

Life, Death, and Necropolitics

A Senior Recital by Benjamin Harris

together with,
Dr. Choi Hye-Seon, piano
Nestor Solorzano, oboe
Kira Lim, soprano
Zachary Singson Dominguez, tenor
Ted Ngoo, tenor

Programme

Banalités (FP107)

Francis Poulenc

Chanson d'Orkenise

Hôtel

Fagnes de Wallonie

Voyage à Paris

Sanglots

10 Blake Songs

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Infant Joy

A Poison Tree

The Piper

London

The Lamb

The Shepherd

Ah! Sunflower

Cruelty Has a Human Heart

The Divine Image

Eternity

Aids Quilt Songbook

Her Final Show

You Bring Out The Doctor in Me

Another Day

Hold My Hand

Being Alive

from Sondheim's *Company*

Banalités (Poulenc)

“He wrote one hundred and forty-six songs, from the maddest buffoonery to the most sincere lyricism, from the most obvious sensuality to the most poignant gravity. It has been said that he was half-monk, half guttersnipe”. - Pierre Bernac on Francis Poulenc

Indeed, Francis Poulenc would go on to compose some of the most sensual, moving, and intriguing songs ever written for the French vocal repertoire. Born in 1899 into an affluent and prosperous family, Francis was the only son of Emilé Poulenc, a manufacturer, and Jenny née Royer. In his youth, the young Francis was enamored with the music of the greats, such as Chopin, Mozart, and Robert Schumann. Through serious study of the works of the greats, alongside formal music education in piano and composition with Ricardo Viñes and Charles Koechlin, Poulenc was able to hone his craft at melodic writing; a skill he became highly regarded for throughout his oeuvre.

Banalités is a song collection that consists of 5 mélodies composed by Francis Poulenc, with text by Guillaume Apollinaire. *Chanson d’Orkenise*, *Fagnes de Wallonie*, and *Sanglots* were taken from Apollinaire’s *Il y a* collection while the poems *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris* were taken from *Le Guetteur mélancolique* and *Poèmes retrouvés* respectively. The song collection begins with *Chanson d’Orkenise*; the setting is the exotic and mythical land of Orkenise. In the piece, the two soldiers question a waggoner and a vagabond; both of them are looking to enter and leave the city. In *Hôtel*, the singer does not want to work (in progress)

10 Blake Songs (Ralph Vaughan Williams)

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on 12 October 1872 to the Reverend Arthur Vaughan Williams and Margaret née Wedgewood. From an early age, the young Vaughan Williams was instilled with extremely liberal beliefs and a philosophical outlook on life. While he was brought up a Christian, he was encouraged to explore views that leaned toward agnosticism and atheism by his parents and his mother. This would set the stage for him to further explore such views during his later years at Charterhouse and Cambridge. The 10 Blake Songs would prove to be one of his last works, with the composer passing away a year later, in 1958, after completing it.

William Blake, on the other hand, was born in 1757, during the early years of what we now call the Age of the Enlightenment. Today, he is largely considered to be one of the germinal poets and artists of the age of Romanticism. From an early age, the young Blake dabbled in visual art and his influences included Michelangelo, Raphael, and Albrecht Dürer. Subsequently, William would begin his foray into the world of poetry. Together, the mediums of visual art and poetry worked in tandem to provide the creative and politically-engaged William with an outlet and a voice.

The 10 Blake Songs for Voice and Oboe was composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams, with text by the English poet and painter, William Blake. Initially composed for the documentary *The Vision of William Blake*, the song cycle was also dedicated to the tenor Wilfred Brown and the oboist Janet Craxton. In the song cycle, Vaughan Williams set to music texts from Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *Several Questions Answered*. In the 10 Blake

Songs, the vocal line ranges from simplistic in “Infant Joy”, “The Lamb”, “The Shepherd”, and the disjunct in “London” and “Cruelty Has a Human Heart”. In tandem with the oboe line, the 10 Blake Songs make for an intriguing listen.

The Aids Quilt Songbook

“For singers, we are being pretty unvocal about AIDS”

These were the words of composer, Jeffrey Stock in the foreword to the original AIDS Quilt Songbook. While this may not be the case today, Stock was referring to the social milieu of baritone William Parker; the brainchild of the AIDS Quilt songbook as we know it today.

William Parker was born in Pennsylvania, in 1944. He took his first voice lesson in his final year as an undergraduate in Germanic languages and literature at Princeton University. He then studied with esteemed vocal pedagogues such as Rosa Ponselle and Pierre Bernac. Subsequently, he went on to enjoy a career of highs that have included performances with some of the world’s leading orchestras.

William Parker died of AIDS in 1993. In the years preceding his death, Parker was involved with the conception and the curation of the AIDS Quilt Songbook. The NAMES Project AIDS Quilt Songbook, also known as the AIDS Quilt Songbook is an ongoing songbook featuring the works of various composers from a multitude of backgrounds in opera, musical theatre, and jazz. (in progress)

Being Alive
from Sondheim’s *Company*

(in progress)

