

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)

Mélodies

Sybille Diethelm, soprano
Annina Haug, mezzo soprano
Nino Aurelio Gmünder, tenor
René Perler, bass-baritone
Fabienne Romer & Edward Rushton, piano

Chansons à quatre voix op. 39 (1905)

Sybille Diethelm, Annina Haug, Nino Aurelio Gmünder, René Perler, Fabienne Romer,
Edward Rushton

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Song texts in French and English

Chansons à quatre voix op. 39 (1905)

1 Véhémente - after Alfred de Musset (1810-1857)

Ah! Assez dormir, ma belle,
Ta cavale Isabelle
Hennit sous tes balcons:
Allons, en chasse!
Vois tes piqueurs alertes,
Et sur leurs manches vertes
Les pieds noirs des faucons:
Allons, en chasse!

Vois écuyers et pages,
En galants équipages,
Sans rochet ni pourpoint,
Têtes chaperonnées,
Trainer les haquenées,
Leur arbalète au poing!

Vois bondir dans les herbes
Les lévriers superbes,
Les chiens trapus crier!
En chasse, et chasse heureuse!
Allons, l'amoureuse,
Le pied dans l'étrier!

Allons, mon intrépide,
Ta cavale rapide
Frappe du pied le sol:
Allons, en chasse!
Et ton bouffon balance
Comme un soldat sa lance,
Son joyeux parasol:
Allons, en chasse!

1 Vehement

Ah! Enough sleep, my beauty,
Isabelle, your mare
is neighing beneath your balconies,
Come on, let's hunt!
See your lively drivers
with the falcons' black feet
on their green sleeves!

See the riders and the page boys,
a gallant team
without rattles and doublets,

heads unhatted
leading the horses,
crossbow in hand!

See the superb greyhounds
bounding through the grass,
and the burly dogs baying!
Tally ho, and happy hunting!
Come on, my lover,
your foot in the stirrups!

Come on, my fearless one,
your speedy mare
is scratching the ground with her feet,
and your fool is swinging
his merry parasol
like a soldier brandishing his lance.

2 Nostalgique - anon.

Fugitive, l'heure s'envole,
Rien ne peut arrêter sa course folle;
Ô symbole, triste symbole
De nos plaisirs, de nos beaux jours.

D'un bonheur trop vite effacé,
Le souvenir nous reste éternellement.
Par lui, le présent monotone se colore
Des reflets plus brillants du passé.
D'un bonheur enfui rapidement
Le souvenir nous reste éternellement.

2 Nostalgic

Fleetingly, time flies away,
nothing can halt its mad course.
O symbol, sad symbol
of our pleasures, of our fine days.

Memories of happiness too soon erased
stay with us for eternity.
Through them, the monotonous present
is coloured by brilliant reflections of the past.
The memory of fleeting happiness
stays with us for ever.

3 Naïve - after Alfred de Musset

Nina, ton frais sourire,
Nina, ton cœur qui soupire,
ta voix, tes yeux, qui font dire
qu'on croit au bonheur d'aimer.

Nina, ces chères années,
Nina, ces douces journées,
Ces roses fanées,
Toutes choses mortes sur ton cœur.

Nina, ô ma charmante,
Pendant la tourmente,
La mer écumante grondait à nos yeux!

Aimable et belle Italie, sage ou folie,
Jamais, jamais ne t'oubliera
Qui t'a pu contempler une fois,
Qui a vu un jour ton bleu ciel!

Toujours plus chérie, tu seras la patrie,
Toujours ta rive fleurie
Restera la patrie que désire l'amour!

3 Naive

Nina, your fresh smile,
Nina, your sighing heart,
your voice, your eyes, which make us
say that we believe in love's happiness.

Nina, these dear years,
Nina, these sweet days,
these wilted roses,
all dead things on your heart.

Nina, o my charming one,
all the while we were tormented,
the foaming sea bellowed in our eyes!

Lovely and beautiful Italy, wisdom or madness,
no one who has ever once contemplated you,
who has for one day seen your blue skies,
will ever be able to forget you.

Ever dearer, you will be our homeland,
your flowering coasts
will ever be the dear land which love desires!

4 Boréale - anon

Ô nuage aux doux contours,
Léger nuage aux flancs neigeux,
Vers quelle plage, sous quels cieux
T'emportent les grands vents d'orage?

Ô fils d'une zone plus brûlante,

Ne viens-tu pas
Arrives-tu du sein profond des mers
Pour servir à la parure
D'un autre horizon
Bien plus vermeil?

4 Boreal

O cloud with the soft contours,
light cloud with snowy flanks,
towards which coasts, under which skies
are the great storm-winds carrying you?

O son of torrid zones,
do you not come,
do you reach us from the deep breast of the seas,
to serve as the finery
of other, more vermilion horizons?

5 Tendre - after a Persian poem

Basse

Toi qu'au jeune âge en mon chemin j'avais rêvée
Je t'ai trouvée
Ô toi que j'avais rêvée, donne à ma tendresse un doux espoir!
Quand l'hirondelle vole et ramène le doux printemps fleuri...
A tout cœur tendre qu'il n'est qu'un temps!
Ô toi qu'autrefois j'avais rêvée en mon chemin,
Je t'ai trouvée enfin!
Hélas! tout est désir, tout est douleur!
Toujours, toujours, toi présente,
Tout est plaisir, tout est tendresse, tout est amour!

Ténor

Ah! plein de bonheur j'aime à te voir
De mon amour combler l'espoir.
A tire d'aile, vole et rappelle
Le doux printemps fleuri.
C'est pour apprendre que pour se rendre
Il n'est qu'un temps!
Ô toi, ma seule envie,
Mon seul bonheur, toute ma vie
Est dans ton cœur!
Hélas! en ton absence
Tout est désir, tout est douleur.
Mais toujours, en ta présence
Tout est plaisir, tout est tendresse,
Tout est oubli, tout est ivresse,
Tout est bonheur d'amour!

Mezzo-soprano

Toi qu'au jeune âge, autrefois,

J'avais rêvé sur mon chemin,
Je t'ai trouvé.
A tire d'aile...
Le doux printemps,
C'est pour apprendre
A tout cœur tendre
Que pour se rendre
Il n'est qu'un temps!
Hélas! en ton absence tout est désir, tout est douleur...
Hélas! tout est désir et douleur...
Toujours, en ta présence tout est plaisir et douceur,
Plaisir, douceur, tendresse, ivresse,
Oubli, bonheur, toujours en ta présence,
Toujours, toujours, tout est amour!

Soprano

Ah! pleine d'ivresse, je veux de ta tendresse combler l'espoir.
Quand l'hirondelle vole et rappelle le doux printemps fleuri.
Il n'est qu'un temps!
Pour se rendre il n'est qu'un temps... Ah!
Ah ! toi qu'autrefois j'avais rêvé sur mon chemin,
Je t'ai trouvé: avec ivresse à ta tendresse
Un doux espoir je veux donner.
Ô toi, ma seule envie, mon seul bonheur
Ma vie est dans ton cœur!
Hélas! en ton absence tout est désir,
Tout est douleur... Toujours, en ta présence,
Toujours, toujours, tout est plaisir tendresse,
Oubli, bonheur, ivresse,
Tout est bonheur, tout est amour!

5 Tender - after a Persian poem

Bass

You, of whom I dreamt, at a tender age on my path,
I have found you.
O you whom I dreamt, give sweet hope to my tenderness!
When the swallow flies and brings back the sweet flowered spring...
for any fond heart there is only one time!
O you whom I dreamt of once on my path,
I have found you at last!
Alas! All is longing, all is pain!
Always, always, when you are there,
all is pleasure, all is tenderness, all is love!

Tenor

Ah! filled with of happiness, I love to see your
hope being fulfilled through my love.
On a wing, sweet flowering spring
flies and reminds us.
It is to learn that there is only one time
to give oneself!

O you, my entire desire,
my happiness, my whole life
is in your heart.

Alas! In your absence
all is longing, all is pain.
But always, in your presence,
all is pleasure, all is tenderness,
all is oblivion, all is intoxication,
all is the bliss of love!

Mezzo-soprano

You whom I dreamt in earlier days,
on my path, I have found you.

Ah! You whom I had dreamt!

On a wing...
the sweet spring.

It is to learn
that for every tender heart
there is only one time
to give oneself!

Alas! In your absence all is longing, all is pain...

Alas! All is longing and pain...

Always, in your presence all is pleasure and sweetness,
pleasure, sweetness, tenderness, intoxication,
oblivion, bliss, always in your presence,
always, always, all is love!

Soprano

Ah! Fully intoxicated, I want your tenderness to fulfil my hope.
When the swallow flies and brings back the sweet flowered spring.

There is only one time!

To give oneself, there is only one time... Ah!

Ah! You, whom I dreamt in earlier times on my path,

I have found you: with intoxication and tenderness

I wish to give you a sweet hope. Ah! A sweet hope.

O you, my only desire, my only happiness,
my life is in your heart!

Alas! In your absence all is longing,
all is pain... Always, in your presence,
always, always, all is pleasure, tenderness,
oblivion, happiness, intoxication,
all is bliss, all is love!

6 Martiale - after Alfred de Musset

Beau chevalier qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu'allez-vous faire aussi loin d'ici?
Qu'allez-vous faire aussi loin de nous?
Voyez-vous pas que la nuit est profonde
Et que le monde n'est que souci?
J'en vais pleurer, moi qui me laissais dire
Que mon sourire était si doux.

6 Martial

Handsome knight leaving for war,
what are going to do, so far from here?
What will you do so far from us?
Do you not see that the night is deep,
and that the world is nothing but sorrow?
And me? I will weep, I who was told
that my smile was so sweet.

4 Lieds op. 45 (1912)

1 Où vivre? - Jean Richepin (1849-1926)

Où vivre? Dans quelle ombre
Étouffer mon ennui?
Ma tristesse est plus sombre
Que la nuit.

Où mourir? Sous quelle onde
Noyer mon deuil amer?
Ma peine est plus profonde
Que la mer.

Où fuir? De quelle sorte
Égorger mon remords?
Ma douleur est plus forte
Que la mort.

1 Where should I live?

Where should I live? In which shade
suffocate my depression?
My sadness is darker
than the night.

Where should I die? Under which wave
drown my bitter mourning?
My sorrow is deeper
than the sea.

Where should I flee to? How
strangle my remorse?
My pain is stronger
than death.

2 Évocation - Jean Richepin

Te souviens-tu du baiser,
Du premier que je vins prendre?
Tu ne sus pas refuser,
Mais tu n'osas pas le rendre.

Te souviens-tu du baiser,
Du dernier que je vins prendre?
Tu n'osas pas refuser;
Mais tu ne sus pas le rendre.

2 Evocation

Do you remember the kiss,
the first one that I came to claim?

You did not know how to refuse it,
but you did not dare return it.

Do you remember the kiss,
the last one I came to claim?
You did not dare refuse it
But you did not know how to return it.

3 Fleurs décloses - Catulle Blée (1869-?)

Nous aimer, à quoi bon, hélas!
avant que s'en vienne l'automne,
va, nos pauvres cœurs seront las,
car l'amour est si monotone...
Ne nous aimons pas, nous verrons
nos larmes et nos peines bien vite effacées...
L'hiver viendra, nous oublierons
fleurs décloses, amours passées...

3 Closed flowers

What is the use of our loving, alas!
Before autumn comes
our poor hearts will be tired,
for love is so monotonous...
If we do not love each other, we will soon see
our tears and our worries wiped out...
Winter will come, we will forget
closed flowers, past loves...

4 Ils ont tué trois petites filles - Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949)

Ils ont tué trois petites filles
Pour voir ce qu'il y a dans leur cœur.
Le premier était plein de bonheur;
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois serpents sifflèrent trois ans.

Le deuxième était plein de douceur,
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois agneaux broutèrent trois ans.

Le troisième était plein de malheur,
Et partout où coula son sang,
Trois archanges veillèrent trois ans.

4 They killed three little girls

They killed three little girls
to see what was in their hearts.
The first was full of gladness;
and everywhere her blood flowed

three snakes hissed for three years.

The second was full of sweetness,
and everywhere her blood flowed,
three lambs grazed for three years.

The third was full of sadness,
and everywhere her blood flowed,
three archangels kept watch for three years.

Kérob-Shal op. 67 (1924)

1 Octroi - René Kerdyk (1885-1945)

Tout un paysage en lignes blanches,
L'octroi de Paris est un Foujita
Avec un oiseau sur une branche
D'un arbre comme il y en a des tas.

Un réverbère est encore en vie
Sur la grille qui coupe du jour
Et dans cette petite aube en sourdine
C'est le passage des topinambours.

Tout un monde somnolent s'avance
En cette lumière d'échafaud
Tandis que le gabelou de la lance
Perce le secret des tombereaux.

1 Customs House

A whole landscape of white lines,
the customs house of Paris is a Foujita
with a bird on a branch
of a tree like so many others.

A street lamp is still alive
on the railings which cut up the daylight,
and into this little muted dawn
pass the Jerusalem artichokes.

A whole sleepy world advances
into this scaffold-like light
while the customs-officer with his lance
pierces the carts' secret.

2. Star - G. Jean Aubry (1882-1950)

J'entends s'égrener ton rire
Quand j'attendais ton aveu,
Dans le soir où je soupire...
Une étoile file. — «Un vœu!...

Fais vite un vœu, car un ange
Là-bas l'attend!» — «Un vœu, mais?...»
— «N'en as-tu donc de rechange?»
L'étoile fuit à jamais.

On se tait. Un ange passe
En vain. Il passe, en effet,
Pour chercher parmi l'espace
Le vœu que tu n'as pas fait.

2 Star

I hear your laughter peal out
as I was expecting your avowal,
in the evening when I sigh...
a star passes over. — “A wish!...

Make a wish, quickly, for an angel
is waiting over there!” — “A wish, but...?”
— “Haven’t you got one spare?”
The star disappears for ever.

Silence. An angel passes
in vain. It passes, in fact,
to search throughout space
for the wish you didn’t make.

3. Vendredi XIII - René Chalupe (1885-1957)

Dans le jardin du Luxembourg,
Sous les berceaux tôt défleuris,
Dans le jardin du Luxembourg
Quatre fontaines sont taries.

Le nonce dénoua son masque
Afin de pouvoir se mirer,
Un soir, dans la première vasque
En revenant du bal paré.

La princesse de Trébizonde,
Se promenant au bord de l’eau,
Laissa s’échapper son anneau
Qui disparut dans la seconde.

Dans la troisième on dit qu’un jour
La fille du roi de Pologne,
Sous les yeux de toute la cour,
Se baigna sans nulle vergogne.

Et, destin funeste prédit
Par une tireuse de cartes,
Je dois le prochain vendredi
Treize me noyer dans la quarte.

3 Friday XIII

In the Jardin du Luxembourg
under the bowers which have already shed their blossoms,
in the Jardin du Luxembourg,
four fountains have dried up.

The nuncio took off his mask
in order to admire himself
in the first basin, one evening
on his way back from the festal ball.

The princess of Trebizond,
walking by the waters,
let her ring fall,
and it disappeared in the second.

They say that in the third, one day,
the daughter of the king of Poland,
within sight of the whole court,
bathed without any shame.

And — dreadful fate seen
in the cards by a fortune teller —
next Friday the Thirteenth,
I must drown myself in the fourth.

3 Mélodies op. 4 (1895)

1 Lied - Camille Mauclair (1872-1945)

Les roses de l'autre année
Sont mortes comme un crépuscule,
Les roses de l'autre année
S'effeuillent au vent qui module
Ta chanson d'abandonnée,
Ô silencieuse fanée!
Ta chanson d'abandonnée
Sanglotant dans le crépuscule,
Ta chanson d'abandonnée
Dans les frondaisons où l'or brûle
D'une guirlande égrenée,
Ô toi frissonnante étonnée!
D'une guirlande égrenée
Dont s'éploie en ce crépuscule
La mort si pâle égrenée
Comme à ton front où, triste et nulle,
Rêve une mort d'autre année,
Ô douce Ariane fanée!

1 Lied

The roses of yesteryear
have died like a dusk,
the roses of yesteryear
shed their petals in the wind
which alters your forsaken song,
you silent, wilted one!
The song of one forsaken
sobbing in the dusk,
your forsaken song
in the fallen leaves, where the gold
of a loosened garland glows,
O shivering astonished one!
Out of the loosened garland
in this dusk, pale and unleashed
death sings a lament,
as on your forehead where, sad and void,
the death of a past year is dreaming,
o sweet, wilted Ariadne!

2 Il pleure dans mon cœur - Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleut sur la ville;
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon cœur?
Ô bruit doux de la pluie,
Par terre et sur les toits!

Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,
Ô le chant de la pluie!

Il pleure sans raison
Dans ce cœur qui s'écoeure.
Quoi! nulle trahison?...
Ce deuil est sans raison.

C'est bien la pire peine,
De ne savoir pourquoi
Sans amour et sans haine
Mon cœur a tant de peine!

2 There is crying in my heart

There is crying in my heart
like the rain over the town.
What is this lassitude
that enters my heart?

O gentle sound of the rain,
on the ground and on the roofs!
For a depressed heart
the song of the rain!

There is no reason for the crying
in this heart that has lost heart.
What? No betrayal?...
This mourning has no reason.

It surely is the worst pain,
not to know why,
without love and without hatred,
my heart has so much pain!

3 Fils de la vierge - Maurice Ganivet (1849-1884)

Comme les fils étincelants
Que l'on dit que la Vierge sème
En effilant son diadème
De fleur en fleur à travers champs,
Autour de nous, mille fils d'or,
Rêves fleuris de ma pensée,
Retiennent mon âme enlacée,
Et paralysent son essor!
Et je vis en joyeux reclus,
Car je sais que de ce rêve,
Si jamais le filet se lève,
Être libre, c'est n'être plus!

3 The Virgin's Threads

Like the shimmering threads
which, it is said, the Virgin sows
by unpicking her crown
of flower upon flower over the fields,
all around us a thousand golden threads,
the flowered dreams of my thoughts,
have captured my soul
which, paralysed, cannot soar!
And I live as a happy recluse,
for I know: if ever
the veil of this dream lifts,
being free will mean: being no more!

2 Chansons op. 18

1 Neige, Coeur et Lys - Georges Maze-Sencier

La neige tombe immaculée:
Que devient la neige foulée?
Une fange immonde et souillée

Le coeur s'ouvre pur ici-bas:
Le coeur ne changera-t'il pas?
Souvent il devient fange, hélas!

Le lys naît virginal Fleur d'ange,
Mais, le soir venu, le lys change
et se flétrit, tache de fange

La neige aux sommets reste pure,
Le coeur qui s'élève s'épure
Aux mains des anges le lys dure.

1 Snow, Heart and Lily

The snow falls, immaculate.
What becomes of the trodden snow?
A revolting, soiled swamp.

The heart reveals its purity down here:
Will the heart not change?
Alas, it often becomes a swamp!

The lily is born as a virginal angel flower,
but, come the evening, the lily changes
and withers, stained by the swamp.

The snow on the summits stays pure,
the heart which strives upwards attains purity,
and the lily endures in the hands of angels.

2 Chanson bretonne - Paul Arosa (1874-?)

Il était un pauv'petit gars
que ses parents n'chérissaient pas.
Sans pain, sans eau, sans jamais rien,
Il mangeait la soupe du chien.

Il s'était tant désespéré,
chaq'soir il avait tant pleuré,
se sentant toujours le vent'creux,
qu'il n'avait plus de larm'aux yeux.

Mais un jour il dit au bon dieu

d'avoir pitié de son p'tit fieu
qui n'voulait plus toujours souffrir,
et ce jour-là Dieu l'fit mourir.

A présent l'gars est bienheureux;
c'est un ange vêtu de bleu.
Mais l'vieux chien n'veut plus manger:
Il n'a plus d'soupe à partager.

2 Breton Song

There was a poor young lad
whose parents didn't love him.
No bread, no water, never ever anything,
he drank the dog's soup.

He was so desperate,
and every evening he had cried so much,
always feeling the empty pit in his stomach,
that his eyes didn't have any tears left in them.

But one day he asked the dear Lord
to have pity on His little urchin
who didn't want to suffer all the time,
and that day God let him die.

Now the lad is happy:
he's an angel dressed in blue.
But the old dog has nothing to eat any more:
he has no soup to share.

4 Poèmes de Ronsard op. 100 - Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)

1 Si...

Si mille oeillets, si mille lys j'embrasse,
Entortillant mon bras tout à l'entour,
Plus fort qu'un cep, qui, d'un amoureux tour,
La branche aimée en mille plis enlace;

Si le souci ne jaunit plus ma face,
Si le plaisir fait en moi son séjour,
Si j'aime mieux les ombres que le jour,
Songe divin, cela vient de ta grâce.

En te suivant je volerais aux cieux:
Mais ce portrait qui nage dans mes yeux,
Fraude toujours ma joie interrompue.

Et tu me fuis au milieu de mon bien,
Comme un éclair qui se finit en rien,
Ou comme au vent s'évanouit la nue.

1 If...

If I embrace a thousand pinks or a thousand lilies,
twisting them all around my arms
tighter than a vine which in amorous style
entwines its beloved branch in a thousand curves;

if worry no longer makes my face yellow,
if pleasure stays with me,
if I prefer the shadows to the day,
this is due to your favour, divine dream.

Following you I could fly to the heavens;
but this image which swims in my eyes
always deceives my interrupted joy;

and then you flee in the midst of my happiness,
like a lightning flash ending in nothing,
or like a cloud which vanishes in the breeze.

2 Privilèges

Les épis sont à Cérès,
Aux chèvres-pieds les forêts,
À Chlore l'herbe nouvelle,
À Phoebus le vert laurier,
À Minerve l'olivier,
Et le beau pin à Cybèle;
Aux Zéphires le doux bruit,
À Pomone le doux fruit,

L'onde aux Nymphes est sacrée,
À Flore les belles fleurs;
Mais les soucis et les pleurs
Sont sacrés à Cythérée.

2 Privileges

Ears of corn are sacred to Ceres,
forests to the cloven-footed fauns,
the new grass to Chloris,
green laurels to Phoebus,
olive-trees to Minerva,
and the handsome pine to Cybele,
gentle sounds to the Zephyrs,
sweet fruit to Pomona,
waves to the Nymphs,
and beautiful flowers to Flora;
but sorrow and tears
are sacred to Aphrodite.

3 Ses deux yeux

Ses deux yeux bruns, deux flambeaux de ma vie,
Dessus les miens répandant leur clarté,
Ont esclavé ma jeune liberté
Pour la damner, en prison asservie.

Par ses yeux bruns ma raison fut ravie,
Et quelque part qu'Amour m'ait arrêté,
Je ne sus voir ailleurs d'autre beauté,
Tant ils sont seuls mon bien et mon envie.

D'autre éperon mon maître ne me point,
Autres pensers en moi ne logent point,
D'un autre feu ma Muse ne s'enflamme:

Ma main ne sait cultiver autre nom,
Et mon papier de nulle ne s'émaille, sinon,
De leurs beautés que je sens dedans l'âme.

3 Her two eyes

Her two brown eyes, twin lights of my life,
reflecting their shine in mine,
have imprisoned my young freedom
and condemned it to serve its time.

My reason has been ravished by these brown eyes;
wherever Cupid might otherwise have held me up,
I could never see any other beauty,
since they are my sole benefit and desire.

No other master may spur me on,
no other thoughts dwell in me,
no other fire ignites my muse.

My hand is unable to write any other name,
And my paper knows no embellishment, other than
of her beauties, which I feel in my soul.

4 Le soir qu'Amour

Le soir qu'Amour vous fit en la salle descendre
Pour danser d'artifice un beau ballet d'amour,
Vos yeux, bien qu'il fût nuit, ramenèrent le jour,
Tant ils surent d'éclairs par la place répandre.

Le ballet fut divin, qui se soulait reprendre,
Se rompre, se refaire et, tour dessus retour,
Se mêler, s'écarter, se tourner à l'entour,
Contre-imitant le cours du fleuve de Méandre.

Ores il était rond, ores long, or' étroit,
Or' en pointe, en triangle, en la façon qu'on voit
L'escadron de la grue évitant la froidure.

Je faux, tu ne dansais, mais ton pied voletait
Sur le haut de la terre: aussi ton corps s'était
Transformé pour ce soir en divine nature.

4 That night when Cupid

That night when Cupid in the ballroom
made you dance an artful dance of love,
your eyes were able to bring daylight back into the night,
so bright were their rays.

It was a divine dance: I watched it resume,
hesitate, gather itself again and, turn after turn,
commingle and spread, and wind around,
imitating the course of Meander's stream.

It was by turns long, narrow, sometimes round
and sometimes pointed in the triangular formation
of cranes in flight escaping the cold.

But I'm wrong, you did not dance: your feet floated
above the ground: that night
your body was transformed into a divine being.

Trois chants op. 98 (1943)

1 Elle était venue - Charles Vildrac (1882-1971)

Elle était venue sur les marches tièdes
Et s'était assise.

La tête gentille était inclinée
Un peu de côté ;

Ses mains réunies étaient endormies
Au creux de la jupe ;

Et elle croisait ses jambes devant elle,
L'un des pieds menus pointant vers le ciel.

Il dut le frôler, ce pied, pour passer
Et il dut la voir.

Il vit son poignet qui donnait envie
D'être à côté d'elle dans les farandoles
Où l'on est tiré, où il faut qu'on tire
Plus qu'on n'oserait.

Et il vit la ligne de son épaule
Qui donnait envie de l'envelopper
Dans un tendre châte.

Mais le désir lui vint de regarder sa bouche
Et ce fut le départ de tout.

Mais le besoin lui vint de regarder ses yeux
Et ce fut la cause de tout.

1 She had come

She had come to the warm steps
and had sat down.

She had inclined her gentle head
a little to the side;

Her folded hands had come to rest
in the lap of her skirt;

and she crossed her legs in front of her,
one of her pretty feet pointing towards the sky.

He had to brush this foot in order to pass her,
and he had to see her.

He saw her wrist, and he felt the desire

to dance side by side with her in a farandole,
when you have to be pulled, and you have to pull
harder than you would otherwise dare.

And he saw the line of her shoulders
which made him wish to wrap her up
in a tender shawl.

But the desire came over him to gaze at her mouth,
and that was the beginning of everything.

But the need came over him to gaze at her eyes,
and that was the cause of everything.

2 La citerne des mille colonnes (Yéré Batan) - Leïla de Dampierre (1891-1955)

Colonnes sans soleil, pâles prisonnières
Que l'eau dormante et froide étreint jusqu'aux genoux,

Vestales de la nuit muette enviez-vous vos soeurs
sur la colline à l'ardente lumière?

Le vent tiède revêt d'écharpes printanières
Leurs sveltes corps brunis sous les acanthes roux

Et les flots adorants si puissants et si doux
Étalent à leurs pieds de farouches crinières.

Vos cortèges perdus s'en vont à l'infini
Murés par un tyran sous la sombre Byzance.

Parfois un bateau noir vient frôler le silence
Et votre beauté vaine émerge de la nuit,
Eclaboussant l'eau morte où passe une lanterne...

Alors un grand soupir fait vibrer la citerne.

2 The cistern with the thousand columns (The Basilica Cistern)

Columns without sun, pale prisoners,
bathed up to the knees in the sleeping cold water,

Vestals of the mute night, do you envy your sisters
on the hill in the glowing light?

Their slim tanned bodies, browned under the red acanthus,
are clothed in springtime veils by the warm wind,

and the adoring waves, so powerful and so gentle,
spread wild manes at their feet.

Throughout eternity you process, lost,

walled in by a tyrant beneath somber Byzantium.

Sometimes a black boat comes and grazes the silence,
and your vain beauty emerges in the night,
splashing the dead water where a lantern passes...

And then, a great sigh makes the cistern vibrate.

3 La tortue et le lièvre (Fable) - Charles Sanglier (1875-1963)

Entre le lièvre et la tortue
Le pari que l'on sait fut fait à la nuit close.
La proposition fut sans doute entendue
Puisqu' un molosse en sut la clause.

Ce chien par trop balourd, malhabile à courir,
Se dit: «J'attraperai le lièvre à l'arrivée.
La proie est ainsi réservée
A mon bel appétit qui ne saurait mentir.»

Il était bien sûr que le lièvre,
Sans nullement se mettre en fièvre,
Allait arriver le premier
Et tomberait dans le guêpier.

Ce chien était logique, en somme.

Donc près du but il se posta.
Il entendit marcher (plaou plaou plaou plaou)
Sur une ombre il sauta (hop la!):
C'est la tortue qu'il attrapa! (Ouap!)

Le lièvre, le voyant mordre la carapace,
Dit: «La tortue a pris ma place,
C'est fort bien,
J'échappe à ce chien :

Sans aucun doute
Cela m'a bien servi de m'amuser en route,
(ah! ah! ah! Ha! ha!)
Je ne m'en plaindrai pas:
Mieux vaut perdre son temps
Que de partir à point!»

3 The tortoise and the hare (fable)

One night, as you know, a bet was made
between the tortoise and the hare.
Someone must have overheard the agreement,
because it seems a mastiff was au fait with all its clauses.

This mutt was too stupid and clumsy to run,

and said to itself: "I'll catch the hare at the finishing-line.
Thus I have reserved the prey
for my great appetite, which never lies."

He was quite sure that the hare
would be the first across the line
without even breaking into a sweat,
and would fall straight into his trap.

The dog had a logical bent, when all's said and done.

So he positioned himself near the line.
He heard steps (plop plop plop plop),
he jumped onto a shadow (hoppla!):
he'd caught the tortoise! (Whap!)

The hare, seeing the dog biting into the shell,
said: "The tortoise took my place,
which is good,
I'll escape the dog:

Without a doubt
it was to my advantage that I amused myself on the way,
(ah, ah, ah, ha ha ha!)
I won't moan about it:
sometimes with time it's better to waste it
than depart on it!"

Booklet note

While Florent Schmitt's orchestral works are well-represented on disc, his songs have been seriously neglected. Some are recorded here for the first time. The qualities that appeal in his larger works are in abundance in this selection that spans his entire creative life: his music's gorgeous sensuality, biting wit, laconic charm, and unleashed savagery. Especially in the works of the 1920s, his compositional techniques are extremely complex, in some cases anticipating Messiaen and the Spectralists, while his affinity with the darker side of human existence is always fascinating.

Schmitt had publicly proclaimed his modernist credentials at the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, when he loudly defended it against the bourgeois nay-sayers. At that stage of Stravinsky's career the admiration was mutual; Stravinsky heard *La Tragédie de Salomé* in 1907, and received the dedication of the full orchestral version. Stravinsky's music resonated deeply in Schmitt at that time, and his words about *Le Sacre*, in part, might equally be a description of his own music, or of what he wished his own music to be: "[...] its frenetic agitation; [...] the senseless whirl of its hallucinating rhythms; [...] aggregations of harmonies beyond any convention or analysis, [...] seeking the most paradoxical sonorities, daring combinations of timbres, by its tropical orchestrations, iridescent and of unbelievable sumptuousness, [...] by an excess of an unheard-of luxuriance of refinement and preciousness [— ...] the music [...] gives us the impression of the darkest barbarity."

It seems that Schmitt was much given to voicing his opinion from the stalls. At the Salle Pleyel in November 1933, his contribution was less defensible than in 1913: he responded to three songs from Kurt Weill's *Der Silbersee*, in the presence of the composer, who had fled Germany that year, by shouting "Vive Hitler!" and "We have enough bad musicians here without importing German Jews!". Schmitt's regrettable political leanings went far: he collaborated with the Nazis and the Vichy regime during the Second World War, in his position as Honorary Vice-president of the musical section of the Groupe Collaboration. On the present CD we perform works Schmitt composed during this period. I admit that thus publicly endorsing music composed by a man who was simultaneously shaking hands with Nazis gave me pause: I had to face the responsibility of squaring admiration for Schmitt's music, and my desire to perform it, with disgust at his antisemitism and his politics. Some interpreters judiciously decide to ignore the dilemma, others might offer excuses to the tune of "everyone was antisemitic in those days", or "he was duly punished after the War and paid his dues". But I had to be absolutely convinced that I needn't harbour feelings of guilt about admiring and performing these songs. The conclusions I reached, which I offer here as a basis for debate with those who disagree, are along these lines: first, Schmitt's musical aesthetic is about as far removed from the Nazi musical aesthetic as possible, and furthermore his opinions are never reflected or propagated in his musical content, whether through style, allusion or choice of texts: the music is always apolitical. Secondly, it seems to me deeply unfair that many of Schmitt's contemporaries of dubious political leanings are unquestioningly feted and performed, even when their music is much less interesting. Lastly, if we confined ourselves solely to music composed by nice people, the world would be much impoverished; genuine and pure appreciation of music can be divorced from the biography of its composers. The discussion on this subject in relation to Schmitt, in programme-notes, CD booklets and on the internet, is suspiciously scarce. For those interested, the article on Schmitt on the French Wikipedia page gives a balanced and unpartisan view of this troubled aspect of his biography. https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florent_Schmitt

Schmitt was born on 28th September 1870 in the eastern French region of Lorraine. Perhaps the proximity to the border with Germany gave rise to his affinity with German culture and Wagnerism, but whatever the reasons, I would like to single out one instrumental work in connection with our compilation of his songs: the suite *Reflets d'Allemagne* op. 28, composed in 1905. *Reflets* is a series of waltzes for piano duet, each movement's title the name of a German city (incidentally, the fifth is "Vienne", anticipating Austria's subsumation into "Germany" by more than 30 years). The **Chansons à quatre voix** op. 39, also from 1905, are closely related to *Reflets d'Allemagne*, in that they are a sequence of waltz-vignettes, incorporate a piano part played by four hands (naturally giving rise to memories of Brahms), and are sprinkled with many cross-references and reminiscences of *Reflets*. The Chansons are full of joy, fire and sensuousness. The fifth song is worth singling out: each voice speaks its own version of the "Arabian poem", and all talk with and against each other in a complex mesh and weave, forming an enticing, intoxicating whole. As if by sleight of hand, the voices converge in longing and harmony at certain crucial moments.

The astonishing songs of the 1910s and 20s are suffused with darker, expressionistic sounds which underscore the cryptic and fathomless poetry. This is a world of nightmares and fantastical visions, typical of Schmitt's predilection for weird and savage exoticism. The four **Lieds** op. 45 (despite the title, all settings of contemporary French poets) are saturated in harmonies augmented and diminished to tonally uncategorisable breaking-point. They are all pitilessly obsessed with death and the death of love. Even the archangels at the close of the fourth song bring no elevated illumination.

The title of the **op. 67 cycle, Kérob-Shal**, is an example of Schmitt's fondness for cryptic word-games. What sounds like some exotic incantation turns out simply to be a mash-up of the first syllables of the poets' names: Kerdyk, Aubry and Chalupt. In these dangerously alluring songs, violent actions are performed against a placid backdrop. *Octroi* depicts a cold landscape on the outskirts of Paris at dawn (note the bird-song in the piano part that anticipates Messiaen gesturally and harmonically, but not conceptually, being descriptive of a banal sort of bird-song "such as there is heaps of"). Impassive calm returns after the violence of the customs officer, brutally depicted in the piano left hand. In *Star*, the sight of a brilliant shooting star provokes excitement in one observer, silence and despair in the other (note that in the final bar g, all 12 notes sound in close proximity, an astonishing and obliterative gesture). In the four strophes of *Vendredi XIII*, the fatal power of four dried-out fountains brings out the worst in the four people who come into contact with them.

Our programme returns for a little relief to some of Schmitt's earlier songs. The **Méodies** op. 4 inhabit the voluptuous world of late Romanticism. Even if this is more familiar territory, some of Schmitt's personal and highly individual fingerprints are already audible, such as the descending chain of fifths, a tritone apart, that curls through *Lied*, providing a stark counterpoint to the deliberately monotonous vocal line. Both the other songs end on unresolved second-inversion triads, surely a sign of rebellion from a twenty-four-year-old composer uninterested in following rules.

In the **Chansons** op. 18 we hear two sides to Schmitt's personality: the melancholic in *Neige, Coeur et Lys*, followed by the brazen gallows-humour of the *Chanson bretonne*, in which the tongue-in-cheek faux-Puccini of the urchin's life in Paradise amid harps and angels contrasts strikingly and hilariously with the earthy harsh reality of the ending.

In the **Poèmes de Ronsard** op. 100, Schmitt for once sets a non-contemporary poet. During the Second World War, he turns his back on his beloved Germanic culture and

reawakens his links to old France, much as Debussy had done during the First World War. Schmitt marries the poetry of Pierre de Ronsard, alive with references to the culture of Classical antiquity, to the sounds and rhythms of ancient music. He may also have been inspired by the revival of interest in the harpsichord, at the hands of Wanda Landowska and her pupil Marcelle de Lacour, for whom Schmitt composed his *Le clavecin obtémperant* in 1945. But the neoclassical Schmitt remains authentic Schmitt, as the musical boldness and joyous humour testify.

An epic group of three **Chants op. 98** rounds off our disc. Schmitt brilliantly and daringly shrugs off the accumulated erotic tension of *Elle était venue* in the piano postlude. In *La citerne aux milles colonnes*, the Basilica Cistern in Istanbul is impressively portrayed in the music. The motion of a passing boat inspires Schmitt to ecstatic waves of water music. Finally, unbounded exuberance and child-like pleasure in story-telling characterise his setting of Charles Sanglier's version of the fable of the tortoise and the hare. Sanglier (wild boar) was not only the chosen pen name of the poet Charles Vallet (an anarchistic postal worker with a literary bent), but was also Schmitt's own nickname: the Wild Boar of the Ardennes.

Artist biographies

Sybille Diethelm, soprano

Sybille Diethelm studied singing at the Hochschulen in Zurich and Munich and has degrees in Musicology and German Literature. She is a member of the ensemble of the Festival "Origen" in the Grisons, where she has performed in many music-theatre productions, including world premieres. She can be heard regularly as a concert soloist. She has sung Bach's Passions in Stuttgart under Helmut Rilling and was soloist in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with Concentus Musicus in the Vienna Musikverein. With her duo partner of over ten years, Fabienne Romer, she specialises in rediscovering and performing forgotten art songs by Swiss composers.

Annina Haug, mezzo-soprano

Having commenced her musical studies with the cello, Annina Haug went on to study singing at the Royal Academy of Music, the Lucerne University of Applied Arts, and the Swiss Opera Studio. She is regularly to be heard as a concert soloist, and especially loves singing chamber music, either in a duo with piano, or with her sister, the harpist Meret Eve Haug. Recent operatic roles include Lucretia in *The Rape of Lucretia*, Oreste in *La Belle-Hélène*, Idamante in *Idomeneo*, Melanto in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, Angelica in *La Cenerentola* and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

Nino Aurelio Gmünder, tenor

Freelance lyric tenor Nino Aurelio Gmünder is a much sought-after concert and opera singer. His broad repertoire encompasses the tenor parts in all the major oratorios, including the St Matthew and St John Passions, Christmas Oratorio, Messiah, The Creation, The Seasons, Paulus and Elijah, as well as parts in the Italian repertoire such as Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. Operatic roles have included Tamino and Tito (Mozart), Abu Hassan (Weber) and Eurimaco (Monteverdi). He has sung under conductors such as Thomas Hengelbrock, Ivor Bolton, Hansjörg Albrecht, Howard Griffiths, Howard Arman, Georg Kallweit and many others.

René Perler, bass-baritone

René Perler has sung with such conductors as Andrew Parrott, Martin Haselböck, Michel Corboz, Livio Picotti and Hans-Christoph Rademann, in many of Europe's most important venues, including San Marco in Venice, the Cathedrals of Berlin and Malaga, and on tour in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus and Ramallah. In recitals he has been heard in Wagner's *Villa Wahnfried* in Bayreuth, in the Richard Strauss Institute in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and in broadcasts on Swiss Radio. His teachers included Cécile Zay, Jakob Stämpfli, Horst Günter, Rudolf Piernay, László Pólgár and Margreet Honig. He also has degrees in Musicology and History from the University of Fribourg/Freiburg.

Fabienne Romer, piano

Fabienne Romer studied with Homero Francesch and Daniel Fueter at the ZHdK, where she graduated with distinction in 2007. Further studies took her to Paris (with Eugen Indiz), Stockholm (with Staffan Scheja) and Munich (with Helmut Deutsch), where she graduated in 2011. In August 2010 she was a finalist in the piano duo category of the ARD Competition in Munich and was awarded the IFP Special Prize for excellent achievement. Fabienne is in demand as a soloist and chamber musician, and one of her special areas of interest is song accompaniment.

Edward Rushton, piano

Edward Rushton is in demand throughout Europe as a pianist specialising in chamber music and song. His discography includes albums for Resonus, BIS, Nimbus, Musiques Suisses, and Lyrita. In 2015 he founded the association "Besuch der Lieder", to perform song recitals in private homes. He teaches piano accompaniment at the Lucerne University of Applied Arts. For his achievements, Edward was awarded the C.F. Meyer Foundation prize in 2020. Edward is also a composer whose operas have been performed throughout Switzerland, Germany, the UK and in Philadelphia. He has composed over thirty works for voice and piano.

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