



A SERIES OF SERIOUS SING-SONGINGS

(ABOUT LIFE, DEATH, AND THE IMPERMANENCE OF MEN AND GRASS)



A Senior Recital by
Ted Ngoo, Tenor
Beatrice Lin, Piano
YSTCM Concert Hall
29th April 2024, 5:10pm

Featuring Finzi's "A Young Man's Exhortation", selections from musical theatre, English art songs,
and one Frank Sinatra number

PROGRAMME

Part One - "Mane floreat, et transeat..."

"A Young Man's Exhortation"

"Giants in the Sky"

"Ditty"

"Tonight at Eight"

"Budmouth Dears"

"The Lads in Their Hundreds"

"Her Temple"

"Younger Than Springtime"

"The Comet at Yell'ham"

Part Two - "...Vespere decidat, induret, et arescat."

"Shortening Days"

"The Sigh"

"It All Fades Away"

"Former Beauties"

"Transformations"

"How It Ends"

"The Dance Continued"

"My Way"



Other alternative titles include

Ted's Musings, Reflections (and other half-digested thoughts)

Ted's Musings on Life (and other relevant imagery involving plants and such)

The Ruminations of Ngoo

Men are grass, trees (and other vegetation involved)

A Young Punk's Complaining

(something involving the combination of words 'Ted' and 'Talk')

FOREWORD

“...in the morning, they are like grass which groweth up
In the morning, it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is
cut down and withereth.” - Psalms 90:5-6 (KJ21)

The first time I had come across this verse from Psalms 90 (apart from the studying of this set) was in a prayer booklet for my grandmother's funeral earlier this year. At the time, I had been recovering from the emotions of a breakup of my first proper relationship, the sudden passing of a friend my age, and the ever-increasing anxiety and excitement that is the graduation recital and a shift towards a musical theatre career. As I went through these events in my life, I have come to wonder what does all of this mean to me, and also perhaps what does this recital (being the final thing I do in my Bachelors degree) mean to me?

I found much wisdom and comfort in the poems of Hardy, as well as the wonderful music set by Gerald Finzi and many of the amazing numbers I have set as companion pieces. This recital has come to symbolise what the events in my life have taught me - that life is meant to be lived bravely, foolishly, and filled with joy. This programme, whilst uncharacteristic (some may say crazy!) of a classical voice degree, has come to showcase my love for both these genres, and throughout time and styles, we are all inspired by love, life, death, and the impermanence of man (and maybe plant life). I hope this recital showcases the lessons I have learnt throughout my 4 years here in NUS, the wisdom I have gained, the voice I have found, and my aspirations for the adventure that the future holds.

With that, I'll like to show my deepest gratitude here, to the people that made it to this milestone with me.

Deepest thanks to my Mom, Dad, and my family. My Dad for telling me to always follow my heart, my Mom for always reminding me to save money and to do things with integrity, and my family for always grounding me and cheering me on.

Deepest thanks to my voice teachers, Prof Alan Bennett who has taught me since I was 18, and Reuben Lai who was my voice teacher in SOTA. Thank you for imparting me the tools of the trade, for pushing me to greater heights, and for always believing in my potential, even during times when I did not believe in myself. Deepest thanks to teachers who I have found friends in, both in SOTA and in YST. I am the artist I am today because of your wisdom and friendship.

Thank you to all my friends, who I have the privilege of knowing so dearly - the 'Boys' (our actual group name is too indecent), the music kids from IBCP '17, the YST Voice Studio (both past and present), friends from CAPT, the NUS Kendo Club, my partners from Evertus, the friends from Fordham MT Intensive '23, and my newfound friends from New Creation. Your friendships have made my life richer and more inspiring, and I can smile upon the hardships and victories because of you.

Deepest thanks to Beatrice Lin for embarking on this crazy musical adventure with me, for reminding me how to count triplets, how to breathe properly and to always listen first. Thank you for grounding me and for being a patient, generous collaborator.

They say "you are the company you keep", and I am blessed to be with such fine company.

Lastly, to the 16 year old me that thought of himself as next to nothing - you have come so far. You did things you never thought you would ever do in your life. You did well in school. You performed in so many concerts and events, from medieval to pop, and some of them you maybe sang like crap, but most of the time you did pretty well. You survived IB, you survived the army, and now you are surviving university. You served as a leader in so many things, even being the President of the Kendo Club at one point! You gained weight, and lost weight (and gained it all again). You made valuable life-long friendships. You found love and you let go of that gently. You found confidence, wisdom, and purpose. Now, you are finding your voice (finally!) and your path in the world. I am proud of who you are today, and how much you have grown. The future is exciting. Trust me.

With that, I proudly present "A Series of Serious Sing-songings (about Life, Death, and the Impermanence of Men and Grass)"!

With love and gratitude,
Ted Ngoo



Photo by Jimmy Wong

ABOUT GERALD FINZI AND "A YOUNG MAN'S EXHORTATION"

"A Young Man's Exhortation" was written between 1926 - 29, for tenor and piano, receiving its first performance in 1933. The set is Finzi's only true song cycle, though he did not call it such, and had subtitled each half of the cycle with the latin verse taken from Psalm 89 of the Vulgate. The subtitles aptly describe the themes of the song cycle - Part 1 deals with themes of youth while Part 2 deals with nostalgia and reflecting upon old age.

While many of the poems were taken from different poem collections of Thomas Hardy, Finzi was said to be very familiar with the poet's entire body of work, and selected said poems that outlined a very clear progression of thought. The original version of the song cycle had 15 songs, but Finzi had removed 5 to give us the present set. Finzi shared a huge admiration for Thomas Hardy's work, mentioning to a friend that Hardy's "Collected Poems" is the one book he would choose to take with him should he be cut off from the world.

Being a contemporary of British greats such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, Finzi composed great pieces such as the cantata "Dies Natalis" and the song cycle "Let Us Garlands Bring". Finzi was also known to have amassed a great collection of manuscripts, scores and books in his library. Finzi also grew apples in his spare time, saving some rare English varieties from extinction.

“In the morning it
flourisheth and groweth
up...”

Psalms 90:6

THE LUSHNESS OF LIFE AND DREAMS OF CHILDHOOD

featuring “A Young Man’s Exhortation” and “Giants in the Sky”

Starting our musical journey today, we begin with two pieces that explore the yearnings of youth and the depths of our inner child. It is poignant (or ironic) that we start the set today with some complaining.

Originally titled “An Exhortation” (which is an old British word for “complaining” - a Singaporean’s favourite past time), scholars speculate that Thomas Hardy wrote the poem in the summer of 1867. During this time, Hardy was facing poor accommodations whilst living in London, and had to move to Dorchester to regain his health. It is during this year that was stormy for the poet as he missed his pastoral childhood home whilst living in the city, yearned for an acting career, and also fell in love with his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, to whom he was engaged with later on. With all these feelings combined, it made sense that “A Young Man’s Exhortation” was filled with lines that asks one to not worry about life and to turn unpleasantness into happiness. To be a King is to simply seize the day and to live life as a King - a carefree, positive life filled with imagination and uncontrollable laughter.

On the other side of the page we have Jack’s (from Jack and the Beanstalk) number “Giants In The Sky” from “Into the Woods”, a 1987 musical with music and lyrics written by Stephen Sondheim, and book by James Lapine. This beloved musical takes the plots of several favourite Brothers Grimm fairytales, and explores their wishes and consequences as the characters get lost in the woods and find themselves (or not). In this number, we find a young Jack describing his adventures when climbing up the beanstalk and finding the Giant’s Castle. Having not seen the world outside the village that he stays in with his mother and his cow best friend, he becomes fascinated, frightened and amazed by the new world he sees above the clouds.

A YOUNG MAN'S EXHORTATION

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Call off your eyes from care
By some determined deftness; put forth joys
Dear as excess without the core that cloy,
And charm Life's lourings fair.

Exalt and crown the hour
That girdles us, and fill it full with glee,
Blind glee, excelling aught could ever be,
Were heedfulness in power.

Send up such touching strains
That limitless recruits from Fancy's pack
Shall rush upon your tongue, and tender back
All that your soul contains.

For what do we know best?
That a fresh love-leaf crumpled soon will dry,
And that men moment after moment die,
Of all scope dispossess.

If I have seen one thing
It is the passing preciousness of dreams;
That aspects are within us; and who seems
Most kingly is the King.

GIANTS IN THE SKY

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

There are Giants in the sky!
There are big tall terrible Giants
in the sky!

When you're way up high
And you look below
At the world you left
And the things you know,
Little more than a glance
Is enough to show
You just how small you are.

When you're way up high
And you're own your own
In a world like none
That you've ever known,
Where the sky is lead
And the earth is stone,

You're free, to do
Whatever pleases you,
Exploring things you'd never dare
'Cause you don't care,
When suddenly there's

A big tall terrible Giant at the door,
A big tall terrible lady Giant
sweeping the floor.
And she gives you food
And she gives you rest
And she draws you close
To her Giant breast,
And you know things now
that you never knew before,
Not till the sky.

Only just when you've made
A friend and all,
And you know she's big
But you don't feel small,
Someone bigger than her
Comes along the hall
To swallow you for lunch.

And you heart is lead
And your stomach stone
And you're really scared
Being all alone...

And it's then that you miss
All the things you've known
And the world you've left
And the little you own-

The fun is done.
You steal what you can and run.
And you scramble down
And you look below,
And the world you know
Begins to grow:

The roof, the house, and your Mother at the door.
The roof, the house and the world you never thought to explore.
And you think of all of the things you've seen,
And you wish that you could live in between,
And you're back again,
Only different than before,
After the sky.

There are Giants in the sky!
There are big tall terrible awesome scary wonderful
Giants in the sky!

YOUNG STUPID LOVE

featuring “Ditty” and “Tonight at Eight”

Continuing past the innocence and yearning of childhood, we find ourselves in the shoes of every young boy aged 11 and beyond (as well as every Taylor Swift song) - young stupid love. As overdone as it sounds, it is a universal thread that connects our poet Hardy, the characters from “She Loves Me”, and the dumb tenor singing this set together.

Written in 1870, scholars have noted that the initials “ELG” found on the original manuscript of the poem refers to Thomas Hardy’s first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford. While Hardy was growing apart from his wife during this point of time, it is noted that “Ditty” is the only poem that Hardy dedicated to his first wife. Pondering on the “walls of weathered stone” that he saw when he visited the St. Juliot Church in Cornwall, Hardy contemplates on how love can be found in the most unexpected of places. Fixated on how we are all “bondservants of Chance”, Hardy too mentions the pain of knowing that had life turned out differently, he would never have met his love, Emma.

Speaking of love found in unexpected places, we now turn to the hyperventilations of Georg in “Tonight at Eight” from the golden age musical “She Loves Me”. With music and lyrics by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, along with the book by Joe Masteroff, the musical is set in 1934 Budapest (pre-dating app era) where shy assistant manager Georg Nowack finds love through an anonymous pen-pal, who is later hilariously revealed to be Amalia Balash, a new co-worker who bickers often with Georg in the first half of the show. In “Tonight at Eight”, Georg gets nervous as he finally approaches the fated day of meeting his anonymous “Dear Friend” in person and goes on a musical tirade to his friend about how anxious he is.

DITTY

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Beneath a knap where flown
Nestlings play,
Within walls of weathered stone,
Far away
From the files of formal houses,
By the bough the firstling browses,
Lives a Sweet: no merchants meet,
No man barter, no man sells
Where she dwells.

Upon that fabric fair
'Here is she!'
Seems written everywhere
Unto me.
But to friends and nodding neighbours,
Fellow wights in lot and labours,
Who descry the times as I,
No such lucid legend tells
Where she dwells.

Should I lapse to what I was
Ere we met;
(Such will not be, but because
Some forget
Let me feign it) - none would notice
That where she I know by rote is
Spread a strange and withering change,
Like a drying of the wells
Where she dwells.

To feel I might have kissed -
Loved as true -
Otherwhere, nor Mine have missed
My life through,
Had I never wandered near her,
Is a smart severe - severer
In the thought that she is nought,
Even as I, beyond the dells
Where she dwells.

And Devotion droops her glance
To recall
What bond-servants of Chance
We are all.
I but found her in that, going
On my errant path unknowing,
I did not out-skirt the spot
That no spot on earth excels -
Where she dwells!

TONIGHT AT EIGHT

Music by Jerry Bock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

I'm nervous and upset
Because this girl I've never met
I get to meet
Tonight at eight
I'm taking her to dinner
At a charming old cafe
But who can eat
Tonight at eight?
It's early in the morning
And our date is not
till eight o'clock tonight
And yet already I can see
What a nightmare this whole day will be

I haven't slept a wink
I only think
Of our approaching tete-a-tete
Tonight at eight
I feel a combination
Of depression and elation
What a state!
To wait
'Till eight!
Three more minutes, two more seconds,
ten more hours to go!
In spite of what I've written
She may not be very smitten
And my hopes, perhaps
May all collapse
Kaput--tonight at eight

I wish I knew exactly how I'll act
And what will happen when we dine
Tonight at eight
I know I'll drop the silverware
But will I spill the water or the wine
Tonight at eight?
Tonight I'll walk right up and sit right
down
Beside the smartest girl in town
And then it's anybody's guess
More and more I'm breathing less and
less!

In my imagination
I can hear our conversation
Taking shape
Tonight at eight
I'll sit there saying absolutely nothing
Or I'll jabber like an ape
Tonight at eight!
Two more minutes,
three more seconds,
ten more hours to go!
I'll know, when this is done
If something's ended or begun
And if it goes all right
Who knows? I might propose
Tonight at eight!

THE GOLDEN LADS THAT WERE GONE TOO SOON

featuring “Budmouth Dears” and “The Lads in Their Hundreds”

War. War never changes. As the serendipity of love connects us, so does the harshness of war, and our steadfast vigilance to maintain times of peace (Hormat SAF).

“Budmouth Dears” was first published in 1908 as part of Hardy’s larger poetic work, “The Dynasts”, and was also published separately as “Hussar’s Song”. During the part of “The Dynasts” where this poem appears, Napoleon has started his advance onto Spanish grounds, and the English army along with their allies camp on the plain of Vitoria. A Sergeant Young, who was part of the King’s Hussars, sings this song reminiscing about the Budmouth-Regis in Wessex, and the young girls that tempted them as they marched up and down Budmouth Beach (For many of us in the audience, it would have been the NS Square downtown, or Pasir Laba...). Despite the poem’s cheery overtones, Hardy adds a tinge of pessimism in the last two stanzas of the poem about the fate of young men during the war.

Running through the same trenches, we have George Butterworth’s setting of A.E Housman’s poem, “The Lads in their Hundreds”. This poem depicts the pastoral scene of an enlistment fair to recruit young men in the small village of Ludlow into the army (an ordeal many of us are sadly too familiar with), and just like “Budmouth Dears”, contemplates on the impending fate of young lives that are gone too soon due to war. The book in which this poem was taken from, “A Shropshire Lad”, saw much sales during times of war - first during Britain’s participation in the Second Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), and again during World War One, as the book’s prominence in military themes and dying young proved to be a comfort for the men in the trenches. George Butterworth, a beloved English composer who was contemporary to other luminaries such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, was one of the “lads that will never be old”. Participating in World War One, Butterworth was in the Battle of the Somme, where he was tragically killed in action by a sniper. For his sacrifice, he had been awarded the Military Cross, and the trench where he had passed was renamed the “Butterworth Trench” in his honour.

BUDMOUTH DEARS

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

When we lay where Budmouth Beach is,
O, the girls were fresh as peaches,
With their tall and tossing figures and their eyes of blue and brown!
And our hearts would ache with longing
As we paced from our sing-singing,
With a smart Clink! Clink! up the Esplanade and down.

They distracted and delayed us
By the pleasant pranks they played us,
And what marvel, then, if troopers, even of regiments of renown,
On whom flashed those eyes divine, O,
Should forget that countersign, O,
As we tore Clink! Clink! back to camp above the town.

Do they miss us much, I wonder,
Now that war has swept us sunder,
And we roam from where the faces smile to where the faces frown?
And no more behold the features
Of the fair fantastic creatures,
And no more Clink! Clink! past the parlours of the town?

Shall we once again there meet them?
Falter fond attempts to greet them?
Will the gay sling-jacket glow again beside the muslin gown? -
Will they archly quiz and con us
With a sideway glance upon us,
While our spurs Clink! Clink! up the Esplanade and down?

THE LADS IN THEIR HUNDREDS

Music by George Butterworth, Text by A.E. Housman

The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.

There's chaps from the town and the field and the till and the cart,
And many to count are the stalwart, and many the brave,
And many the handsome of face and the handsome of heart,
And few that will carry their looks or their truth to the grave.

I wish one could know them, I wish there were tokens to tell
The fortunate fellows that now you can never discern;
And then one could talk with them friendly and wish them farewell
And watch them depart on the way that they will not return.

But now you may stare as you like and there's nothing to scan;
And brushing your elbow unguessed at and not to be told
They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man,
The lads that will die in their glory and never be old.

DEVOTION AND DEDICATION

featuring “Her Temple” and “Younger than Springtime”

A key turning point in the journey of growing up is focus - a wholehearted and purposeful dedication to the things you love. It could be a craft, a person, or yourself.

This set explores what is it like to give yourself completely to one single thing.

“Her Temple” was published in 1922 alongside the collection “Late Lyrics and Earlier”. It is believed that Thomas Hardy wrote this poem as a tribute to the death of his first wife Emma. He had written many poems after her death and this is one of the shorter ones that explores the poet’s devotion to her memory. In the poem, Hardy speaks of building a temple in her honour, so that people may never forget her. Just like in Shakespeare’s famous Sonnet 18, Hardy hopes that people will remark “Why a woman such honour!” as they read this temple of poems for her. In his palace of words, Emma will live forever as long as the poem exists, all while the craftsman humbly fades into antiquity. It can be interpreted that the opening theme that Finzi writes in the opening of this song aims to evoke the beautiful memory of Emma that Hardy holds dear.

The same devotion transcends decades later to another time and another place, we explore the unexpected love story of an American soldier and a South Pacific Islander in “Younger Than Springtime” from the musical “South Pacific”. The classic was composed by Broadway veteran Richard Rodgers, with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and book by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan. Based on the Pulitzer prize-winning book, “Tales of the South Pacific”, the musical tells the love stories of Emilie de Becque, a French plantation owner living on a South Pacific island, and Lt. Cable, an officer from the US Marines sent to the island to spy on Japanese forces in the Pacific. In “Younger Than Springtime”, Lt. Cable is introduced to Liat, a Tonkinese girl the daughter of the sassy grass-skirt vendor, Bloody Mary. Both of them are left alone and share an intimate moment in this song. Later on in the musical, Cable and Liat’s love for each other develops. However Cable, aware of his family’s racial prejudices, refuses to marry a Tonkinese girl. As he watches Liat get taken away by Bloody Mary, he regrets his decision and resolves to remain to the island once his mission is done, throwing away his life back in the States. On the fateful mission, Lt. Cable is killed by a Japanese strafing run, and Liat learns of his death later on, refusing to marry anyone else but him.

HER TEMPLE

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Dear, think not that they will forget you:
If craftsmanly art should be mine
I will build up a temple, and set you
Therein as its shrine.

They may say: 'Why a woman such honour?'
Be told, 'O so sweet was her fame,
That a man heaped this splendour upon her;
None now knows his name.'

YOUNGER THAN SPRINGTIME

Music by Richard Rodgers, Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

I touch your hands and my arms grow strong,
Like a pair of birds that burst with song.
My eyes look down at your lovely face,
And I hold a world in my embrace.

Younger than springtime, are you
Softer than starlight, are you,
Warmer than winds of June,
Are the gentle lips you gave me.
Gayer than laughter, are you,
Sweeter than music, are you,
Angel and lover, heaven and earth,
Are you to me.

And when your youth
And joy invade my arms,
And fill my heart as now they do,
Then younger than springtime, am I,
Gayer than laughter, am I,
Angel and lover, heaven and earth,
Am I with you!

And when your youth
And joy invade my arms,
And fill my heart as now they do,
Then younger than springtime, am I,
Gayer than laughter, am I,
Angel and lover, heaven and earth,
Am I with you.

THE STARS THAT OUTLIVE US

featuring “The Comet at Yell’ham” (and nothing else!)

For many of us here in this island city, we may not get the chance to see many comets and other falling celestial bodies. Usually the ones I remember seeing in my childhood are those on Hollywood, local TV, and the ever elusive (and often imagined) ‘stars’ on my report card. Moving away from that digression, it is cool to think about the many moments that will outlive our brief existence, and how its beauty will live in our cherished memories.

“The Comet at Yell’ham” was published in 1902 and very much refers to a very real comet observed by Hardy. This comet was known as “Encke’s Comet”, and shined brightly across the night Britain sky in September and October, 1858. Hardy himself mentions remembering watching the comet, possibly atop Yellowham Hill as mentioned in the poem. The “sweet form” mentioned in the second stanza possibly refers to a childhood sweetheart of Hardy or his close family.

The poem contemplates the shortness of life - on how this celestial moment, though brief and awe-inspiring, may come again another time, though we may no longer be in this world to enjoy it again.

THE COMET AT YELL'HAM

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

It bends far over Yell'ham Plain,
And we, from Yell'ham Height,
Stand and regard its fiery train,
So soon to swim from sight.

It will return long years hence, when
As now its strange swift shine
Will fall on Yell'ham; but not then
On that sweet form of thine.

“...in the evening it is cut
down and withereth.”

Psalms 90:6

BEGINNING OF AUTUMN

featuring “Shortening Days” (and nothing else!)

As the comforting winds of Spring and Summer fade, so shall it make away for the crisp air of autumn. The shimmer of youth has passed and the leaves now begin to yellow. It is quaint how summer days are long, and the autumn and winter days are shorter, almost to symbolise our lives becoming shorter as the years go by. With this, we head into the second half of our programme, which explores man’s later years and his shortening days.

“Shortening Days” was published in 1925 deals with the themes of autumn and finding joy in one’s later years. While many scholars argue about the setting of this poem, some suggest that “Shortening Days” was set in Hardy’s childhood home in Higher Bockhampton, where the homestead’s living-room windows open westward and the sun rays thread through the smoke from the fireplace. In the first stanza, Hardy takes stock of his autumn, describing the willows as “like shock-headed urchins” and evoking imagery of an autumn that feels closer to winter due to the bare trees. Underscored by Finzi’s rhythmic and cheery accompaniment, the cider-maker approaches. Coming towards the trees, he shakes up the apple trees and takes the fallen apples to make into cider.

While a simple and common imagery in the autumn days, the cider-maker and “apple-tree shaker” can be seen as the stock-taking of the events of one’s life. As the apples fall to the ground, our memories are spread out honestly. Though it sounds sombre, the arrival of the cider-maker is a happy and welcome one, and so should we welcome graciously the later years of our life. Watching the cider-maker gather the apples into the large vat, we joyously reflect on whether the harvest of our life, marked by our virtues and shortcomings, will result in a good crop or a mediocre one.

SHORTENING DAYS

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

The first fire since the summer is lit,
and is smoking into the room:
The sun-rays thread it through,
like woof-lines in a loom.
Sparrows spurt from the hedge,
whom misgivings appal
That winter did not leave last year for ever,
after all.

Like shock-headed urchins, spiny-haired,
Stand pollard willows, their twigs just bared.

Who is this coming with pondering pace,
Black and ruddy, with white embossed,
His eyes being black, and ruddy his face
And the marge of his hair like morning frost?
It's the cider-maker,
And appletree-shaker,
And behind him on wheels, in readiness,
His mill, and tubs, and vat, and press.

HALF-REGRETS

featuring “The Sigh” and “It All Fades Away”

Perhaps as we look back upon our life, we may sigh at the things we missed, the mistakes we made, or the ones that got away. Of course, we should aim to live without regrets, but I think no one is impervious to having one (or at least half a) regret in their life.

“The Sigh” was published as part of Thomas Hardy’s collection of poems titled “Time’s Laughingstocks” in 1909. Many speculate that the woman spoken about in this poem may refer to Emma, though it could have been Hardy’s second wife, Florence Dugdale, possibly either pining for her former suitor Wyatt, or out of self-pity which she suffered from. The poem deals with the themes of regret in love, and amidst the pastoral underscoring which reminds us of the starry-eyed love in “Ditty”, there lies the bittersweet mystery of the reason behind her sighs.

“It All Fades Away”, the iconic eleven o’ clock number from “The Bridges of Madison County”, expresses those same feelings of love that could be and regret over what has been lost. The musical is based on Robert James Waller’s 1992 novel of the same name, with music and lyrics by Jason Robert Brown, and book by Marsha Norman. The musical follows the fated meeting of Francesca Johnson, an Italian war bride living an unfulfilled farm life with her family in Iowa, and Robert Kincaid, a photographer from the National Geographic sent to photograph the covered bridges of Madison County. Both of them fall in love and have an affair, but when Robert invites Francesca to run away with him, Francesca chooses to remain with her family instead. Fast forward years later, Robert stops taking photos for the National Geographic due to a chronic illness, and thanks his secretary for helping him wait for Francesca’s call, which never comes. As Robert packs his things in his office, he reminisces about the moment he met Francesca, knowing that everything will all fade away but his love for her.

THE SIGH

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Little head against my shoulder,
Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,
And up-eyed;
Till she, with a timid quaver,
Yielded to the kiss I gave her;
But, she sighed.

That there mingled with her feeling
Some sad thought she was concealing
It implied.
- Not that she had ceased to love me,
None on earth she set above me;
But she sighed.

She could not disguise a passion,
Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion
If she tried:
Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,
Hearts were victors; so I wondered
Why she sighed.

Afterwards I knew her thoroughly,
And she loved me staunchly, truly,
Till she died;
But she never made confession
Why, at that first sweet concession,
She had sighed.

It was in our May, remember;
And though now I near November
And abide
Till my appointed change, unfretting,
Sometimes I sit half regretting
That she sighed.

IT ALL FADES AWAY

Music and Lyrics by Jason Robert Brown

There was something in a desert
There was some place wild and green
And a child in a village I passed through
There are places that I've traveled
And so many things I've seen
And it all fades away but you

I was sliding down a mountain
I was burning in the sun
I was crying with amazement at the view
I was capturing a moment
But when all is said and done
Well, it all fades away but you
It all fades away, it all fades away
It all fades but you

I have sailed across the oceans
Past the cities and the farms
On a neverending quest for something new
And the only things that mattered
Were the four days in your arms
'Cause, it all fades away but you
It all fades away, it all fades away
It all fades away but you

There is one thing that's eternal
That cannot be torn apart
There is one thing that remains forever true
Past the thinking, past the breathing
Past the beating of my heart
It will all fade away but you
It all fades away, it all fades away
It all fades away but you
It all fades away, it all fades away
It all fades away but you
But you, But you
You

THE GIRLS THAT WERE ONCE GOLDEN

featuring “Former Beauties” (and nothing else)

Often do we look at old photographs, videos, listen to old songs, and wonder where that time and our youth have gone (me included, and I’m 25 gosh).

“Former Beauties” was written in 1902 and was published in a collection of seven poems by Hardy titled “At Casterbridge Fair”. The collection of poems treat Hardy’s observations of an annual fair held in Dorchester in February. In the poem, Hardy recounts the fair market dames that he came across and possibly courted, making a brief reference to the maidens at Budmouth Shore that beguiled the soldiers in “Budmouth Dears”. The song joyously recounts the days where girls danced in their youth and their romances in moonlight within a short triple meter section. As the music returns back to present age, Hardy wistfully hopes these girls forget their former beauty, and if they do not forget, for them to remain golden in our memory.

FORMER BEAUTIES

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years ago,
And courted here?

Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
We vowed and swore
In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
Or Budmouth shore?

Do they remember those gay tunes we trod
Clasped on the green;
Aye; trod till moonlight set on the beaten sod
A satin sheen?

They must forget, forget! They cannot know
What once they were,
Or memory would transfigure them, and show
Them always fair.

RETURNING TO THE EARTH

featuring “Transformations” and “How It Ends”

As we approach the second last set of today’s programme, we contemplate on what possibly happens after the grand adventure of life. As our souls shine spectacularly and with jubilation (I hope), where do we go afterwards? Do we return to the ground, or walk into the light? Who do we say goodbye to, and hello to as we cross to the other side?

“Transformations” was published in 1917, in the collection “Moments of Visions and Miscellaneous Verses”. There are a couple of stories in which inspired Hardy to write “Transformations”. One of them mentions Hardy being inspired by writings from Fitzgerald, as well as his profession as a church restorer. Another (more romantic) story mentions how Hardy fell a love with a Louisa Harding, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer in Stinsford who Hardy’s father had done some work for. Hardy had always admired Louisa from afar, and when she passed away in 1913, he often pondered over her unmarked grave in Stinsford churchyard. One of his visits may have sparked the creation of “Transformations”. Lyrical in nature, the poem contemplates life after death, as Hardy wonders if the people he had met in his life had transformed into the nature surrounding him.

We see a more personal and honest confrontation of death in “How It Ends” in the musical “Big Fish”. The musical; with lyrics and music written by Andrew Lippa alongside book written by John August, is based on Daniel Wallace’s 1998 novel “Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions” and the 2003 film of the same name. The show explores the relationship between Edward (a teller of tall tales) and his son, Will. Throughout the musical, we see much of Edward’s (exaggerated) adventures. A rift is caused between father and son as some of the stories are proven false, and after Will finds out the truth, comes back to tell his dying father about his final grand “prison escape”. Seeing the characters in his stories and his lover, Sandra, Edward reflects on his life, and passes away peacefully with Will by his side.

TRANSFORMATIONS

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Portion of this yew
Is a man my grandsire knew,
Bosomed here at its foot:
This branch may be his wife,
A ruddy human life
Now turned to a green shoot.

These grasses must be made
Of her who often prayed,
Last century, for repose;
And the fair girl long ago
Whom I often tried to know
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,
But as nerves and veins abound
In the growths of upper air,
And they feel the sun and rain,
And the energy again
That made them what they were!

HOW IT ENDS

Music and lyrics by Andrew Lipka

I've seen this all before when I was just a child.
I met a witch who took a bow and showed me how it ended.

We stood here on the shore.
The air was sweet and mild,
With disbelief implausibly suspended.
And in my child's imagination, I remember you;
Though, I didn't know if we were foes or friends.
But now you're standing here,
I see the vision coming clear.
I know exactly how this ends.

It ends with you, it ends with me
It ends the way a story's ending is supposed to be
A bit insane, a touch of pain,
Adeptly told, yet uncontrolled,

It ends with faith, it ends with love
It ends with water in the river and the sun above
Part epic tale, part fire sale
But all sincere, and standing here

I know I wasn't perfect, I know my life was small,
I know that I pretended that I knew it all.
But when you tell my story, And I hope somebody does,
Remember me as something bigger than I was

It ends with sons, it ends with wives
It ends with knowing when the pavement bends we find our lives.
So let it come, and let me go.
Show me the waves, and let them flow.
It all ends well,
This much, I know.

LIFE'S LUSHNESS LIVED AND DREAMS END

featuring "The Dance Continued" and "My Way"

As we approach the end of the programme, we do not look towards death and what comes after. Rather we look back and celebrate the scenes that make our lives lush and full. Echoing the sentiments of the first set, we aspire towards living life to it's fullest, carefree and filled with laughter, so that we may look back and be content that we had lived at all.

"The Dance Continued" was published in 1914 as part of a collection titled "Satires of Circumstance". In this poem, Hardy tells the reader to not worry about a person passing, and that they have lived through their youth happily and freely. As the dead fret not of the living, so shall the living get past their grief and live every moment fully just as the ones before did. Hardy wrote another poem with similar themes which Finzi has also set it to music, titled "Life laughs onward". The Dance of Life shall continue regardless of individual deaths, and no one can stop its natural currents from sweeping ahead without them. This belief was important to Hardy's values, and he found much comfort in them.

"My Way" is a boisterous celebration of life (and also a great way to close this dumb tenor's university career - for now). The English lyrics of the song was written by Canadian-American singer, Paul Anka, who took the melody from a French song, "Comme d'habitude". Both songs are completely unrelated to each other. At the time after hearing the French song, Anka acquired the rights to them. After a dinner with Frank Sinatra who declared he wanted to end his career, Anka wrote the lyrics, inspired by the way the Italian mobsters and Sinatra would speak. After a one take recording with The Chairman of the Board in December 1968, the rest of history. Earning massive commercial success, the song has been covered by the likes of Elvis Presley, has been inducted into the Grammy's Hall of Fame, and was polled by American funeral directors as the most played song in funerals. Despite the success, the humble Sinatra said this was his least favourite song due to the selfishness of it. Nevertheless, this song celebrates life - no matter how tricky and arduous it may be, at least one can live saying "I did it my way."

THE DANCE CONTINUED

Music by Gerald Finzi, Text by Thomas Hardy

Regret not me;
Beneath the sunny tree
I lie uncaring, slumbering peacefully.

And lightly dance
Some triple-timed romance
In coupled figures, and forget mischance;

Swift as the light
I flew my faery flight;
Ecstatically I moved,
and feared no night.

And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree;
For I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully.

I did not know
That heydays fade and go,
But deemed that what was would be always so.

I skipped at morn
Between the yellowing corn,
Thinking it good and glorious to be born.

I ran at eves
Among the piled-up sheaves,
Dreaming, 'I grieve not, therefore nothing grieves'.

Now soon will come
The apple, pear, and plum,
And hinds will sing, and autumn insects hum.

Again you will fare
To cider-makings rare,
And junketings; but I shall not be there.

Yet gaily sing
Until the pewter ring
Those songs we sang when we went gipsying.

MY WAY

Music by Jacques Revaux, Lyrics by Paul Anka

And now the end is here
And so I face that final curtain
My friend I'll make it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more
I did it, I did it my way

For what is a man, what has he got?
If not himself then he has naught
Not to say the things that he truly feels
And not the words of someone who kneels
Let the record shows
I took all the blows and did it my way

Yes, it was my way.

Regrets, I've had a few
But then again too few to mention
I did what I had to do
I saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course
Each careful step along the byway
And more, much, much more
I did it, I did it my way

Yes, there were times I'm sure you knew
When I bit off more than I could chew
But through it all, when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried
I've had my fill, my share of losing
And now, as tears subside
I find it all so amusing
To think I did all that
And may I say, not in a shy way
Oh, no, oh, no, not me
I did it my way

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Beatrice Lin, Piano

A graduate of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Singapore, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Haute école de Musique de Genève, her studies were generously supported by the National Arts Council and the Lee Foundation. She was also awarded the Adolphe Neuman Prize from the canton of Geneva upon graduation.

Performances include live radio broadcasts on the Radio Suisse Romande Espace 2, keyboardist with L'Orchestre de Chambre de Genève and Ensemble Contrechamps, as well as répétiteur for the Concours de Genève. On home ground, she is collaborative pianist at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory and freelances with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra as well as the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Ted Ngoo, Tenor

Ted Ngoo is a tenor completing his Bachelor's Degree in Music at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at NUS, majoring in Voice Performance and minoring in Theatre Studies. Ted graduated from the School of the Arts, Singapore in 2017 and was also part of YSTCM's Young Artist Programme in 2016. Ted studied under the guidance of tenor Reuben Lai and is currently studying under Prof. Alan Lee Bennett.

Ted is grateful to have many opportunities performing in Singapore, with recent credits including his opera debut in L'arietta's "Speed Dating Tonight" (Busboy, 2022), Stravinsky's "Pulcinella" alongside the YST Orchestra and Red Dot Baroque (Tenor Soloist, 2022), the YST Voice Faculty's Production of "Fantasticks" (Bellamy, 2023), and The Opera People's production of Bellini's "La Sonnambula (Ensemble, 2023). In love with music and the stage, Ted aspires to be an active performer in the musical theatre and opera scene, both locally and abroad, and hopes he can impact the communities around him through sincere storytelling.