



Songs of Hope and Despair

Today's recital explores the theme of hope and despair.

Over the last 18 months, we have all felt caught in a seemingly constant cycle of hopeful expectation and the dashing of hope by some new rule or advice caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Today's programme has been designed to reflect this alternation between hope and despair, which has surely affected us all over the last year.

Two French cabaret-style songs frame the programme. The first, *Les Chemins de l'amour* by Poulenc, looks back nostalgically on past days of love and happiness, which now seem completely out of the narrator's reach. The last piece, *Je te veux* by Satie, is almost the reverse – the narrator speaks of their burning desire to spend the rest of their life with their loved one, leaving the sadness of the past behind them.

Following the Poulenc are two Lieder by German composers, both of which draw on the German Romantic trope of a quasi-religious relationship between nature and the human soul. *Frühlingsglaube*, by Schubert, is about the sense of promise and new life brought by spring. Schumann's *Mondnacht* is also an appraisal of the beauty of nature, and in particular of the curious restorative power of nature on the human soul.

We then return to despair in the first of the two baroque pieces, *Zerfleisse mein Herz* from Bach's St John Passion. This aria is an emotional outpouring of despair at the death of Jesus, conveyed by the recurring sobbing motif in the vocal part. This is contrasted with Handel's aria *If God be for us* from the Messiah, which asserts the believer's unwavering faith in God's protection. This assurance is reflected in the clear, resolute harmonic and rhythmic structure of the piece.

Then two more pieces about despair. *Nel chor piu non mi sento*, by Paisiello, is on the classic theme of the unrequited lover's suffering. The narrator speaks of the torture and torment they are forced to endure and that eventually their love will drive them to despair. Despair is the title of Wolf's Lied *Verborgenheit*, which is a setting of Eduard Mörike's poem of the same name. The poem is about the willing withdrawal and seclusion of the narrator, in order to be spared from the destructive bursts of passion which bring him only pain.

The recital ends with Satie's hopeful cabaret-style song *Je te veux*.