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OSSIAN HUSKINSON & MATTHEW FLETCHER

Saturday 14 March, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

The Road Goes Ever On

Donald Swann

Three Salt-Water Ballads

Frederick Keel

Songs of Travel

Vaughan Williams

We gratefully acknowledge support for this concert by Sue Cotton.

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall; please request a headset from our front-of-house staff to enhance your enjoyment of this evening's concert.

Please ensure hearing aids are switched to the appropriate concert setting.

PROGRAMME NOTES

The Road Goes Ever On

Donald Swann (1923-1994)

1. *The road goes ever on;*
2. *Upon the hearth;*
3. *In the willow-meads of Tasarinan;*
4. *In western lands;*
5. *Namárië;*
6. *I sit beside the fire;*
7. *Errantry.*
8. *Bilbo's Last Song (At the Grey Havens)*

The success of Donald Swann's song-writing and performing partnership with Michael Flanders has tended to obscure the wide range of his career. It included collaborations with, among others, singer-songwriter Sydney Carter, poet Sir John Betjeman, writer and broadcaster John Amis, and jazz trumpeter Digby Fairweather.

The range of poets whose words he set to music was similarly wide, including William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Robert Burns, Byron, Hardy, Shakespeare, Tennyson and, in translation, Hermann Hesse, Rainer Maria Rilke and Irina Ratushinskaya.

His stage and concert works include *Perelandra*, an opera based on the allegorical novel by CS Lewis, a number of instrumental pieces, and several choral works, including *Requiem for the Living*, to words by Cecil Day Lewis.

The Road Goes Ever On sets lyrics by JRR Tolkien, mostly from his epic fantasy-novel *The Lord of the Rings*. The songs were composed during the mid-1960s, as the Flanders-and-Swann partnership was drawing to a close. Tolkien was delighted with the results, except for 'Namárië'. He hummed a tune in the style of Gregorian chant to show Swann the kind of thing he had in mind, and Swann re-wrote his setting, using this tune. The first seven songs in tonight's selection were published in the USA in 1968, and in the UK the following year, with Tolkien's illustrations. Three more songs were added to later editions.

Between them, the songs explore themes of travel – roads that come to an end, and that continue indefinitely – the natural world and changing seasons; memory, and speculation about the future.

The words of 'Namárië' are in Tolkien's invented language Sindarin, spoken by the Grey Elves of Middle Earth. 'Errantry' is taken from *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, and is set mainly in a patter-song style. 'Bilbo's Last Song' is one of the additional songs. The words were written near the end of Tolkien's life as a personal gift to his secretary, Margaret Joy Hill, who passed them on to Swann after Tolkien's death. In it, Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit who has been at the centre of the stories, anticipates his final sea-voyage.

Three Salt-Water Ballads

Frederick Keel (1871-1954)

1. *Port of Many Ships;*
2. *Trade Winds;*
3. *Mother Carey (As told me by the Bo'sun)*

Keel was both a composer and a baritone soloist (he gave the first London performance of Vaughan Williams' 'Linden Lea' in 1902). He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London, where he later returned as Professor of Singing. He was a member of the Folk Song society, active more as a singer, arranger and editor of the Society's journal, than as a song-collector. He also played a role in the revival of interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean lute-songs, by composers such as John Dowland, Thomas Campion and Thomas Morley.

He composed two sets of *Salt-Water Ballads*, both to words by John Masefield, reflecting Masefield's experiences of sea-travel. The first set of four songs, was published in 1902, the year the poems themselves were first published.

The second, and better-known, set of three appeared in 1919. It opens with a lively evocation of a nautical after-life, each verse ending on a wistful note. The more contemplative 'Trade Winds', the best-known of all Keel's songs, paints an alluring picture of a tropical anchorage. The third song is a warning to young sailors not to go near the two great oceanic mischief-makers, Mother Carey and her partner, Davy Jones, who delight in raising storms and causing shipwrecks.

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Songs of Travel

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel* cycle belongs to the first decade of the last century when his personal voice was emerging and the work marks a major achievement in his development. The poems are by Robert Louis Stevenson, and the songs were originally performed in a group of eight by Walter Creighton and Hamilton Harty at the Bechstein Hall, London, on 2 December 1904. Most of them had probably been written in 1904, although 'Whither must I wander?' predates the others and had been published in the June edition of the magazine *The Vocalist* in 1902 and also performed that November. Although conceived as a group of integral songs, the commercial demands of the publisher meant that they appeared separately in two volumes in 1903 and 1905, apart from the final song which the composer clearly planned as an epilogue to be performed only when the songs were performed as a whole. This was not published until 1960 in the first edition of the cycle in its original sequence, which was first performed by Harvey Allen, accompanied by Frederick Stone, in a BBC broadcast on 21 May the same year.

The *Songs of Travel* made a strong impression on audiences and musicians of the time; for instance, Arthur Bliss, nineteen years Vaughan Williams's junior, who studied at Cambridge between 1910 and 1913, recalled in his autobiography *As I Remember* – 'To us musicians in Cambridge Vaughan Williams was the magical name; his Songs of Travel were on all pianos'. In the context of the development of English song they are important too, for they reflect a significant advance from the parlour song to the art song which professional singers – such as the cycle's dedicatee, the bass-baritone Plunket Greene – were encouraging composers to write. Here, like the Somervell cycles, was a work conceived in the tradition of the early Romantic questing song cycle of love and loss. Nevertheless, it differs from its models and from Somervell's works in that there is no real narrative thread from one poem to the next, rather a set of different circumstances on which the poet comments. Significant too is the influence of folksong on several of the songs. Vaughan Williams collected his first folksong, 'Bushes and Briars', in December 1903 and the experience of finding the lovely traditional tunes is apparent in *Songs of Travel*.

The opening song 'The vagabond' establishes the cycle's Romantic credentials; indeed Stevenson had composed the words 'To an air of Schubert'. Its steady tramping accompaniment, combined with a triplet which prefigures the opening of the vocal line, evokes the purposeful tread of the wanderer striding out on the open road. 'Let Beauty awake', with its images of dawn and dusk, has a fervent melodic line that floats on a buoyant arpeggio accompaniment. Particularly memorable is the bitter-sweet radiance of the phrase 'And the stars are bright in the west!', which recurs as a link between the verses and in the brief coda. Over a joyous accompaniment, 'The roadside fire' radiates the delight of new-found love that bubbles over ecstatically in the final verse. 'Youth and love' is the kernel of the cycle and points to its central dilemma: which is preferable, 'love' and by implication a settled life, or 'solitude' and the freedom to wander. As if emphasising the choice to be made, the accompaniment includes transformed allusions to the triplet figure from 'The vagabond' and the opening phrase of 'The roadside fire' at the song's climax. 'In dreams' has a chill melancholy, created through a persistent, uneasy off-beat rhythm in the piano and a brooding chromatic vocal line. Pianissimo, wide-spaced arpeggiated piano chords, combined with an expansive melodic line evoke the vast brilliance of the night sky in 'The infinite shining heavens', in which the traveller, gazing above, finds peace. 'Whither must I wander?' has a homely simplicity, appropriate to the poet's images of childhood and the security of home and family which are now long in the past, never to return. In its character it is close to Vaughan Williams's most renowned song 'Linden Lea', composed the year before it. A sole sonorous chord, like a call to attention, opens 'Bright is the ring of words', whose forthright melody incorporates the opening notes of the hymn 'Sine nomine' ('For all the Saints'), which haunted the composer throughout his life. The brief epilogue, with its references to 'The vagabond', 'Whither must I wander?' and 'Bright is the ring of words', encapsulates the whole cycle with the wanderer, now old, looking ahead to his final journey beyond the grave.

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OSSIAN HUSKINSON, BASS-BARITONE

A graduate of University of Nottingham, Ossian Huskinson won The Mozart Prize and Fifth Prize at Tenor Viñas 2024 and The Critics' Circle 2022 Young Talent (Voice) Award, A Finalist at the 2023 Paris Opera Competition and at Neue-Stimmen 2022, he also won First Prize and the Audience Prize at the 2021 Clonter Opera Competition, and was awarded the Simon Sandbach Award by Garsington Opera.

His operatic engagements have included Harašta *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Speaker *The Magic Flute* for English National Opera where he was a Harewood Artist; Pluto *L'Orfeo* and Jupiter *Platee* for Garsington Opera at Wormsley; and Sarastro *The Magic Flute* and Figaro *Le nozze di Figaro* for Dorset Opera Festival, where he also created Mr Shiner in Paul Carr's *Under the Greenwood Tree*. For Opéra de Toulon, he has sung Seneca *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and for Deutsche Oper, Berlin, he has sung roles including Second Armed Man *Die Zauberflöte* and Pietro *Simon Boccanegra*.

His debut solo recital *The Roadside Fire*, with pianist Matthew Fletcher, is available on Linn Download as part of The Royal Academy of Music Bicentenary Series. Highlights of his concert career have included J. S. Bach *B Minor Mass* and Mozart *Requiem* with The Really Big Chorus; Beethoven *Symphony No. 9* with Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin at the Beethovenfest Bonn; *Messiah* with Huddersfield Choral Society; and Verdi *Requiem* with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ossian Huskinson joined the Jette Parker Artists Programme at The Royal Ballet and Opera, London, at the start of the 2024 / 2025 season. In his first season, his roles included Wagner *Faust*, Mandarin *Turandot* and Angelotti *Tosca*. In concert, he sang Beethoven *Symphony No. 9* with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* with Odyssey Festival Orchestra. He also sang Simone *Gianni Schicchi* and Prince Gremin Eugene *Onegin* at the 2025 Verbier Festival.

His roles at the Royal Ballet and Opera for 2025 / 2026 include Angelotti in the new production of *Tosca*, further performances as Mandarin *Turandot* and Marchese d'Obigny *La traviata* and Abimelech Samson *et Dalila*. He also sings Druid *The Devil's Den* with Shadwell Opera, in association with Opera North, and appears in recital at Ludlow English Song Festival and Sinfonia Smith Square.

Ossian Huskinson's continuing professional development is supported by Mascarade Opera. Feature interviews with him appear in both Opera and Opera Now.

Ossian Huskinson appears by kind permission of The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

MATTHEW FLETCHER, PIANO

A member of Glyndebourne Opera Festival's music staff since 2012, and winner of the *Das Lied* and *Kathleen Ferrier* accompanist prizes, Matthew is a sought-after pianist and répétiteur. His performances have taken him to major concert halls, festivals and opera houses across the UK and Europe. He has played with the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic Orchestras, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Recent highlights include recitals at Brighton Festival and King's Place with Danielle De Niese, a recording of the songs of Elizabeth Maconchy with Joanna Songi, and his onstage debut at Glyndebourne as the 'spinning organist' in *Saul*. Matthew's fortepiano and harpsichord continuo for Glyndebourne's recent productions of *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* was described by the press as 'stunningly imaginative' and 'wonderfully witty'. Matthew is also a keen jazz pianist and composer.

Matthew read music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he was organ scholar. He then studied piano accompaniment with Michael Dussek and Pascal Nemirovsky at the Royal Academy of Music. He was made an associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2016, and was on their teaching staff as a vocal coach from 2015 – 2022. Matthew is a member of the Hampstead Collective.