soprano singing the character of an adolescent boy. At this point in the opera, Sesto's father Pompey has been murdered, and his head has been delivered to him and his mother in Caesar's presence. At first paralyzed with horror, in this "rage" aria Sesto summons the courage to exact vengeance. This aria is also *da capo*, a Baroque form which demands variations on the repeat. The libretto is by Nicola Francesco Haym, a collaborator of both Handel and Giovanni Bononcini, Handel's rival.

Giulio Cesare

Svegliatevi nel core

Vani sono i lamenti;
è tempo, o Sesto, ormai
di vendicar il padre;
si svegli alla vendetta
l'anima neghittosa,
che offesa da un tiranno invan riposa.

Svegliatevi nel core, furie d'un alma offesa,
a far d'un traditor aspra vendetta!
L'ombra del genitore
accorre a mia difesa,
e dice: a te il rigor, figlio, si aspetta.

Julius Caesar

Awaken in my heart

Laments are all in vain:
now is the time, Sextus,
to avenge your father,
if you wake up to revenge
your idle soul
which, offended by a tyrant, rests in vain.

Awaken in my heart furies of an offended soul
To do bitter vengeance to a traitor!
The shade of my father
Comes to my defense
And says: son, harshness is expected of you!

The collaboration between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte resulted in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Don Giovanni*, all three widely considered to be masterworks of the operatic canon. *Le nozze di Figaro* is based on the Beaumarchais play (of the same name, but in French), the second in a trilogy that begins with *The Barber of Seville* and ends with *The Guilty Mother*.

The character of Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro*, like Sesto in *Giulio Cesare*, is a travesti role. He is a pageboy who has written a love song “**Voi che sapete**” for the Countess, his employer’s wife, and at this point in the opera’s second act, despite his nervous protestations, is compelled to sing it for her.

Le nozze di Figaro

Voi che sapete

Voi che sapete che cosa è amor,
donne, vedete s'io l'ho nel cor.
Quello ch'io provo vi ridirò,
è per me nuovo, capir nol so.
Sento un affetto pien di desir,
ch'ora è diletto, ch'ora è martir.
Gelo e poi sento l'alma avvampar,
e in un momento torno a gelar.
Ricerco un bene fuori di me,
non so chi'l tiene, non so cos'è.
Sospiro e gemo senza voler,
palpito e tremo senza saper.
Non trovo pace notte né dì,
ma pur mi piace languir così.

The marriage of Figaro

You who know

You who know what love is,
ladies, see if I have it in my heart.
What I feel I will explain to you;
It is new to me, I don't understand it.
I feel a feeling full of desire,
Which now is pleasure, now is torment.
I freeze, then I feel my soul burst into flame,
and in a moment I freeze again.
I search for a treasure outside of myself;
I know not who holds it nor what it is.
I sigh and I groan without wishing to,
I flutter and tremble without knowing why.
I find no peace night or day,
but I like to languish like that.

Born in Zwickau, Germany, in 1810, Robert Schumann studied piano with Friedrich Wieck, the father of the child prodigy Clara Wieck, who would later marry Robert and become Clara Schumann. Robert’s aspirations to be a pianist were waylaid by problems with his right hand, but Clara ended up premiering and editing much of his music so that we have it today. Robert was also a music critic, and after the couple met Johannes Brahms, Robert praised the young man in *The New Journal of Music*, a magazine that he started in Leipzig. The Schumanns moved to Düsseldorf when Robert was appointed director of music there, but he had to resign after three years. Plagued by poor mental health, Robert died at the age of 46 in an insane asylum in Bonn due to complications from pneumonia.

Schumann wrote two song cycles titled *Liederkreis*. One has poetry by Joseph von Eichendorff from his poetry collection *Intermezzo*, the other, poetry by Heinrich Heine. The “**Waldesgespräch**” given here is from the former. As with most German Lieder, this piece has so much to take in. One can hear a hunting horn motive as well as a change in key and theme when the second character of the story starts speaking. Also typical of German lieder, Eichendorff’s poetry is very much of the Romantic period, portraying nature in its imagery of the woods, the river, and the witch’s castle on a crag high above.

Waldesgespräch

„Es ist schon spät, es ist schon kalt,
Was reit’st du einsam durch den Wald?
Der Wald ist lang, du bist allein,
Du schöne Braut! Ich führ’ dich heim!“

„Gross ist der Männer Trug und List,
vor Schmerz mein Herz gebrochen ist,
wohl irrt das Waldhorn her und hin,

Forest Dialogue

“It is already late, it is already cold,
Why ride you by yourself through the forest?
The forest is vast, you are alone,
You beautiful bride! I lead you home.”

“Great is man’s deceit and cunning,
My heart is broken from pain.
Indeed strays the hunting horn here and there,

O flieh! Du weißt nicht, wer ich bin.“

So reich geschmückt ist Roß und Weib,
So wunderschön der junge Leib,
Jetzt kenn' ich dich, Gott steh' mir bei!
Du bist die Hexe Loreley.

„Du kennst mich wohl, du kennst mich wohl!
von hohem Stein
Schaut still mein Schloss tief in den Rhein.
Es ist schon spät, es ist schon kalt,
Kommst nimmermehr aus diesem Wald!“

Oh flee! You know not who I am.”

“So wonderfully adorned is steed and woman,
So wonderfully beautiful the young body,
Now I know you, God stand by me!
You are the witch Loreley.”

“You know me well, you know me well!
from high rocky cliff
My castle looks quietly deep into the Rhine.
It is already late, it is already cold,
Nevermore will you come out of this forest.”²

Gustav Mahler primarily earned his living as a conductor. Born Jewish in what was then the Austrian Empire in 1860, he later converted to Catholicism in order to land the position of director at the Vienna Court Opera. He experienced rampant antisemitism especially in the press, but fortunately neither that, nor even a ban on his music during the Third Reich, could stop him from going down in history as one of the greatest conductors and composers. Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* premiered in 1905, a cycle of five songs to poetry by Friedrich Rückert. Rückert was a translator of poetry from the Far East and a professor of Eastern languages as well as a poet. Adding to the words of the poem themselves, the sound-world of “**Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen**” shows the composer's own peaceful solitude as he recovered from a haemorrhage beside the lake near Meiernigg, Austria, where he wrote the cycle between 1901 and 1902. Here both melody and harmony wander, as if on a walk on a trail by the lake.

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen,
Mit der ich sonst viele Zeit verdorben,
Sie hat so lange nichts von mir vernommen,
Sie mag wohl glauben, ich sei gestorben!
Es ist mir auch gar nichts daran gelegen,
Ob sie mich für gestorben hält,
Ich kann auch gar nichts sagen dagegen,
Denn wirklich bin ich gestorben der Welt.
Ich bin gestorben dem Weltgetümmel,
Und ruh' in einem stillen Gebiet.
Ich leb' allein in meinem Himmel,
In meinem Lieben, in meinem Lied.

I am lost to the world

I am lost to the world
With which I used to waste much time.
It has for so long not heard from me
It may well believe I am dead.
And it does not matter to me
Whether it thinks I am dead,
I can also not deny it,
Because truly I am dead to the world.
I am dead to the world's tumult
And I rest in a quiet place
I live alone in my heaven,
In my love, in my song.

Franz Schubert, violinist, pianist, and vocalist, eventually became in essence the father of the modern pop song by adding 600 songs to the genre of the German Lied during his tragically short thirty-one years. Born in Vienna, his most influential teacher was none other than Antonio Salieri. Schubert had started studying violin, piano, and even viola with his family, and Salieri taught him music theory and composition.

Although the genre of Lied is not opera, Schubert nevertheless adds wonderful drama to his pieces. By way of example, the four characters of his “**Erlkönig**,” written when Schubert was only eighteen, come together to create a glorious moment of horror storytelling. Schubert builds tension rhythmically, harmonically,

² Beaumont Glass, Schumann's Complete Song Texts: In One Volume Containing All Completed Solo Songs Including Those Not Published During The Composer's Lifetime, Duets, Trios, Quartets (Leyerle Publications, 2002). 52-53.

and dynamically, then almost lures one into a false sense of dream-like safety with a softer dynamic and key changes, then drops the pretense to close the piece with harsh reality. The storminess of this poem is illustrative and apropos of the fact that its author, Goethe, was indeed one of the Sturm und Drang movement in eighteenth-century German literature.

Erlkönig

Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er fasst ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

„Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht?“
„Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif?“
„Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.“

„Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand.“

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht?“
„Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind:
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.“

„Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Rein
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein.“

„Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort?“
„Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.“

„Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.“
„Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!“

Dem Vater grauset, er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not:
In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.

The Erlking

Who rides so late through night and wind?
It is the father with his child;
He holds the boy firmly in his arms,
He grasps him securely, he holds him warm.

“My son, why hide your face so anxiously?”
“Father, do you not see the Erlking?
The Erlking with crown and tail?”
“My son, it is a streak of mist.”

“You lovely child, come go with me!
I'll play nice games with you;
Many bright flowers are on the shore,
My mother has many golden garments.”

“My father, my father, and do you not hear
What the Erlking softly promises me?”
“Be calm, stay calm, my child:
The wind is rustling in the dry leaves.”

“Will you, fine boy, go with me?
My daughters will wait on you nicely;
My daughters lead the nightly dance
And rock and dance and sing you to sleep.”

“My father, my father, and do you not see there
Erlking's daughters in the dark spot?”
“My son, my son, I see it clearly:
The old willows are shining gray.”

“I love you, your fair form allures me;
And if you are not willing, I shall use force.”
“My father, my father, now he seizes me!
Erlking has hurt me!”

The father is horrified, he rides fast,
He holds in his arms the groaning child,
He reaches the courtyard with effort and distress:
In his arms the child was dead.³

³ Beaumont Glass, Schubert's Complete Song Texts, Volume 1 (Leyerle Publications, 1996). 482-483.

Franz Liszt wrote two settings of Victor Hugo's "**Oh! quand je dors.**" The one given here is the more popular of the two. Liszt, known today primarily as a superstar touring pianist, was also a teacher and conductor in addition to being a composer. Born in Hungary with a father who played multiple instruments, as a toddler Liszt started improvising at the piano, then eventually studied with Carl Czerny and Antonio Salieri after successful concerts as a child earned him financial support to go study in Vienna. He met Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, while living in Paris, and this poem reflects romantic relationships that both poet and composer were involved in, Hugo with Juliette Drouet, and Liszt with Marie d'Agoult.⁴ The poem dates from the 1840 collection *Les rayons et les ombres*. The song was composed two years later.

Oh! Quand je dors

Oh! quand je dors, viens auprès de ma couche,
Comme à Pétrarque apparaissait Laura,
Et qu'en passant ton haleine me touche ...
Soudain ma bouche
S'entr'ouvrira!

Sur mon front morne où peut-être s'achève
Un songe noir qui trop longtemps dura,
Que ton regard comme un astre se lève ...
Et soudain mon rêve
Rayonnera!

Puis sur ma lèvre où voltige une flamme,
Éclair d'amour que Dieu même épura,
Pose un baiser, et d'ange deviens femme ...
Soudain mon âme
S'éveillera!

Oh! When I sleep

Oh! when I sleep, come close to my bed,
As Laura appeared to Petrarch.
And when in passing your breath touches me
Suddenly my mouth
Will open!

On my gloomy forehead where perhaps ends
A dark dream that lasted too long,
That your glance rises like a star
And suddenly my dream
will shine!

Then on my lip where a flame flutters
A flash of love that God himself will purify,
Lay a kiss, and from an angel become a woman...
Suddenly my soul
Will awaken.

Georges Bizet has a place in the operatic repertoire with his ever-present *Carmen*, but he started as an acclaimed piano student at the Paris Conservatory. However, he preferred not to perform in public and instead made a living as an arranger and transcriber. Sadly, this is an artist whose work was not appreciated in his lifetime and only after *Carmen* became a success after his death did he receive acclaim.

The poet of "**Ouvre ton coeur,**" Louis Delâtre, was recruited by composer Bizet while he was in Rome to write the words to his ode-symphony *Vasco de Gama* between 1859 and 1860. "Ouvre ton coeur" was to be part of that text, but ended up separate and was published after Bizet's death. Given the piano accompaniment that evokes guitar figures and the *bolero* rhythmic pattern he uses, this piece foreshadows Bizet's work in *Carmen*, where he used more Spanish dance patterns such as the habanera and seguidilla.

Ouvre ton coeur

La marguerite a fermé sa corolle,
L'ombre a fermé les yeux du jour.
Belle, me tiendras-tu parole?
Ouvre ton coeur à mon amour.

Open your heart

The daisy has closed its cup,
The shadow has closed the eyes of the day.
My beauty, will you keep your word to me?
Open your heart to my love.

⁴ Georg Predota, "The Music of Poetry: Songs of Franz Liszt to Poetry by Victor Hugo." *Interlude*. 25 December 2022, <https://interlude.hk/the-music-of-poetry-songs-of-franz-liszt-to-poetry-by-victor-hugo/> (12 June 2025)

Ouvre ton coeur, ô jeune ange, à ma flamme,
Qu'un rêve charme ton sommeil.
Je veux reprendre mon âme,
Comme une fleur s'ouvre au soleil!

Open your heart, o young angel, to my flame,
That a dream may charm your sleep.
I want to take back my soul,
As a flower opens to the sun!

Known for his *Symphonie fantastique*, Hector Berlioz was initially on track to become a doctor early in life, but after attending the Paris Opera while in medical school, he decided he wanted to be a composer and started training at the Paris Conservatory after he graduated. Most of his songs are orchestrated, including “**La mort d’Ophélie**,” but they also function as works for voice and piano. “La mort d’Ophelie” is a translation of Gertrude’s monologue from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* wherein she describes how Ophelia, Hamlet’s one-time love interest, died. Berlioz loved Shakespeare and his obsession with the actress Harriet Smithson, for and about whom he wrote the *Symphonie fantastique*, began when he started attending Shakespeare plays by a touring company at the Théâtre de L’Odéon.

La mort d’Ophelie

Auprès d’un torrent, Ophélie
Cueillait, tout en suivant le bord,
Dans sa douce et tendre folie,
Des pervenches, des boutons d’or,
Des iris aux couleurs d’opale,
Et de ces fleurs d’un rose pâle,
Qu’on appelle des doigts de mort.

Puis élevant sur ses mains blanches
Les riants trésors du matin,
Elle les suspendait aux branches,
Aux branches d’un saule voisin.
Mais, trop faible, le rameau plie,
Se brise, et la pauvre Ophélie
Tombe, sa guirlande à la main.

Quelques instants sa robe enflée
La tint encor sur le courant,
Et comme une voile gonflée,
Elle flottait toujours chantant,
Chantant quelque vieille ballade,
Chantant ainsi qu’une naïade
Née au milieu de ce torrent.

Mais cette étrange mélodie
Passa, rapide comme un son.
Par les flots la robe alourdie
Bientôt dans l’abîme profond;
Entraîna la pauvre insensée,
Laissant à peine commencée
Sa mélodieuse chanson.

The death of Ophelia

Beside a stream, Ophelia
Gathered, following the water’s edge,
In her sweet and tender madness,
Periwinkles, buttercups,
Irises the color of opal,
And those pale pink flowers
That are called dead man’s fingers.

Then lifting her white arms
The laughing treasures of the morning,
She hung them on branches,
The branches of a neighboring willow.
But, too weak, the branch bent,
It broke, and poor Ophelia
Fell, her garland in hand.

For a few moments her puffed-up dress
Still bore her on the current,
And like a full sail
She floated always singing,
Singing some old ballad,
Singing like a naiad
Born in the middle of the stream.

But this strange melody
Passed, quick as a sound.
The dress weighed down by the waves,
Soon into the deep abyss
Led the poor senseless girl
Barely having begun
Her melodious song.

Ralph Vaughan Williams started his musical training with piano lessons from his aunt, then started studying violin. His formal music education was at the Royal Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford. He also earned a Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Arts from Trinity College at Cambridge University. He secured a church organist and choirmaster position, composed and collected folk songs, and studied with Maurice Ravel in Paris. He served in World War I and suffered hearing damage and eventually deafness, but continued to compose until his death. In addition to his instrumental pieces such as *The Lark Ascending* and *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, Vaughan Williams wrote over 80 songs for voice and piano. “**Silent Noon**” is part of a set of songs set to poetry by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The House of Life*. A “sonnet sequence,” the poems are the poet’s expressions of and reflections on the loves of his life.

The House of Life

Silent Noon

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.

All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour glass.

Deep in the sunsearched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:
So this winged hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Jake Heggie’s career in opera composition began after he had worked as a public relations associate for San Francisco Opera. He made many connections at that company, including mezzo-soprano, Frederica von Stade, who became an outspoken advocate for his works and for whom he wrote **Songs to the Moon**. Von Stade premiered the work in 1998. The poems are by Vachel Lindsay, best known for turning poetry into performance art. Initially, Lindsay was expected to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a doctor, but he convinced his parents to let him attend the Art Institute of Chicago. After much writing and travel, he ended up in Los Angeles, where he wrote “General William Booth Enters into Heaven,” his most well-known poem and which he performed around the United States. He was able to publish his works, but still needed to travel and give poetry performances in order to support his family. After his health began to fail, he and his family moved back to Springfield, where he committed suicide in 1931.

Songs to the Moon

The Haughty Snail-King (What Uncle William Told the Children)

Twelve snails went walking after night.
They’d creep an inch or so,
Then stop and bug their eyes
And blow.
Some folks...are...deadly...slow.

Twelve snails went walking yestereve,
Led by their fat old king.
They were so dull their princeling had
No scepter, robe or ring –
Only a paper cap to wear
When nightly journeying.

This king-snail said: “I feel a thought
Within...it blossoms soon...
O little courtiers of mine...
I crave a pretty boon...
Oh, yes...(High thoughts with effort come
And well-bred snails are ALMOST dumb.)
“I wish I had a yellow crown

As glistening...as...the moon.”

“Just A Closer Walk With Thee,” like many songs of the oral gospel music tradition that arose out of the cries for deliverance from the enslaved people of the American South, does not have one known origin. However, Horace Clarence Boyer in his book The Golden Age Of Gospel claims that composer Kenneth Morris first wrote it down after a chance hearing while on a train trip in 1940,⁵ and indeed the melody that we know today comes from his arrangement. It was first recorded in 1941 by the Selah Jubilee Singers, and since then it has been recorded by hundreds of artists including Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Elvis Presley, and Tennessee Ernie Ford.

Just a closer walk with Thee

I am weak but Thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Thro' this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.

⁵ Horace Clarence Boyer, The Golden Age of Gospel (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 75.

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Mezzo-soprano **Maggie Ramsey** is an opera singer based in Alexandria, VA. Most recently, in the 2024-2025 season she performed the roles of Dorothee in Joseph Bologne's *The Anonymous Lover* and Katisha in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* with Victorian Lyric Opera Company in Rockville, MD, and the Duchess of Krakenthorpe in *La fille du regiment* with Bel Cantanti Opera in Rockville, MD, with which she will perform as La Chatte and Une Patre in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* this fall. In 2024 she sang Dame Hannah in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Ruddigore* with VLOC and covered the same role with Young Victorian Theatre Company in Baltimore, MD. In 2023 she covered the roles of Sandman, Hansel, and the Witch in Shakespeare Opera Theatre's production of *Hansel and Gretel* in Northern Virginia. In 2022, she performed the role of Emilia in their production of *Othello*. Maggie has also sung the role of the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with SOT. Other roles with SOT include Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet* (2020), Prince Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet* (2019), and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017). In 2018 she became a member of the Sopranessence women's vocal ensemble and has appeared in concerts with them ever since. She is pleased to present her second local solo recital at her beloved Cherrydale United Methodist Church, where she served as soprano soloist for five years.

THANK YOU TO MY PARTNER IN CRIME, RUTH LOCKER! You are a rock for me and for Sopranessence, and I have loved preparing this program with you.

A free will offering will be taken. Any donations received will go directly to offsetting the costs of this performance, and a portion of the donations will be given back to the church.