

Mirages

A selection of English and French song of the twentieth century.

Muriel Herbert (1897-1984)

Loveliest of Trees

Words by A.E.Housman (1859-1936)

The Lost Nightingale

Words by Alcuin (735-804) tr. Helen Waddell (1889-1965)

To Daffodils

Words by Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

The Crimson Rose, 1:47

Words by Enid Clay (1881-1972)

Mirage

Words by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Mirages, op. 113

Words by Renée de Brimont (1880-1943)

Cygne sur l'eau

A swan on the water

Reflets dans l'eau

Reflections in the water

Jardin nocturne

Nocturnal garden

Danseuse

Dancing-girl

Muriel Herbert (1897-1984)

Faintheart in a Railway Train

Words by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

I dare not ask a kiss

Words by Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

Rose kissed me today

Words by Austin Dobson (1840-1921)

When Death to either shall come

Words by Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

She weeps over Ragoon

Words by James Joyce (1882-1941)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Underneath the Abject Willow

Words by W.H. Auden (1907 - 1973)

Programme

I am delighted to be performing a selection of songs by English composer Muriel Herbert (1897-1984), with whom I have recently become fascinated. Much of this short biography is taken from the writing of Claire Tomalin, Herbert's daughter, who has collected and published many of her previously unpublished works. Thank you to Anna Barnett, Herbert's granddaughter, who continues to publish the Muriel Herbert Songbook via BiblioFox Music Publishing, based in Oxford.

Muriel Herbert was born in Sheffield in 1897. She grew up in Liverpool, and in 1917, received the Liverpool scholarship to study composition at the Royal College of Music in London, where she studied with Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford, who did not favour women students but the absence of young men fighting abroad during World War I allowed more women to study.

Thanks to encouragement from Roger Quilter in 1920, who recommended her works to the publisher Augener, her first five songs were published in 1922, beginning a prolific and successful decade as a composer. She married French academic, Emile Delavenay, in 1928. She spent much of her career between Paris, Cambridge, London and Geneva. By the 1940s, as her marriage declined and familial demands increased following the birth of her two children, her composition declined. She moved to Welwyn Garden City, where her female friends rallied around her and she became a music teacher.

Herbert left over 100 songs, which were carefully compiled by her daughter Claire towards the end of her life and after her death. Her poetic tastes are wide-ranging. She was known to be a friend of James Joyce, whose poetry features her songs. Authors featured in this recital range from famous near-contemporaries such as A.E. Housman, Thomas Hardy, Enid Clay, Austin Dobson, and Robert Bridges, to explorations of earlier writers such as Robert Herrick (1591-1634) and Helen Waddell's translation of medieval scholar Alcuin (735-804).

Her daughter, Claire, described her mother's music as being the 'core of her being'. Claire's words best describe the fate of so many female creatives of the past: "sometimes I think that if I could switch back time to 1925, years before my own birth, I would say to her: turn away from the clever young Frenchman who is going to propose to you. Have nothing to do with him, do not even think of marrying him. Remain a single woman, devote yourself entirely to your art. Because you have a gift, priceless and fragile, which risks being crushed by marriage, by children, by the distraction and trouble they bring."

A selection of Muriel Herbert's songs are paired in this recital with *Mirages* Op. 113 by Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), a song cycle which sets a collection of poetry of the same name by Renée de Brimont (1880-1943), expert in French literature of the 19th century, and herself a poet. The recital concludes with a brief song by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), a composer for whom myself and Muriel Herbert have a shared admiration.

Performers

Sophie Madden is a 24 year old soprano based in Oxford. She graduated with a first-class degree in Music from the University of Cambridge (Newnham College) in 2023. She was a Choral Scholar, and later Music Administrator, for the Choir of Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge.

During her studies and since, Sophie has enjoyed a busy and varied musical life. She features as a recorded soloist on the most recent albums and upcoming release by the Choir of Sidney Sussex College of music by 16th-century composers Jean L'heritier, Jacquet de Mantua and Jheronimus Vinders. Sophie has developed a particular love for early 20th-century English song and for the operas of Benjamin Britten, performing principal roles such as 'the Governess' in *The Turn of the Screw* and the 'Female Chorus' in *The Rape of Lucretia* in student productions.

Sophie is currently working as maternity cover in the Development and Alumni Relations Office at St Edmund Hall. Since moving to Oxford last August, she has enjoyed getting involved in the local musical scene. Sophie has accepted an offer to study for an MMus in Vocal Performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow for September 2026.

Jeremy Wan (piano)