Concert Program IV:

Songs of Love

August 2

Tuesday, August 2
8:00 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

PROGRAM OVERVIEW
One of Brahms’s essential creative outlets was the vocal tradition he inherited from Franz Schubert. Brahms possessed an innate sensitivity to the sympathy between poetry and music—a vital concern of the Romantic generation. The perennially beloved Liebeslieder Waltzes contain all of the hallmarks of Brahms’s vocal oeuvre: warmth, intimacy, expressive nuance, and beguiling lyricism; the unique scoring of the Opus 91 Songs for Mezzo-Soprano, Viola, and Piano adds to these qualities an exquisite melancholy. Concert Program IV surrounds these works with the music of Schubert and Schumann (including the Spanische Liebeslieder, which served as a model for Brahms’s Liebeslieder Waltzes). Brahms’s legacy is evident in the hyper-Romantic Seven Early Songs of Alban Berg, one of Brahms’s early-twentieth-century artistic heirs.

SPECIAL THANKS
Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Linda DeMelia and Ted Wobber with gratitude for their generous support.

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
Selected Lieder
“Liebesbotschaft”
“Nachtstück”
“Auflösung”
Paul Appleby, tenor; Wu Han, piano

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Zwei Gesänge, op. 91 (1884; 1863–1864)
“Gestillte Sehnsucht: In gold’nen Abendschein getaucht”
“Gestisches Wiegenlied: Die ihr schwebet”
Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano; Gilbert Kalish, piano; Paul Neubauer, viola

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)
Selected Lieder
“Lehn’ deine Wang’ an meine Wang’,” op. 142, no. 2
“Du bist wie eine Blume,” op. 25, no. 24
“Heiß mich nicht reden,” op. 98a, no. 5
Kelly Markgraf, baritone; Wu Han, piano

ROBERT SCHUMANN
Spanische Liebeslieder, op. 138 (1849)
Erin Morley, soprano; Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano; Paul Appleby, tenor; Kelly Markgraf, baritone; Gilbert Kalish, Wu Han, piano

INTERMISSION

ALBAN BERG (1885–1935)
Sieben frühe Lieder (1905–1908)
Erin Morley, soprano; Gilbert Kalish, piano

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Liebeslieder Waltzes, op. 52 (1868–1869)
Erin Morley, soprano; Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano; Paul Appleby, tenor; Kelly Markgraf, baritone; Gilbert Kalish, Wu Han, piano
Program Notes: Songs of Love

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(Born January 31, 1797, Vienna; died November 19, 1828, Vienna)

“Liebesbotschaft” from Schwanengesang, D. 957, “Nachtstück,” “Auflösung”

Composed: “Liebesbotschaft”: 1828; “Nachtstück”: 1819; “Auflösung”: March 1824
Published: “Liebesbotschaft”: 1829; “Nachtstück”: 1825; “Auflösung”: 1842
Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below
Approximate duration: 10 minutes

The composer John Harbison has credited Franz Schubert with composing “the best piece in every genre he really tackled.” Notwithstanding Schubert’s creative supremacy across all prevalent musical forms of his time, from solo sonata to symphony, the lied represents the centerpiece of his artistry. Schubert crystallized the vocal tradition that all subsequent composers in the nineteenth century would inherit. His contribution of more than six hundred songs to the lied repertoire is as consistent in artistic quality as it is staggering in quantity. It is an extraordinary catalog comprising one inspired utterance after another, each containing in fleeting minutes the depth of human experience, expressed achingly through the intimate medium of voice and piano.

The buoyant “Liebesbotschaft” begins Schubert’s final collection of songs, published posthumously as Schwanengesang (Swan Song). “Nachtstück” sets a text by the poet and Schubert’s close friend Johann Mayrhofer. Schubert’s setting of Mayrhofer’s funeral text is fittingly dark-hued. “Auflösung,” composed in the same month as Schubert’s signature Death and the Maiden String Quartet, likewise sets a Mayrhofer text. Though less decisively downtrodden than “Nachtstück,” Schubert’s setting nevertheless captures an existential weariness befitting Mayrhofer’s poem.

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, Vienna)

Two Songs, op. 91

Composed: I. “Gestillte Sehnsucht”: 1884; II. “Gestliches Wiegenlied”: 1863–1864
Published: 1884
Other works from this period: Symphony no. 3, op. 90 (1883); Four Quartets for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Piano, op. 92; Tafellied, op. 93b, for six voices and piano; Five Songs, op. 94; Seven Songs, op. 95 (1884); Symphony no. 4, op. 98 (1884–1885)
Approximate duration: 13 minutes

Brahms composed the Two Songs, op. 91, for alto, viola, and piano over a period of twenty years, between 1864 and 1884; they were intended for the violinist Joseph Joachim and his wife, the singer Amalie Weiss. The set comprises one secular song, “Gestillte Sehnsucht” (“Stilled Desire”), and one sacred, “Gestliches Wiegenlied” (“Sacred Lullaby”).

The songs were published in the reverse order of composition. Brahms composed the first of the songs, “Gestillte Sehnsucht,” twenty years after “Gestliches Wiegenlied.” Joseph and Amalie Joachim had at this time recently separated, and Brahms composed the song in the hopes of helping the couple to reconcile. The song sets a text by the German Romantic poet Friedrich Rückert.

*Bolded terms are defined in the glossary.

Robert Schumann
(Born June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Saxony; died July 29, 1856, Endenich, near Bonn)

“Lehn’ deine Wang’ an meine Wang’”, op. 142, no. 2; “Du bist wie eine Blume”, op. 25, no. 24; “Heiß mich nicht reden”, op. 98a, no. 5

Spanische Liebeslieder, op. 138

Published: “Lehn’ deine Wang’ an meine Wang’”: 1858; “Du bist wie eine Blume”: 1840; “Heiß mich nicht reden”: 1851; Spanische Liebeslieder: 1857
Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below
Approximate duration: “Lehn’ deine Wang’ an meine Wang’”: 45 seconds; “Du bist wie eine Blume”: 2 minutes; “Heiß mich nicht reden”: 4 minutes; Spanische Liebeslieder: 20 minutes

Not quite a full generation younger than Schubert (1797–1828), Robert Schumann (1810–1856) followed Schubert as the early nineteenth century’s most important composer in the miniature forms of solo piano pieces and lieder. His contributions to the song repertoire are seminal: his keen ear for vocal inflection, the expressive nuance of his piano accompaniments, and, most of all, his deep sensitivity to the discourse between poetry and music place Schumann’s lieder among his top artistic accomplishments.

“Lehn’ deine Wang’ an meine Wang’,” on a text by Heinrich Heine, was originally intended as part of Dichterliebe, Schumann’s 1840 cycle on sixteen Heine texts and one of the landmark song cycles of the Romantic literature. The song’s fleeting intensity would indeed be at home in Schumann’s most famous cycle. Following Schumann’s decision to exclude it, the song remained unknown until after the composer’s death; it ultimately appeared as the second of Schumann’s Four Songs, op. 142, published posthumously in 1858.

The love-struck “Du bist wie eine Blume” ("Thou Art So Like a Flower") comes from Schumann’s Opus 25 song cycle, Myrthen, composed as a wedding present for Clara Wieck in the same year as Dichterliebe. The text comes again from Heine.

“Heiß mich nicht reden” is the fifth of Schumann’s Lieder und Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, composed in 1849. The cycle uses poems from Goethe’s second novel, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship), which left a great impression on the deeply literate composer. Following his third reading of the novel—and especially affected by the character Mignon—Schumann produced this
cycle of nine songs. (In addition to the Opus 98a cycle, Goethe’s illu-
inated character inspired Schumann’s Requiem für Mignon, op. 98b, for
solo voices, chorus, and orchestra.)

Schumann’s Opus 138 Spanische Liebeslieder for four singers
and four-hand piano were composed in the same year as the Lieder
und Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister and Requiem für Mignon. It is a ten-
movement cycle based on Spanish folk songs, comprising songs for
solo voice and duets and one movement for the full quartet. Schumann
also includes two instrumental movements, one at the beginning of the
set, which immediately creates a colorful Spanish atmosphere, and an
intermezzo that appears as the cycle’s sixth number. The cycle is on
German translations of texts by the poet Emanuel von Geibel.

Schumann’s choice of medium of four singers and two pianists—
at once peculiar and exquisitely intimate—would serve as a model for
Brahms’s Liebeslieder Waltzes, composed twenty years later. But
Brahms’s more famous Liebeslieder involve more ensemble singing,
whereas Schumann’s Spanische Liebeslieder call for all four singers
only at the cycle’s conclusion.

ALBAN BERG
(Born February 9, 1885, Vienna; died December 24, 1935, Vienna)

Seven Early Songs
Composed: 1905–1908; revised and orchestrated, 1928
Published: 1928
First performance: Orchestral version: November 6, 1928, Vienna
Other works from this period: Piano Sonata, op. 1 (1907–1908);
Four Songs, op. 2 (1909–1910); String Quartet, op. 3 (1910)
Approximate duration: 16 minutes

Together with his teacher Arnold Schoenberg and fellow Schoenberg
pupil Anton Webern, Alban Berg emerged from the Romantic tradition
of the nineteenth century as one of Brahms’s early-twentieth-century
artistic heirs. (Schoenberg, the early twentieth century’s great innova-
tor of serial and atonal composition, wrote an essay in 1947 entitled
“Brahms the Progressive,” in which he discussed certain techniques in
Brahms’s music that foretold his own.) The early works of Schoenberg,
Webern, and Berg (collectively referred to as the Second Viennese
School) exhibit a hyper-expressionist, post-Romantic language that
steadily evolved towards experiments in atonality and twelve-tone com-
position—an evolution that would have far-reaching consequences for
music throughout the twentieth century. But while Webern took the
twelve-tone method to its strictest extremes, Berg remained sub-
jectively Romantic throughout his career, if within the framework of a
radically new musical language. “At once a modernist and a Romantic,
a formalist and a sensualist,” writes scholar Douglas Jarman, “he pro-
duced one of the richest bodies of music in the twentieth century, and
in opera, especially, he had few equals.”

The songs composed between 1905 and 1908, and assem-
bled and published two decades later as Berg’s Sieben frühe Lieder
(Seven Early Songs), reflect Berg’s early years under Schoenberg’s
tutelage; their expressive depth demonstrates the influence of the
young composer’s teacher. The songs are essentially tonal, though
they audibly extend the harmonic language of Brahms’s most chro-
matic late works. The first song of the set, “Nacht,” floats enigmatically
on whole-tone figurations, using the exotic-sounding scale that likewise
captivated Debussy and Stravinsky. The songs moreover demonstrate
the influence of both Brahms and Schoenberg in their motivic treat-
ment. “Traumgekrönt” (no. 4) obsesses over a germinal four-note motif,
echoing an architectural trait of Brahms’s mature chamber works and
also looking forward to the thematic sophistication of Berg’s own later
scores; the right hand of the piano accompaniment in “Liebesode”
(no. 6) is similarly built on a single three-note figure.

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Liebeslieder Waltzes, op. 52
Composed: 1868–1869
Published: 1869
First performance: January 5, 1870, Vienna
Other works from this period: Hungarian Dances for Piano, Four
Hands, Books 1–2 (1868); Four Songs, op. 43; Four Songs, op. 46;
Five Songs, op. 47; Seven Songs, op. 48; Five Songs, op. 49 (1868);
Rinaldo, op. 50, cantata for tenor solo, four male voices, and orchestra
(1863–1868); Rhapsodie, op. 53, for alto solo, four male voices, and
orchestra (1869); Schicksalslied, op. 54 (1868–1871); Triumphlied,
op. 55 (1870–1871)
Approximate duration: 24 minutes

The Liebeslieder Waltzes for vocal quartet and four-hand piano are
a beguiling set of eighteen perfectly wrought parlor songs. Brahms’s
biographer Jan Swafford describes them as “confectionery tunes with
a large helping of Viennese Schlagobers (whipped cream)...The music
testifies to Brahms’s love of both Strauss and Schubert waltzes, but
like most such testaments of his they hardly resemble their inspiration;
this is the Viennese waltz à la Brahms.”

The Liebeslieder Waltzes set texts from traditional folk songs
in various languages, translated into German by the Romantic poet
Georg Friedrich Daumer. They supposedly were inspired in part by
Brahms’s short-lived infatuation with Julie Schumann, Robert and Clara
Schumann’s daughter. The texts accordingly reflect a quintessentially
Romantic sense of pining.

—Patrick Castillo