

Brahms *Nachtigallen Schwingen* op 6 no 6

This is an early example of a Brahms lied - he wrote over 200 lieder in his career. The text is a poem by Hoffmann von Fallersleben.

The singer is watching nightingales flapping their wings and singing their old songs, waking up the flowers with their noise. As he watches, he dreams of being a nightingale too (and the music changes key and rhythm to mimic the dreaming state). Sadly, reality returns (together with the original theme) and as the birds circle between the trees, the singer can only stand and weep.

Mozart *Dove sono i bei momenti* from *Le nozze di Figaro*

The opera *le nozze di Figaro* charts the amorous exploits of Count Almaviva, and his wife's attempts to curtail his activities, in which she is assisted by her maid Susanna and Susanna's fiancé Figaro.

In this aria, the countess wonders sadly where the beautiful moments of her marriage have gone, reminiscing about earlier times when she captivated the Count. With renewed optimism, she hopes that her devotion to him will prevail to recapture his ungrateful heart.

Handel *Farewell ye limpid springs* from *Jephtha*

This oratorio, with a libretto by Thomas Morell, was one of Handel's last works. It was written in 1751, when Handel's health and eyesight were failing.

Jephtha tells the story, from chapter 11 of Judges, of a general who vows to sacrifice the first person he sees on his return provided that God gives him victory. Victory is granted, and he is greeted on his journey home by his daughter Iphis, who must be the victim.

In this extract, Iphis challenges the priests to fulfil the vow and takes leave of this world, looking forward to happier times in the next.

Berlioz *Absence* from *Les nuits d'été*

Berlioz wrote the song-cycle *Les nuits d'été* for Marie Reccio, who would later become his second wife. He originally set his friend Théophile Gaultier's poems for voice and piano in 1834, but subsequently orchestrated the songs in the 1840s, which led to their popular success.

The singer longs for the return of her beloved, without whose smile her life is like a flower denied sunshine. She reflects sadly on the distance he has travelled from her, and the expanse of the countryside between them.

Berkeley *What's on your mind?* from *Five Poems by W H Auden* Op 53

Berkeley was introduced to W H Auden by Benjamin Britten, who had already set a number of Auden's poems. *What's on your mind?* and three other poems of the five are from the anthology *Songs and other Musical Pieces*.

The singer is watching a lover sleep, and speculates about the dreams the sleeper may be having. The speculations, and the music that accompanies them, grow more dramatic and complex as the song progresses, until a final climax is reached and the song dies away.

Quilter *When icicles hang by the wall* from *Two Shakespeare Songs* op 32

Quilter's musical reputation rests mainly on his song-writing. He composed over one hundred songs for solo voice and piano, predominantly to texts by English poets such as Herrick, Tennyson and Shakespeare.

The text for this song is the final poem from *Love's Labours Lost*, where it provides a comic conclusion to the play. It describes how the hooting of an owl has a cheering effect amid the petty discomforts suffered in the winter. The lighthearted tune alternates between the minor, used while the problems are described, and the major, when the owl is heard.

Vivaldi *Un certo non so che* from *Arsilda Regina di Ponto* RV 300

Although this arietta is included in *Arsilda Regina di Ponto*, Vivaldi also uses it in his later opera *L'Atenaide* RV 302, and may have originally written it as an individual song.

In *Arsilda* it is sung by the queen Arsilda, who is pondering the fact that her new husband remains aloof from her. She is unaware that this is because he has disappeared and his identical twin sister is impersonating him.

A stranger has met and touched the singer's heart, without causing pain. The singer wonders if this could be love, into whose fire she has already stepped without caution.

Seiber *The Owl and the Pussy-cat*

As a vocal composer, Seiber is best known for his settings of folk-songs from various countries in eastern Europe. However he set a number of Edward Lear's nonsense songs, either for chorus or for solo voice.

His first setting of *The Owl and the Pussy-cat* was as background music for a short film of the same name, which was shown at the Cannes film festival in 1954. He returned to the poem again in 1960, setting it for solo voice and piano, which is the version being performed today.