

Text and Translations

George Frederic Handel

“Ombra mai fu” from *Serse*

A comic opera, *Serse* premiered in 1738 after a series of serious operas were premiered by Handel, making this work an unusual departure for the composer. Through the Royal Academy of Music, Handel produced several Italian operas that were a draw to the people of London. In this opera, *Serse*, the king of Persia, becomes jealous when his sweetheart, Romilda, is smitten with *Serse*’s brother, Arsamene. Before this conflict begins, *Serse* relaxes underneath a tree and sings one of Handel’s most famous arias.

Ombra mai fu

Ombra mai fu di vegetabile
cara ed amabile soave più

Never was a shade

Never was a shade in nature
more cherished, pleasant, and gentle.

Translation by Nico Castel

Henri Duparc

L’invitation au voyage

Duparc’s “L’invitation au voyage,” composed in 1870, is a setting of two of three verses of the Symbolist poet Beaudelaire’s famous poem describing his love of the countryside in Holland, which he described in “Small Prose Poems,” as “a singular country, drowned in the mists of our North, and could be called the East of the West, the China of Europe” and the longing of a man wishing to touch his lover. At this time, Beaudelaire was in love with an actress Marie Daubrun, and this poem describes a mystical trip growing in his mind, which finds them both in an exotic and perfect world.

From notes by Marianne Williams Tobias, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra © 2016

L'invitation au voyage

Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!
Les soleils mouillés
De ces cieux brouillés
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
Si mystérieux
De tes traites yeux
Brillant à travers leurs larmes.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Vois sur ces canaux
Dormir ces vaisseaux
Don't l'humeur est vagabonde;
C'est pour assouvir
Ton moindre désir
Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde.

Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière,
D'hyacinthe et d'or;
Le monde s'endort
Dans une chaude lumière!

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté.

Invitation to a journey

My child, my sister,
Dream of the sweetness
Of going yonder to live together!
To love at leisure,
To love and to die
In a country that resembles you!
The humid suns
Of these hazy skies
Have for my spirit the charm
So mysterious
Of your betraying eyes
Shining through their tears.

There, all is order and beauty,
Luxurious, calm and sensuous delight.

See on these canals
These sleeping ships
Whose nature is to roam;
It is to fulfill
Your least desire
That they come from the ends of the earth.

The setting suns
Invest the fields,
The canals, the whole town,
With hyacinth and gold;
The world falls asleep
In a warm light!

There, all is order and beauty,
Luxurious, calm and sensuous delight.

Translation by Bernac

Henri Duparc

Extase

With poetry written by Jean Lahor, this song continues an ongoing theme of longing and transcends the music to the realm of the sensual. The lover describes a transformative and intimate moment.

Extase

Sur un lys pâle mon cœur dort
D'un sommeil doux comme la mort...

Mort exquise, mort parfumée
Du souffle de la bien-aimée...

Sur ton sein pâle mon cœur dort
D'un sommeil doux comme la mort...

Ecstasy

On a pale lily my heart sleeps
a sleep sweet as death...

Equisite death, death perfumed
by the breath of the beloved...

On your pale breast my heart sleeps
a sleep sweet as death...

Translation by Bernac

Henri Duparc

Chanson Triste

Lahor continues to give us a story of how a lover finds rest in their soulmate. When their world is troubled, the lover will be able to seek peace and forever live in the memories that they made with their special person.

Chanson Triste

Dans ton cœur dort un clair de lune,
Un doux clair de lune d'été,
Et pour fuir la vie importune
Je me noierai dans ta claret.

J'oublierai les douleurs passées,
Mon amour, quand tu berceras
Mon triste cœur et mes pensées,
Dans le calme aimant de tes bras.

Tu prendras ma tête malade
Oh! Quelquefois sur tes genoux,
Et lui diras une ballade
Qui semblera parler de nous.

Et dans tes yeux pleins de tristesses,
Dans tes yeux alors je boirai
Tant de baisers et de tendresses
Que, peut-être, je guérirai...

Song of Sadness

In your heart moonlight sleeps,
Gentle summer moonlight,
And to escape from the stress of life
I will drown myself in your radiance.

I will forget past sorrows,
My love, when you cradle
My sad heart and my thoughts
In the loving peacefulness of your arms

You will take my aching head
Oh! Sometimes upon your knee,
And will relate a ballad
That seems to speak of ourselves.

And in your eyes full of sorrows,
In your eyes then I will drink
So deeply of kisses and of tenderness
That, perhaps, I shall be healed...

Translation by Bernac

Johannes Brahms

Die Mainacht, Op. 43 No. 2

Before Brahms's interpretation, Fanny Mendelssohn composed a song based on the poem by Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty. Normally, the poem has four verses, and both Mendelssohn and Brahms choose to use a total of three; however, while both use verses 1 and 3, Mendelssohn used verse 2 to focus her song on the theme of loneliness. Meanwhile, Brahms omits verse 2 in favor of verse 4, which highlights the melancholy that exists when there is no love.

Die Mainacht

Wann der silberne Mond durch die Gesträuche blinkt,
Und sein schlummerndes Licht über den Rasen streut,
Und die Nachtigall flötet,
Wandl' ich traurig von Busch zu Busch.

Überhüllet vom Laub girret ein Taubenpaar
Sein Entzücken mir vor; aber ich wende mich,
Suche dunklere Schatten,
Und die einsame Träne rinnt.

Wann, o lächelndes Bild, welches wie Morgenrot
Durch die Seele mir strahlt, find ich auf Erden dich?
Und die einsame Träne
Bebt mir heißer die Wang herab.

May Night

When the silvery moon shines through the bushes,
And its slumbering light gleams over the grass,
And the nightingale sings,
I sadly wander from bush to bush.

Hidden by leaves, a pair of doves
Sing their charms to me; but I turn back,
See darker shadows,
And the lonely tear falls.

When, oh happy memory, which like the sunrise
Shines through my soul, shall I find you here on Earth?
And the lonely tear
Falls more hotly down my cheek.

Translation by Mackenzie Jacquemin

Robert Schumann

Mondnacht, from *Liederkreis*, Op. 39, No. 5

Besides *Dichterliebe*, *Liederkreis* is widely considered to be the epitome of Schumann's vocal writing. While mainly focused on piano, Schumann composed a plethora of songs in 1840; it is the year that easily contained Schumann's heaviest output of vocal repertoire. *Dichterliebe* was written in the same year, and both cycles provided some of Schumann's most well-known classics, including *Mondnacht*. Similar to *Extase*, the lover recalls an intimate moment. However, this memory seems less about sensuality, and has now become further into the past.

Mondnacht

Es war, als hätt' der Himmel,
Die Erde still geküßt,
Daß sie im Blütenschimmer
Von ihm nur träumen müßt'.

Die Luft ging durch die Felder,
Die Ähren wogten sacht,
Es rauschten leis die Wälder,
So sternklar war die Nacht.

Und meine Seele spannte
Weit ihre Flügel aus,
Flog durch die stillen Lande,
Als flöge sie nach Haus.

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Moonlit Night

It was as if heaven
Had silently kissed the Earth,
So that the earth in the shimmer of blossoms
Could only dream of heaven.

The breeze went through the fields,
The ears of corn waved gently,
The forests rustled softly,
The night and stars were so clear.

And my soul spread wide
Its wings out,
Flew through the still areas, a
As if it were flying home.

Richard Strauss

Zueignung, Op. 10 No. 1

In one of Strauss's earliest songs, the singer speaks about a past relationship and offers a sort of thanksgiving to their previous lover for their now-over experiences. Ironically, while the German title of the song is often translated as "Devotion," the overall feel of the accompaniment, combined with the declamatory upper register of the voice, suggests what could be a resentful end to devotion.

Zueignung

Ja, du weißt es, teure Seele,
Daß ich fern von dir mich quale,
Liebe macht die Herzen krank,
Habe Dank.

Einst hielt ich, der Freiheit Zecher,
Hoch den Amethysten-Becher,
Und du segnetest den Trank,
Habe Dank.

Und beschworst darin die Bösen,
Bis ich, was ich nie gewesen,
Heilig, heilig an's Herz dir sank,
Habe Dank!

Dedication

Yes, you know it, dearest soul,
How I suffer when I am away from you.
Love makes hearts sick,
Have my thanks.

I once held, I who toasted freedom,
The high amethyst beaker,
And you blessed the drink.
Have my thanks.

And you exorcised within it the evils,
Until I, as I've never been before,
Blest, sank blest upon your heart.
Have my thanks!

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Richard Strauss

Morgen! Op. 23, No. 4

With a beautiful instrumental beginning, this song is a rarity in lieder; while most German songs seem to be focused on past joys and troubles, this song looks ahead to the future with unequalled optimism and confidence. Love and happiness in all different forms will come to those who wait with strength.

Morgen!

Und morgen wird die Sonne wieder scheinen
Und auf dem Wege, den ich gehen werde,
Wird uns, die Glücklichen, sie wieder einen
Inmitten dieser sonnenatmenden Erde...

Und zu dem Strand, dem weiten, wogenblauen,
Werden wir still und langsam neidersteigen,
Stumm werden wir uns in die Augen schauen,
Und auf uns sinkt des Glückes stummes Schweigen...

Tomorrow!

And tomorrow the sun will shine again,
And on the path, upon which I shall walk,
It will again unite us, the happy ones,
Upon this sun-breathing earth...

And to the shore, broad, with waves of blue,
Shall we descend, quietly and slowly;
Silently shall we gaze into each other's eyes,
And the speechless silence of happiness will fall upon us.

Translation by Bard Suverkrop © 2008, IPA Source, LLC

Vincenzo Bellini

“Eccomi...Oh! Quante volte” from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*

Before the famous Shakespeare play, there had already been several versions of Romeo and Juliet, as the story had existed for at least a century. A touchstone in Italian culture, the classic story about a religious conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellini, both represented by the Capulets and Montagues respectively, was retold by Bellini in operatic form in 1830 with great success. This aria is Juliet's famous “Wherefore art thou” monologue in beautiful bel canto form.

Eccomi...Oh! Quante volte

Eccomi in lieta vesta...
Eccomi adorna come vittima all'ara
Oh! Almen potessi qual vittima cader dell'ara al piede!
Oh nuziali tede, abborrite così, così fatali siate per me ferali.
Ardo... una vampa, un foco tutta mi struggle.
Un refrigerio ai venti io ciedo invano.
Ove sei tu, Romeo? In qual terra t'aggiri?
Dove inviarti i miei sospiri?

Oh quante volte ti chiedo al ciel piangendo!
Con quale ardor t'attendo e inganno il mio desir!
Raggio del tuo sembiante ah! parmi il brillar del giorno: Ah!
l'aura che spira intorno mi sembra un tuo sospir.

Here I am...Oh! How often

Here I am, in joyous garments...
Here I am, adorned like a victim at the altar.
Oh, if only I could fall victim at the foot of the altar!
Oh nuptial torches so abhorrent, so dire, you are fateful
flames for me.
I am burning up... a flame, a fire consumes me.
A soothing coolness of the winds I ask in vain.
Where are you Romeo? In what land are you wandering?
Where shall I send you my sighs?

Oh, how often here I wept to heaven for you!
With what ardor I await you and deceive my desire!
A ray of your countenance ah, seems to me the light of day:
Ah! The air that wafts around me seems to me one of your
sighs.

Translation by Nico Castel.

Samuel Barber

Selections from *Hermit Songs*

Barber's *Hermit Songs* premiered in 1953 with the composer performing at the piano alongside soprano Leontyne Price. The text of the songs is cited as being written by unknown Irish monks. They explore multiple thematic ideas, including the thought of separating oneself from society and its harsh rules. In the second and third selections, there is also a theme of motherhood that has a large presence.

Church Bell at Night

Sweet little bell, struck on a windy night,
I would liefer keep tryst with thee than be with a light and foolish woman.

St. Ita's Vision

'I will take nothing from my Lord,' said she, 'unless He gives me His Son from Heaven
In the form of a Baby that I may nurse Him.'
So that Christ came down to her in the form of a Baby and then she said:
'Infant Jesus, at my breast,
Nothing in this world is true
Save, O tiny nursling, You.
Infant Jesus at my breast,
By my heart every night,
You I nurse are not a churl
But were begot on Mary the Jewess
By Heaven's light.
Infant Jesus at my breast,
What King is there but You who could
Give everlasting good?
Wherefore I give my food.
Sing to Him, maidens, sing your best!
There is none that has such right
To your song as heaven's King
Who ever night
Is Infant Jesus at my breast.'

The Crucifixion

At the cry of the first bird
They began to crucify Thee, O Swan!
Never shall lament cease because of that.
It was like the parting of day from night.
Ah, sore was the suffering borne
By the body of Mar's Son,
But sorer still to Him was the grief
Which for His sake
Came upon His Mother.

Promiscuity

I do not know with whom Edan will sleep, but I do know that fair Edan will not sleep alone.

The Desire for Hermitage

Ah! To be all alone in a little cell with nobody near me; beloved that pilgrimage before the last pilgrimage to Death.
Singing the passing hours to cloudy Heaven; feeding upon dry bread and water from the cold spring.

That will be an end to evil when I am alone in a lovely little corner among tombs

Far from the houses of the great.

Ah! To be all alone in a little cell, to be alone, all alone:

Alone I came into the world,

Alone I shall go from it.

Vincenzo Bellini

Vanne, o rosa fortunate

While mostly recognized for his operatic writing, Bellini wrote many fun songs such as this. The singer contemplates feelings of both envy and love.

Vanne, o rosa fortunate

Vanne, o rosa fortunate, a posar di Nice in petto ed ognun sarà costretto la tua sorte invidiar.

Oh, se in te potessi anch'io transformarmi un sol momento; non avria più bel contento questo core a sospirar.

Ma tu inchini dispettosa, bella rosa impallidita, la tua fonte scolorita dallo sdegno e dal dolor.

Bella rosa, è destinata ad entrambi un'ugual sorte; là trovar dobbiam la morte, tu d'invidia ed io d'amor.

Go, oh fortunate rose

Go, oh fortunate rose, to rest upon Nice's breast and all will be forced to envy your fate.

Oh, if I could but for a single moment transform myself into you; no greater joy would have my heart but to sigh.

But you bow in scorn, beautiful fading rose, your face made pale by anger and sorrow.

Beautiful rose, it is decreed that we share the same fate: we both must die, you of envy and I of love.

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Vincenzo Bellini

Bella Nice, che d'Amore

The singer contemplates how tragic it will be if death comes before their love can be returned by their beloved.

Bella Nice, che d'Amore

Bella Nice, che d'amore desti il fremito e il desir, Bella Nice, del mio core dolce speme e sol sospir,

Ahi! verrà, né si lontano, forse a me quell giorno è già, che di morte l'empia man oil mio stame troncherà.

Quando in germbò al feral nido peso, ahi! misero, io sarò, deh, rammenta quanto fido questo cor ognor t'amò.

Sul mio cenere tacente se tu spargi allora un fior, Bella Nice, men dolente dell'avel mi fia l'orror.

Non ti chiedo che di pianto venga l'urna mia a bagnar, se sperar potess'io tanto, vorrei subito spirar.

Beautiful Nice, your love

Beautiful Nice, your love has caused this trembling and desire, beautiful Nice, you have caused in my heart sweet hopes and a single sigh.

Ah, it will come, for not too distant, is already that day for me, on which death's pitiless hand shall take my life.

When I am in the grips of this fatal nest Ah! I will be miserable, then, remember how faithfully this heart will continue to love you.

If upon my silent ashes you would scatter a flower, beautiful Nice, the horror of the grave would be less painful to me.

I do not ask that with your tears you would bathe my tomb, if I would even hope for this much I would surely die.

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Vincenzo Bellini

Malinconia, Ninfa gentile

A true song of devotion, this is a piece where the singer swears themselves eternally to their beloved, and puts mountains, fountains, and all riches aside for their true love. While they wanted riches for so long, the singer has realized that fate has presented something that is infinitely more wonderful.

Malinconia, Ninfa gentile

Malinconia, Ninfa gentile, la vita mia consacro a te; i tuoi piaceri chi tiene a vile, ai piacer veri nato non è.

Fonti e colline chiesi agli Dei; m'udiro alfine, pago io vivrò, né mai quell fonte co' desir miei, né mai quell monte trapasserò.

Melancholy, gentle nymph

Melancholy, gentle nymph, I dedicate my life to you; he who holds your pleasures as worthless, is not born to true pleasures – can never know what true pleasure is.

I will ask of the gods for fountains and hills; they have heard me at last, I will live a satisfied life, and I, with my desires, neither to that fountain nor to that mountain will ever go. No, never.

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Vincenzo Bellini

Almen se non poss'io

In a bittersweet moment, the singer contemplates the deep and caring love that they have for someone, and how difficult it is, even when it is temporary, to say goodbye.

Almen se non poss'io

Almen se non poss'io seguir l'amato bene, saffetti del cor mio, seguitelo per me.

Già sempre a lui vicino raccolti amor vi tiene e insolito cammino questo per voi non è.

If I cannot at least

If I cannot at least follow my beloved, affections of my heart, go with him for me.

Always near to you now, Cupid keeps his attention on you, although this is not the usual pathway for you.

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Vincenzo Bellini

Per pietà, bell'idol mio

The singer makes it clear how powerfully meaningful their relationship is to them. They express appreciation through passionate words and with undeniable fire.

Per pietà, bell'idol mio

Per pietà, bell'idol mio, non mi dir ch'io sono ingrato; infelice e sventurato abbastanza il Ciel mi fa.

Se fedele a te son io, se mi struggo ai tuoi bei lumi, sallo amor, lo sanno i Numi il mio core, il tuo lo sa.

Have mercy, my beloved

Have mercy, my beloved and do not tell me that I am ungrateful; unhappy and unfortunate enough has Heaven made me.

That I am faithful to you, that I burn under the gaze of your beautiful eyes, knows Cupid, the gods, my heart and your heart.

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