

Catherine Jenaway

LTCL (Recital) Programme Notes

7th April 2006 at 2.05 pm

Mid twentieth century society was heavily influenced by the Depression and the World Wars. Old mores and social structures disappeared, travel became easier and more affordable and as conventions were being questioned in the arts, new techniques and ideas emerged. New technologies such as radio, the telephone, film and newsreel were developed, giving new ways of communicating the emerging ideas. The music of the period reflects this. More international influences are evident, especially as artists fled from totalitarian regimes. America emerged as a powerful cultural centre, partly as the destination of migrant composers and partly through the recognition and acceptance of black culture and its music, especially the advent of Jazz.

The song cycle **On This Island**, which was written in 1937, reflects on the changes to society in the years before the Second World War, at a time when Britten and Auden were working for the Government Film unit, and shortly before they each emigrated to the United States. Britten repeatedly demonstrates the pervasiveness of change by adopting changes of key or tempo in each of the songs, often from a triumphalist start to a more reflective ending.

Harold Arlen wrote **Blues In The Night** for the MGM film “Hot Nocturne” in 1941. He had just received an Oscar for “Over The Rainbow”, and was nominated for another Academy Award with this song. The work was a popular success, with the result that the film’s title was changed to match the song.

The three songs **Caneuon Y Tri Aderyn** were written by Dilys Elwyn-Edwards in 1961, as a commission for BBC Radio, and were first performed by Kenneth Bowen, accompanied by the composer. Y Gylfinir describes how the curlew’s call is like a shepherd’s pipe, herding the clouds with the four winds as its sheepdogs. In Tylluanod the night-time cries of the owls are heard echoing across the landscape from the different local villages, and in Mae Hiraeth Yn Y Mor nostalgia is carried in the sounds of waves, in the sight of mountains and in firelight as a cock-crow awakens the singer’s memories.

Written in 1948, Menotti’s opera **The Telephone** is a one-act work for two singers. Lucy’s fascination with telephone and compulsion to answer each call frustrates her boyfriend Ben’s attempt to propose to her. **Hello, Oh Margaret It’s You** is the first of the distracting calls she receives, a trivial gossipy conversation with a close friend. Margaret is heard at the other end of the line in a rapid triplet motif.

Richard Strauss’s **Vier Letzte Lieder** were written in Switzerland, to where the composer and his family had retreated in exile. They were completed in 1948, in the months preceding Strauss’s death in 1949. In **September**, a garden mourns the end of summer, and slowly goes to sleep. **Beim Schlafengehen** – Going To Sleep – shows the weary poet sinking into slumber, from which the soul floats away in a dream. The two remaining songs are **Frühling** (Spring) and **Im Abendrot** (At Twilight).