

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ständchen – Serenade (1885) Op. 106 no.1

The moon shines over the mountain,
Just right for the people in love;
A fountain purls in the garden –
Otherwise silence far and wide.

By the wall in the shadows,
Three students stand
With flute and fiddle and zither,
And sing and play.

The sound steals softly into the dreams
Of the loveliest of girls,
She sees her fair-headed lover
And whispers “Remember me.”

Franz Kugler

Translation © Richard Stokes

Die Mainacht – The May night (1868) Op. 43 no.2

When the silvery moon gleams through the bushes,
And sheds its slumbering light on the grass,
And the nightingale is fluting,
I wander sadly from bush to bush.

Covered by leaves, a pair of doves
Coo to me their ecstasy; but I turn away,
Seek darker shadows,
And the lonely tear flows down.

When, O smiling vision, that shines through my soul
Like the red of dawn, shall I find you here on earth?
And the lonely tear quivers more ardently down my cheek.

Christoph Heinrich Hölty

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Wie Melodien (1886) Op. 105 no.1

Thoughts, like melodies,
Steal softly through my mind,
Like spring flowers they blossom
And drift away like fragrance.

Yet when words come and capture them
And bring them before my eyes,
They turn pale like grey mist
And vanish like a breath.

Yet surely in rhyme
A fragrance lies hidden,
Summoned by moist eyes
From the silent seed.

Klaus Groth

Translation © Richard Stokes

Von ewiger Liebe (1857) Op.43 no.1

Dark, how dark in forest and field!
Evening already, and the world is silent.

Nowhere a light and nowhere smoke,
And even the lark is silent now too.

Out of the village there comes a lad,
Escorting his sweetheart home,

He leads her past the willow-copse,
Talking so much and of so many things:

‘If you suffer sorrow and suffer shame,
Shame for what others think of me,

Then let our love be severed as swiftly,
As swiftly as once we two were plighted.

Let us depart in rain and depart in wind,
As swiftly as once we two were plighted.’

The girl speaks, the girl says:
‘Our love cannot be severed!

Steel is strong, and so is iron,
Our love is even stronger still:

Iron and steel can both be reforged,
But our love, who shall change it?

Iron and steel can be melted down,
Our love must endure for ever!’

August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben

Translation © Richard Stokes

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Vier Lieder Op.27

Ruhe, meine Seele – Rest, my soul

Not even
A soft breeze stirs,
In gentle sleep
The wood rests;
Through the leaves'
Dark veil
Bright sunshine
Steals.
Rest, rest,
My soul,
Your storms
Were wild,
You raged and
You quivered,
Like the breakers,
When they surge!
These times
Are violent,
Cause heart and
Mind distress—
Rest, rest,
My soul,
And forget
What threatens you!

Karl Friedrich Henkel

Translation © Richard Stokes

Cäcilie – Cecily

If you knew
What it is to dream of burning kisses,
Of walking and resting with one's love,
Gazing at each other
And caressing and talking –
If you knew, your heart would turn to me.

If you knew
What it is to worry
On lonely nights
In the frightening storm, with no soft voice
To comfort the struggle-weary soul –
If you knew, you would come to me.

If you knew
What it is to live enveloped in God's world-creating breath,
To soar upwards, borne on light to blessed heights –
If you knew, you would live with me.

Heinrich Hart

Translation © Richard Stokes

Heimliche Aufforderung – Secret invitation

Come, raise to your lips
the sparkling goblet,
And drink at this joyful feast
your heart to health.

And when you raise it, give
me a secret sign,
Then I shall smile, and drink
as quietly as you ...

And quietly like me, look
around at the hordes
Of drunken gossips—do not
despise them too much.

No, raise the glittering goblet,
filled with wine,
And let them be happy
at the noisy feast.

But once you have savoured the meal,
quenched your thirst,
Leave the loud company
of happy revellers,

And come out into the garden
to the rose-bush,—
There I shall wait for you
as I've always done.

And I shall sink on your breast,
before you could hope,
And drink your kisses,
as often before,

And twine in your hair
the glorious rose—
Ah! come, O wondrous,
longed-for night!

John Henry Mackay

Translation © Richard Stokes

Morgen – Tomorrow

And tomorrow the sun will shine again
And on the path that I shall take,
It will unite us, happy ones, again,
Amid this same sun-breathing earth ...

And to the shore, broad, blue-waved,
We shall quietly and slowly descend,
Speechless we shall gaze into each other's eyes,
And the speechless silence of bliss shall fall on us ...

John Henry Mackay

Translation © Richard Stokes

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Les nuits d'été Op.7 – Summer nights
words by Théophile Gautier

Villanelle

When the new season comes,
When the cold has vanished,
We will both go, my lovely,
To gather lily of the valley.
Gathering the pearls underfoot,
That one sees shimmering in the morning,
We will hear the blackbirds
Whistle.

Spring has come, my lovely,
It is the month blessed by lovers;
And the bird, preening his wing,
Speaks verse from the edge of his nest.
Oh! come now to this mossy bank
To talk of our beautiful love,
And say to me in your sweet voice:
"Always!"

Far, far away, straying from our path,
Causing the hidden rabbit to flee
And the deer, in the mirror of the spring
Bending to admire his great antlers,
Then home, completely happy and at ease,
Our hands entwined round the basket,
Returning carrying strawberries
From the wood.

Le spectre de la rose – The ghost of the rose

Open your closed eyelids
Touched by a virginal dream!
I am the ghost of a rose
That you wore yesterday at the ball.
You took me, still pearly
With silver tears, from the watering can,
And in the starlit party,
You carried me all evening.

O you who caused my death
Without being able to chase it away
Every night my rose-coloured spectre
Will dance by your bedside.
But fear not, I claim neither
Mass nor De Profundis.
This light scent is my soul
And I come from Paradise

My destiny is enviable
And to have a fate so beautiful
More than one would have given his life;
For on your breast I have my tomb,
And on the alabaster on which I repose
A poet with a kiss
Wrote, "Here lies a rose
Of which all kings will be jealous."

Sur les lagunes: Lamento – On the lagunes

My beautiful friend is dead,
I shall weep always;
Under the tomb she has taken
My soul and my love.
To Heaven, without waiting for me,
She has returned;
The angel who took her
Did not want to take me.
How bitter is my fate!
Ah! Without love to sail on the sea!

The white creature
Lies in a coffin;
How in nature
Everything seems to me in mourning!
The forgotten dove
Weeps and dreams of the absent one.
My soul weeps and feels
That it is deserted!
How bitter is my fate!

Ah! Without love to sail on the sea!

Over me the vast night
Spreads like a shroud.
I sing my song
That only Heaven hears:
Ah! How beautiful she was
And how I loved her!
I shall never love
A woman as much as her...
How bitter is my fate!
Ah! Without love to sail on the sea!

Absence

Come back, come back, my beloved!
Like a flower far from the sun,
The flower of my life is closed
Far from your bright red smile!

Between our hearts what a distance!
So much of space between our kisses!
O bitter fate! O harsh absence!
O great desires unappeased!

Come back, come back, my beautiful beloved!
Like a flower far from the sun,
The flower of my life is closed
Far from your bright red smile!

Between here and there what fields,
What towns and hamlets,
What valleys and mountains,
To tire the hoofs of the horses.

Come back, come back, my beautiful beloved!
Like a flower far from the sun,
The flower of my life is closed
Far from your bright red smile!

Au cimetière – In the cemetery

Do you know the white tomb,
Where there floats with a plaintive sound
The shadow of a yew tree?
On the yew a pale dove
Sitting sad and alone at sunset,
Sings its song:

An air morbidly tender
At once charming and deadly,

That hurts you
And that one would like to hear for ever;
An air like the sigh in Heaven
Of a loving angel.

One might say that an awakened soul
Weeps under the ground in unison
With the song,
And for the misfortune of being forgotten
Complains, cooing
Very softly.

On the wings of the music
One feels slowly returning
A memory.
A shadow, an angelic form
Passes in a shimmering ray
In a white veil.

The belle de nuit flowers, half closed,
Cast their weak and sweet scent
Around you,
And the ghost in a gentle pose
Murmurs, stretching its arms to you:
Will you return?

Oh! Never again by the grave
Will I go, when evening falls
In a black cloak,
To hear the pale dove
Singing at the top of the yew
Its plaintive song.

L'île inconnue – The unknown isle

Tell me, young beauty,
Where do you want to go?
The sail swells its wing,
The breeze begins to blow.

The oar is of ivory,
The flag is of moire,
The rudder of fine gold;
I have for ballast an orange,
For sail an angel's wing
For cabin boy a seraph

Tell me, young beauty,
Where do you want to go?
The sail swells its wing,
The breeze begins to blow.

Is it to the Baltic?
To the Pacific Ocean?
The isle of Java?
Or perhaps to Norway,
To pick the snow-flower
Or the flower of Angsoka?

Tell, me, tell me, young beauty,
tell me, where do you want to go?

Take me, says the beautiful one,
To the faithful shore
Where one loves for ever!
That shore, my dear,
Is almost unknown
In the land of love.

Where do you want to go?
The breeze begins to blow.