

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Strauss was a German composer and conductor. Born in Munich, he was a young talent and started composing at the age of six. He is the most famous German post-Romantic composer and held conducting positions at opera houses in Munich, Weimar, Berlin, and Vienna. His most important works are his symphonic poems and operas. His lieder are also significant, many of which he composed for his wife, soprano Pauline de Ahna. He was influenced by Richard Wagner, and his style included long vocal lines and coloratura. Strauss also composed orchestral accompaniment to his lieder, which first began in the late nineteenth century.

Vier letzte Lieder, TrV 296

The *Vier letzte Lieder*, Four Last Songs, were Strauss' last compositions. Composed in 1845 when Strauss was 84 years old, they reflect on the acceptance of death with long, glorious vocal lines and rich orchestration. The two poets featured are Joseph Eichendorff and Herman Hesse.

Frühling

In dämmrigen Grüften
Träumte ich lang
Von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,
Von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen
In Gleiß und Zier,
Von Licht übergossen
Wie ein Wunder vor mir.

Du kennst mich wieder,
Du lockst mich zart,
Es zittert durch all meine Glieder
Deine selige Gegenwart.

September

Der Garten trauert,
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.
Der Sommer schauert
Still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.
Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt
In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach Ruh.
Langsam tut er die großen
Müdgewordnen Augen zu.

Beim Schlafengehen

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
Soll mein sehnliches Verlangen
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn vergiß du alles Denken,
Alle meine Sinne nun
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht
Will in freien Flügen schweben,
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

Im Abendrot

Wir sind durch Not und Freude
Gegangen Hand in Hand,

Spring

In dusky vaults
I have long dreamt
of your trees and blue skies,
of your scents and the songs of birds.

Now you lie revealed
in glistening splendor,
flushed with light,
like a wonder before me.

You know me again,
you beckon tenderly to me;
all of my limbs quiver
from your blissful presence!

copyright © by Emily Ezust

September

The garden is mourning,
the rain sinks coolly into the flowers.
Summer shudders
as it meets its end.

Leaf upon leaf drops golden
down from the lofty acacia.
Summer smiles, astonished and weak,
in the dying garden dream.

For a while still by the roses
it remains standing, yearning for peace.
Slowly it closes its large
eyes grown weary.

copyright © by Emily Ezust

While going to sleep

Now that the day has made me so tired,
my dearest longings shall
be accepted kindly by the starry night
like a weary child.

Hands, cease your activity,
head, forget all of your thoughts;
all my senses now
will sink into slumber.

And my soul, unobserved,
will float about on untrammelled wings
in the enchanted circle of the night,
living a thousandfold more deeply.

copyright © by Emily Ezust

In the twilight

Through adversity and joy
We've gone hand in hand;

Vom Wandern ruhen wir
Nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Thäler neigen,
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
Nachträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her, und laß sie schwirren,
Bald ist es [Schlafenszeit]²,
Daß wir uns nicht verirren
In dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot,
Wie sind wir wandermüde --
Ist dies etwas der Tod?

We rest now from our wanderings
Upon this quiet land.

Around us slope the valleys,
The skies grow dark;
Two larks alone are just climbing,
As if after a dream, into the scented air.

Come here and let them whirl past,
For it will soon be time to rest;
We do not wish to get lost
In this solitude.

O wide, quiet peace,
So deep in the red dusk...
How weary we are of our travels --
Is this perhaps - Death? --

copyright © by Emily Ezust

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Wagner, born in Leipzig, transformed opera in the 19th century into a perfect art form by his idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, meaning total artwork. It is the combination of poetic, visual, musical, and dramatic arts. In his later compositional life, he combined thick, rich textures, chromaticism, and harmonies together to create sounds that had never been heard before up to that point in time. He inspired composers such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Henri Duparc, and others.

Tristan und Isolde

Tristan und Isolde was composed between 1857 and 1859. He was inspired by Mathilda Wesendonck, the wife of his landlord and patron Otto Wesendonck. He taught Mathilde about music, and their relationship went from teacher and instructor to genius and goddess. He abandoned his work on the *Ring Cycle* to compose *Tristan und Isolde* and set Mathilde's poems to music.

Mathilde gave Wagner emotional and spiritual support, and two of them are "studies" for Tristan. The first song is "*Im Treibhaus*" or "*In the hothouse*" composed in May 1858. The poem is about longing for something or someone you do not have. The music is used for the prelude to Act III.

The second study is from the last song in the cycle, titled "*Träume*" or "*Dreams*" composed in December of 1857. The poem is about how dreams come to embrace one's soul and then fade away. The melody is clearly heard in this section of the love duet. This lied is also known for Isolde's transfiguration, or Liebestod, at the end of *Tristan und Isolde*. Liebestod translates to "love death" which means lovers consummating their love in death which is fitting to Wagner's infatuation with Mathilde. She wouldn't leave her family for him, and if she did, *Tristan und Isolde* would not be what it is today: transcendent.

O sink herneider, Nacht der Liebe BEIDE

O sink hernieder,
Nacht der Liebe,
gib Vergessen,
dass ich lebe;
nimm mich auf
in deinen Schoss,
löse von
der Welt mich los!

TRISTAN

Verloschen nun
die letzte Leuchte;

ISOLDE

was wir dachten,
was uns deuchte;

TRISTAN

all Gedenken -

ISOLDE

all Gemahnen -

BEIDE

heil'ger Dämm'rung

Descend, O Night of Love TOGETHER

Descend,
O Night of love,
grant oblivion
that I may live;
take me up
into your bosom,
release me from
the world!

TRISTAN

Extinguished now
the last glimmers;

ISOLDE

what we thought,
what we imagined;

TRISTAN

all thought

ISOLDE

all remembering,

TOGETHER

the glorious presentiment

hehres Ahnen
löscht des Wähnens Graus
welterlösend aus.

ISOLDE

Barg im Busen
uns sich die Sonne,
leuchten lachend
Sterne der Wonne.

TRISTAN

Von deinem Zauber
sanft umspinnen,
vor deinen Augen
süss zerronnen;

ISOLDE

Herz an Herz dir,
Mund an Mund;

TRISTAN

eines Atems
ein'ger Bund; -

BEIDE

bricht mein Blick sich
wonn'-erblindet,
erbleicht die Welt
mit ihrem Blenden:

ISOLDE

die uns der Tag
trügend erhellt,

TRISTAN

zu täuschendem Wahn
entgegengestellt,

BEIDE

selbst dann
bin ich die Welt:
Wonne-hehrstes Weben,
Liebe-heiligstes Leben,
Niewiedererwachens
wahnlos
hold bewusster Wunsch.

Liebestod

Mild und leise
wie er lächelt,²
wie das Auge
hold er öffnet ---
Seht ihr's, Freunde?
Säht ihr's nicht?
Immer lichter
wie er leuchtet,
stern-umstrahlet
hoch sich hebt?
Seht ihr's nicht?
Wie das Herz ihm
mutig schwillt,
voll und hehr
im Busen ihm quillt?
Wie den Lippen,
wonnig mild,

of sacred twilight
extinguishes imagined terrors,
world-redeeming.

ISOLDE

The sun concealed
itself in our bosom,
the stars of bliss
gleam, laughing,

TRISTAN

softly entwined
in your magic,
sweetly dissolved
before your eyes;

ISOLDE

heart on your heart,
mouth on mouth;

TRISTAN

the single bond
of a single breath;

TOGETHER

my glance is deflected,
dazzled with bliss,
the world pulses
with its blinding radiance:

ISOLDE

lit by Day's
guileful deception,

TRISTAN

standing firm against
deceitful delusion,

TOGETHER

then am I
myself the world;
floating in sublime bliss,
life of love most sacred,
the sweetly conscious
undeluded wish
never again to waken.

Love death

Mildly and gently,
how he smiles,
how the eye
he opens sweetly ---
Do you see it, friends?
Don't you see it?
Brighter and brighter
how he shines,
illuminated by stars
rises high?
Don't you see it?
How his heart
boldly swells,
fully and nobly
wells in his breast?
How from his lips
delightfully, mildly,

copyright © DM

süßer Atem
sanft entweht ---
Freunde! Seht!
Fühlt und seht ihr's nicht?
Höre ich nur diese Weise,
die so wundervoll und leise,
Wonne klagend,
alles sagend,
mild versöhnend
aus ihm tönend,
in mich dringet,
auf sich schwinget,
hold erhallend
um mich klinget?
Heller schallend,
mich umwallend ---
Sind es Wellen
sanfter Lüfte?
Sind es Wogen
wonniger Düfte?
Wie sie schwellen,
mich umrauschen,
soll ich atmen,
soll ich lauschen?
Soll ich schlürfen,
untertauchen?
Süß in Düften
mich verhauchen?
In dem wogenden Schwall,
in dem tönenden Schall,
in des Welt-Atems wehendem All ---
ertrinken,
versinken ---
unbewusst ---
höchste Lust!

sweet breath
softly wafts ---
Friends! Look!
Do n't you feel and see it?
Do I alone hear this melody,
which wonderfully and softly,
lamenting delight,
telling it all,
mildly reconciling
sounds out of him,
invades me,
swings upwards,
sweetly resonating
rings around me?
Sounding more clearly,
wafting around me ---
Are these waves
of soft airs?
Are these billows
of delightful fragrances?
How they swell,
how they sough around me,
shall I breathe,
Shall I listen?
Shall I drink,
immerse?
Sweetly in fragrances
melt away?
In the billowing torrent,
in the resonating sound,
in the wafting Universe of the World-Breath ---
drown,
be engulfed ---
unconscious ---
supreme delight!

copyright © lyrictranslate.com

This recital has been made possible by the Music in Action grant from the Richard Wagner Society of the Upper Midwest. This recital is in memory of those we've lost from the pandemic, violence, and illness.

This recital is dedicated to Michael Ruppert who was a founding board member of St. Croix Valley Opera and president of RWSUM.

If you are dealing with loss and grief, a wonderful resource is FamilyMeans – Center for Grief and Loss: <https://www.griefloss.org/>

In compliance with the Music in Action Grant, there will be a short Q and A session at the end of the recital if you have questions for Ms. Wagner.

Thank you all for coming and thank you most to Obed Floan.