

# Gerald Finley and Isata Kanneh-Mason

Pittville Pump Rooms

Saturday 12 July

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Ludwig van Beethoven	Selected songs	12'
Ludwig van Beethoven	An die Ferne Geliebte (A. Jeitteles) Op. 98	14'
Franz Schubert	Meeres Stille (Goethe) D.216	15'
	<i>Prometheus (Goethe) D.674</i>	
	<i>Wanderers Nachtlied II (Goethe) D.768</i>	
	<i>Erkönig (Goethe) D.328</i>	
Interval		
Edvard Grieg	Selected songs	12'
Mark Anthony Turnage	Three Songs	7'
Ralph Vaughan Williams	Songs of Travel	13'

## About the Programme

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### ~~Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)~~ Selected songs

In many ways the lyric song form was not a natural fit for Beethoven, whose immense musical powers were inclined more towards motivic development carried out on a symphonic scale. He nevertheless composed songs periodically throughout his life, and the intimacy inherent in the Lied style allowed him a space to explore personal feelings, including unrequited love, in a way not afforded by the demands of sonata form.

*An die ferne Geliebte* ('To the distant beloved') is one example of this exploration. Written in 1816, it is the earliest major song cycle in history, and served as inspiration for later composers of this form including Schubert and Schumann. The text comes from the poetry of Alois Jeitteles, a young Czech medical student, and uses idealised natural imagery to describe the separation of the narrator from their beloved. Each song except the last is in strophic form, employing a limited variety of textural and harmonic devices in the accompaniment - for instance a shift to the tonic minor for the second half of *Leichte Segler in den Höhen* - to support dramatic moments in the text. The final song, *Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder* ('Accept, then, these songs'), quotes the melody of the first, and ends with optimism that the songs will help close the distance between the admirer and their object of admiration.

### Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Selected songs

Schubert is known as a master of the lyric art song. His gifts for harmonic alchemy and effortless melodic invention have cemented him a place as one of the greatest composers of Lieder in the genre's history - and these four settings of Goethe, written between 1815 and 1824, are no exception.

*Meeres Stille* ('Sea's calm') is a musical enactment of every sailor's fear: a becalmed ship. The slow-motion melody unfolds atop increasingly sinister arpeggiated chords in the piano; the lack of motion is not mesmerised silence but eerie stasis. *Prometheus* is a more overtly dramatic song, a defiant narration by the eponymous fire-stealing demigod. It alternates between recitative and aria-like passages, employing fierce tremolos in the piano before progressing

through a series of varying textures, bound together by the Titan's simmering anger. *Wandrer's Nachtlied II* is pure contemplation: a setting of one of Goethe's most concentratedly beautiful poems (originally scrawled on a cabin wall), this song lays out with diatonic concision a scene of utmost peace. *Erlkönig* returns to dramatic tension, narrating through each character's voice the pursuit and capture of a father's young son by the sinister Erlking, a supernatural figure of Germanic folklore. One of Schubert's most well-known songs, it features stamina-sapping repeated octaves in the piano and an increasingly unmoored sense of tonality as the pursuer edges ever closer. The song closes with the father's horrified recognition of his child's death, underscored by a perfunctory cadence.

### **Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**

*Sechs Lieder* Op. 48

Like Beethoven, Grieg's motivation for songwriting came mostly from romantic impulses - in Grieg's case for his wife (and first cousin) Nina, who was for him "the only true interpreter of my songs." The *Sechs Lieder* (1884-89) feature little of the Norwegian folk music that influenced so much of Grieg's work, instead setting texts from a variety of German writers in a variety of moods. *Gruß* ('Greeting') is light-hearted and optimistic; *Dereinst, Gedanke mein* ('One day, my thoughts') is sober and reflective, asserting that only death can release us from the pain of thwarted love. (Edvard and Nina's marriage was not always steady). *Lauf der Welt* ('The way of the world') is lively and whimsical, with a characteristic open fifth bass pattern; this is followed by the wistfulness of *Zur Rosenzeit* ('At rose time'), a poignant setting of Goethe. Finally comes the sweet consummation of *Ein Traum* ('A dream'), in which the winding chromatic lines and gentle arpeggios of a romantic dream lead to the joyful realisation of love in the waking world.

### **Mark Anthony Turnage (b.1960)**

Three Songs

*The Singing Cat*    *Mourned*    *Last Word*

The *Three Songs* were written for Gerald Finley who created the role of Harry Heagan in Turnage's highly successful opera *The Silver Tassie*, premiered at English National Opera in 1999. At the heart of Mark Anthony Turnage's music is a sense of theatre and his ability to take influences from all genres of music, weaving a tapestry of sounds so that it becomes its own distinctive voice.

### **Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)** Selected songs from *Songs of Travel*

*The Roadside Fire*    *The Infinite Shining Heavens*    *Whither must I wander*    *Bright is the Ring of Words*

The *Songs of Travel* are a distinctly English response to the Romantic image of the wayfarer, a recurring subject of song cycles by Schubert in particular. Written between 1902 and 1904, they set poems by Robert Louis Stevenson which range in character from bright-eyed enchantment to melancholic nostalgia. *The Roadside Fire* depicts the headiness of love, with its *leggiero* accompaniment and narrator's vivid statements of devotion; *The Infinite Shining Heavens* is more solitary, evoking a feeling of awe under the nighttime firmament. Here the piano's hushed arpeggiations melt into one another in slow undulations; eventually, one of the stars falls down to join the wayfarer, transforming wonder into contentment. This is quickly dispelled in *Whither Must I Wander?*, a sinuous meditation on the loss of home. Written in more-or-less strophic form, this song views the fireglow of childhood happiness as forever shut off from an embittered future. Its vivid landscape and natural imagery prefigure a brief moment of hope in the final stanza – the world carries on – but in the end this too is extinguished, and the wanderer departs, to return no more. Finally, the sonorous opening and full-textured homophony of *Bright is the Ring of Words* transforms the hopelessness of loss into the hope of remembrance: though the wanderer must cease their wandering, their life lives on through words and song.

*Programme notes written by Will Fox (winner of RPS Young Classical Writers Prize 2025)*

## **Artist Biographies**

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### **Gerald Finley** *Bass-Baritone*

Grammy Award-winning Canadian bass-baritone Gerald Finley is one of the most revered and influential artists of our time, with celebrated performances at the world's major opera and concert venues and recordings on CD and DVD with major labels in a wide variety of repertoire. His extensive career is devoted to the complete spectrum of vocal art, encompassing operatic, orchestral and song repertoire, collaborating with the greatest composers, orchestras and conductors.

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His career initially focussed on the music of Mozart; his Don Giovanni and Count Le nozze di Figaro have been heard live and broadcast throughout the world. His ever expanding repertoire soon encompassed major Wagner and Verdi repertoire as well as roles including Bluebeard, Guillaume Tell, J. Robert Oppenheimer in John Adams' *Dr. Atomic*, and Jaufré Rudel in Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*. He created Harry Heegan in Mark Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*.

Finley's concert work is a vital part of his flourishing career with recent appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic the London Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Mahler Chamber, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra.

As a celebrated song recitalist, he works regularly with pianist Julius Drake. Their many appearances throughout the world include the Schubertiade, a residency at the Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie-Zankel Hall and lauded appearances at the festivals of Salzburg, Edinburgh, and Tanglewood. He has also performed with Sir Antonio Pappano, Malcolm Martineau, Simon Lepper and Michael McMahon.

As part of his dedication to preserving and enhancing the singing tradition, he gives masterclasses throughout the world most recently at the Juilliard School of Music, and continues to work with the Jette Parker Young Artists' Program at the Royal Ballet & Opera, Covent Garden, the National Opera Studio, and the Lindemann Program at the Met.

Finley was born in Montreal, began singing as a chorister in Ottawa, Canada, and completed his musical studies in the UK at the Royal College of Music, King's College, Cambridge, and the National Opera Studio. He is a Fellow and Visiting Professor at the Royal College of Music. In 2014 he climbed Kilimanjaro for the charity Help Musicians UK. In 2017 he was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire and had previously been appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada. Mr Finley also features on a Canadian stamp celebrating Canadians in opera.

### **Isata Kanneh-Mason** *piano*

Pianist Isata offers eclectic and interesting recital programmes with repertoire encompassing Haydn and Mozart, Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms to Gershwin and beyond. In concerto, she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

Isata is in high demand from concert halls and orchestras worldwide. Following her phenomenally successful concerto debut at the BBC Proms in 2023, she was invited to open the festival in July 2024 with the BBC Symphony and conductor Elim Chan, a performance which resulted in stellar reviews in the mainstream press. Isata appears as concerto soloist with the European Union Youth Orchestra and Iván Fischer in summer 2024 performing Dohnányi's Variations on a Nursery Tune at Carnegie Hall, New York, the Grafenegg Festival, and Bolzano Festival Bozen.

Highlights of the 2024/25 season include Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto at the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie's FREISPIEL festival and at the Ulster Orchestra's season opening concert; and Prokofiev's Third Concerto with the Chineke! Orchestra on tour at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, the Konzerthaus Berlin, Brussels's BOZAR and London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Solo recital appearances include the Lucerne Festival, Piano aux Jacobins Toulouse, the Schumann-Haus Düsseldorf, PHIL Haarlem, and on tour across the USA. In concerto performance, Isata appears with the London, Bergen, Bremen, and Duisburg philharmonics, the North Carolina Symphony, and on tour with the Staatskapelle Weimar, and the Residentie Orkest.

Isata continues her longstanding duo collaboration with her cellist brother, Sheku, with performances in the UK and on tour across Europe, the USA, and Canada. She will also give performances with bass-baritone Gerald Finley in the Czech Republic and Germany.

In 2023/24, Isata gave performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, NCPA Orchestra Beijing, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on tour in the USA and Germany, Cleveland Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, and Stockholm Philharmonic among others. She appeared in solo recital at the Beethoven Bonn and Rheingau festivals, and venues around the globe such as London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie Hall, Boston's Jordan Hall and the Konzerthaus Dortmund.

Isata is a Decca Classics artist and has recorded four solo albums for the label including Romance (2019), Summertime (2021), Childhood Tales (2023), and Mendelssohn (2024). Her latest release presents music from two Mendelssohn siblings, including the glittering First Piano Concerto by Felix and the long-lost 'Easter Sonata' by his exceptionally talented but overlooked elder sister Fanny, alongside transcriptions of some of Felix's most famous music by Rachmaninoff and Liszt. Isata has received many awards, including the coveted Leonard Bernstein Award from the Schleswig-Holstein Festival and an Opus Klassik award for best young artist. She also enjoys composing and

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arranging and released two albums of her favourite works for intermediate and advanced piano students through ABRSM Publishing in 2023.