

## **FORGOTTEN HARMONIES**

### **“A single beauty must inspire man throughout his life”**

—Schubert, personal journal, 25 March 1824

The birth of the *Lied* coincides, in many ways, with the emergence of Romanticism itself. Franz Schubert’s biographer, Otto E. Deutsch, tells us that the composer and his circle were avid readers of the philosophical writings of the Schlegel brothers, August and Friedrich (1767–1845; 1772–1829). In their journal *Athenaeum*, the Schlegels advanced their nascent Romantic theory, proposing a new poetic ideal that unified all artistic disciplines into a higher entity they called “poetry.” This poetry, for them, was a “speaking painting” or a “music of the spirit,” not a “product of nature” but a “reflection of the human mind.”

In March 1824, Schubert recorded in his diary one of the fruits of his reflection on the Schlegel brothers’ writings: “*A single beauty must inspire man throughout his life, that is true; but the light of this enthusiasm must illuminate everything else.*” This pantheistic conception of art and music offers a rich perspective on spiritual and aesthetic harmony through which to experience this evening’s concert, aptly titled *Forgotten Harmonies*.

Tonight’s programme explores the fertile terrain of early Romanticism and its evolution through the 19th century—juxtaposing works contemporary to Schubert with those that followed closely in his wake. The horn, an emblematic instrument of the Romantic era, plays a comforting role, lending the voice and piano a pastoral, generous, and at times magical ambiance.

### **C. Oberthür**

Today, the name Carl Oberthür (1819–1895) is seldom heard, yet in 19th-century London he was a celebrated harp virtuoso, as well as the author of a widely used harp method. He composed over 350 works, many for the harp, but also around forty solo piano pieces now almost entirely forgotten. In his *Lied Die Heimath* (“My Homeland”), which opens with the line *In der Heimath ist es schön* (“It is beautiful in my homeland”), Oberthür conjures an atmosphere of gentle pastoral joy. A lyrical horn solo weaves through the texture, accompanying a sung text of great simplicity. The poem expresses a psychological projection: the speaker’s almost naïve gratitude toward a landscape perceived as benevolent and indissociable from the lovers’ eventual meeting.

### **J.W. Kalliwoda**

The Bohemian violinist, conductor, and composer Johannes Wenzeslaus Kalliwoda (1801–1866), born in Prague, was a central figure in his time but is now largely forgotten. He left over 450 works, including seven symphonies and several concertos. In 1822, he settled in Donaueschingen, where he served for over three decades as director of the Court Theatre, conducting works such as *La clemenza di Tito* and *Don Giovanni*; his *Symphony No. 7* echoes the dramatic gestures of both *Don Giovanni* and Schumann’s symphonic idiom. A dynamic figure with a keen eye for Europe’s best musical talent, Kalliwoda invited artists such as Robert and Clara

Schumann, Liszt, and Thalberg to his theatre. An esteemed composer, he also performed in Cologne, Mannheim, and Leipzig. The 1850 fire that destroyed the Court Theatre was a severe misfortune for Kallivoda, leading to his eventual retirement in solitude in Karlsruhe.

The Lied *Heimweh* ("Homesickness," 1839), written for voice, piano, and horn, is deeply melancholy and meditates on the Schubertian theme of death as consolation: "*If the phantom voice speaks true, if my sweet love lies in her grave—then her grave is my only homeland.*" In *Die Entführung* ("The Abduction"), tragic love is again central. The beloved, symbolised by a distant star, is imprisoned and unreachable. The midnight's horn call becomes a dream of liberation: "*Hail, beautiful star! Let me fall into your heart; do not remain forever distant!*" This theme uncannily foreshadows the emotional universe of Mahler. In *Nachtlied eines Einsamen* ("Night Song of a Solitary Man"), the celestial canopy once more evokes the unbridgeable distance between lovers. The protagonist's yearning becomes so intense that he imagines hearing angels singing: "*Two stars call to me in soothing, friendly peace.*"

## **F. Schubert**

*Herbst*, D.945 ("Autumn"), is a sombre Lied in E minor composed in 1828, Schubert's final year. Set to a poem by Ludwig Rellstab (1799–1860), it is a strophic song in 12/8 time, whose trembling piano tremolos evoke icy winds and a sense of foreboding characteristic of Schubert: "*The clouds drift so dark and grey; the stars vanish from the blue heavens.*" Here is no reprieve from human despair, and no lightening offered by nature—a sombre Lied, to be sure, a dark gem.

By contrast, *Viola*, D.786 (1823), set to a text by Schubert's close friend Franz von Schober, is an epic ballad of some twelve minutes, unfolding over fifteen pages of music. The two friends develop their vision of music as "speaking painting" in a very ingenious way, that of a conversation among flowers: snowdrops, roses, tulips, and hyacinths reveal the secrets of the human soul. A recurring choral refrain, "*Snowdrop, O bell of the snows,*" begins quietly in A-flat major and returns between the more impassioned episodes, lending unity to this richly coloured ballad. The intervening sections modulate through widely contrasting keys (F major, G minor, E-flat major, B major...), with characters and moods that range (as Brigitte Massin notes) from funereal to tender to martial. The result is nothing short of a Schubertian epic.

*Auf dem Strom*, D.943 ("On the River"), written for tenor, horn, and piano, was also composed during Schubert's last year while he was working on his last complete symphony, the Ninth. *Auf dem Strom* is based on a poem by Ludwig Rellstab—who would later provide texts for several of Schubert's last Lieder in the collection *Schwanengesang* ("Swan Song"). Here, the horn plays a prominent role, opening the Lied and bridging the stanzas with poignant interludes. The mood is one of gentle companionship and shared longing, ending on a note of quiet melancholy reflecting on the inaccessibility of the beloved: "*There, perhaps—O blessed comfort—there I may meet her gaze once more.*"

## **Sandeep Bhagwati**

“Heinrich Heine, one of the most beloved 19th-century poets of the German language, has always remained a controversial figure,” Sandeep Bhagwati writes, “because of his revolutionary political views that forced him into lifelong exile from his homeland, his proud Jewish identity and his heavily satirical descriptions of life in the diaspora, which irked both sides. Readers of his Romantic poetry were often put off by his sarcastic and irreverent tone—his most famous bestseller, “Das Buch der Lieder” (“The Book of Songs”), is half-love poetry, half-satire of the foolishness of love, often appearing in the same poem. He relished mocking sentimental mushiness and insisted on rational thinking—something that set him apart from other poets that Romantic composers enjoyed setting to music. While Schubert chose only a few of Heine’s more lyrical poems, Robert Schumann found a soulmate in him: someone who like himself could be at once dark and satirical, trenchant and wistful, ominous and erotic. While searching for poems by Heine to set I found many fragments, sketches, short poems that I liked. I remembered the Ancient Greek poetry form “kentron” (κέντρον)—“cento” in Latin—which refers to a new poem stitched together from disjointed passages taken from another author’s works (often Homer or Virgil). Thus, not all the lyrics of these four songs are original poems by Heine—rather, I combined lines from various poems by him. In this sense the music is a cento as well—you will hear numerous fragments of Romantic music from Heine’s time taking turns in un-Romantic ways. Will their composite raggedness conjure up a sense of longing? The lines I selected from Heine’s poems all yearn for something—for missed or lost connections, for opportunities that have eluded us. My closest loved ones live dispersed around the globe; some of them will always be far away, no matter where I am. But at times we the disjointed may all look up to the night sky and feel connected. Even if, as Heine wrote, the stars themselves will never listen . . . ”

## **V. Lachner**

The Lachner brothers, Franz and Vinzenz, hailed from Swabia (now Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) and were prominent composers and conductors of their time. Vincenz Lachner (1811–1893) was appointed *Kapellmeister* at Vienna’s Kärntnertor Theatre in 1834—where, a decade earlier, Beethoven had premiered his *Ninth Symphony*. Vinzenz later conducted in Mannheim and London, but remained firmly aligned with the Brahmsian tradition, opposing Wagnerian innovations. Wagner, ever pugnacious, publicly campaigned against Lachner, ultimately contributing to his dismissal from Mannheim around 1873. In 1842, Lachner published *Waldhornruf* (“The Call of the Hunting Horn”) for tenor, horn, and piano—a Lied that begins in the innocence of a dream of love, only to end in tragedy with a double murder.