

SCHUBERT Vinter Journe Trombone Travels • 1

Matthew Gee, Trombone Christopher Glynn, Piano

Trombone Travels • 1 Franz Schubert (1797–1828) Winterreise, Op. 89, D. 911 ('Winter Journey') (1827) (arr. Matthew Gee, b. 1982)

The trombone is praised for its vocal qualities. Its facility to glissando allows it to directly mimic vocal techniques – vibrato, portamento and all manner of microtonal inflections. The player can develop colours further by altering the vowel shape within the mouth cavity and by inserting a mute into the instrument, putting at their disposal a vast array of tonal possibilities.

Trombone Travels explores these vocal qualities through some of the great art song cycles. The journey begins with Schubert's most remarkable narrative song cycle Winterreise. To re-imagine such a work for trombone and piano required a re-evaluation of trombone technique, with the aim of furthering the expressive potential of the instrument necessitated by such astonishing music.

The initial difficulty is that of removing the words. Vocal emotion and expression are largely conveyed via the shape and colour of the text's language, especially for Schubert, whose genius lay in musical imagery and meaning. Understanding and interpreting the German language, its accents and shape, was the first consideration of the arranging process, establishing the groundwork from which to impart meaning and emotion to the arrangement. Although the German text established the musical foundation of the arrangement, English titles are used here to emphasise that the text is no longer the primary expressive vehicle.

Written in 1827 towards the end of his short life, *Winter Journey* contains 24 songs based on the poetry of Wilhelm Müller. Schubert famously described them as 'truly terrible songs', which 'have affected me more than any others'. They were initially received badly by his friends but Schubert dismissed this, claiming that they were without doubt some of his finest works. The songs are largely mournful in character, possibly reflecting Schubert's own personal traumas, prior to his death a year later aged just 31.

Goodnight begins the cycle: we hear toiling footsteps in the piano as the wanderer ponders a girl who 'spoke of love / Her mother even of marriage'; it becomes clear that his love is unrequited. Removing the text from a strophic song is a huge challenge - subtle textual changes are emphasised by an octave shift in the second verse and cup mute in the last. Unusually, the sudden major key final verse offers no hope: the wanderer writes 'Good night' on her gate so that she might see that he thought of her. These fragile dreams of happiness are quickly blown away in The Weather Vane. The trombone's considerable dynamic range adds to the agitated, unpredictability of the music, enhancing the bitter sarcasm of the mocking weather vane. 'Inside the wind is plaving with hearts' reflects the wanderer. a fibre mute adding poignance to the sound. The wanderer's Frozen Tears fall like ice, and vet his emotions 'well up, so scaldingly hot' that they would melt all the ice of winter. This contrast requires careful control of tone colour and vibrato from cold and desolate, to warm and rich – culminating in the stark crv of pain in the final line, as both vibrato and range reach their climax. Despair slips into obsessiveness. Frozen Solid, with its highly charged emotion – established through the piano's pulsating triplets - creates a palpable sense of urgency as the wanderer searches for his past love. He vows to 'pierce ice and snow' with his burning tears. before longing to remain frozen with grief. Undulating triplets roll into The Linden Tree, but bring a dramatic change of mood The wanderer peacefully reminisces about the many sweet dreams he has had in the tree's shade. These turn to grief upon seeing the tree: we shift to the minor as 'The cold wind blew' his hat from his head. He is unable to find peace among rejection. A Flood of tears follows. Strophic in design. the song's second verse is transposed up an octave to heighten his increasing anguish, culminating in sheer desperation: 'There will be my sweetheart's house'. On the *River*, the wanderer carves the name of his beloved into the ice 'With a sharp stone'. Cold words contrast warm music a crisp, metal straight mute sitting on the warm piano below. Emotions peak in the final verse, propelling headlong into *Turning Back*, where he recounts his panic-stricken exit from his beloved's house. The music is frantic throughout: crows throw snowballs and hailstones at him, before exhaustion

consumes him. A Will-o'-the-wisp lures the wanderer 'Into the deepest rocky chasms'. Wide intervals and a playful vocal line reflect the twists and turns of his journey, until anguish at the final turn - 'Every river will reach the sea ... Every sorrow, too, will reach its grave'. The weary fugitive then finds Rest 'In a charcoal-burner's cramped cottage'. Exhausted, he revels in the turbulence within his heart. Quick dynamic changes - hushed moans and sorrowful wails - play to the trombone's strengths, before the wanderer begins Dreaming of Spring. He dreams of bright flowers and green meadows, before being awoken by cockerels. In an almost hallucinatory state he then mistakes ice crystals on the window for leaves. As the text delineates between these three conditions, we explore three very different colours: an airy, naive sound as he dreamt: a hard, invasive sound for the cockerels: and the trombone's natural mellow tone during the trance, wondering when he shall hold his love in his arms. These questions are quickly answered in Loneliness. as the now weary wanderer continues onward 'greeted by no one'. There is an overwhelming sense of numbness: his stuttering footsteps are heard in the piano. before the vocal line soars, professing that he is not so wretched despite all his turmoil.

The second half of *Winter Journey* is much darker, as matters of love turn to those of exclusion and death. Despite this, The Post opens in a lively 6/8 as the postman's horses approach. Both his heart and the vocal line leap as he anxiously waits for a letter from his sweetheart. Nothing arrives. He contemplates his youth in The Grev Head, his frozen hair giving him the appearance of an old man. The illusion melts and he shudders at his youth - 'How far it is still to the grave!' The Crow then accompanies him out of town, circling above his head. The tessitura is heightened covering three octaves, to exaggerate the crow's descent. One of the most contemplative texts - Last Hope - follows. as the wanderer. 'lost in thought', watches a leaf fall to the ground, his hopes with it. This feeling of detachment is enhanced by use of a solo tone mute, its nasal, mocking sound, ideal for the many emotions of this song. The same mute is utilised during In the Village, as the wanderer passes through while people sleep. Feelings of detachment recede

as he claims to be 'finished with all dreams'. The end of this long night is signalled by a Stormy Morning, with its florid. punchy piano writing and symphonic vocal line - 'How the storm has torn apart / The grey mantle of the sky!' This is truly idiomatic trombone writing. The storm passes quickly and is replaced by a lilting dance as the wanderer follows a light 'this way and that'. On the surface a very sweet song. but bestowed a poignant twist through its title. A Mirage. He passes The Sianpost, pointing him down a road 'From which no man has ever returned'. Daunting, repetitive guavers much like *Goodnight* – suggest an inevitability about his journey and the peace he will find in death. Has he finally accepted his fate? He seeks refuge in The Inn. but his troubled mind tricks him and he is in fact in a gravevard. The wanderer begins to long for death which continues to elude him - 'Do vou nonetheless turn me away?' Out of nowhere. Courage bursts forth full of energy in a display of bravado quite at odds to all previous songs: 'When my heart speaks in my breast / I sing loudly and merrily'. The piano suggests emptiness behind the words, concluding this song in the minor. After this brief display of false confidence, the wanderer's exhausted state envelops him once more. He gazes at Three Suns in the sky, believing them to be the eves of his beloved. Is it too much to wonder if Schubert had the sound of four trombones in his head? This is exquisite trombone writing, and entirely plausible given that Schubert would have heard Beethoven's Equale at the latter's funeral in March 1827. The eerie sound of a bucket mute heightens this hallucinatory state. The forlorn, recitative-like melodies of The Hurdy-aurdy Man conclude Winter Journey. The wanderer's deterioration is complete and his despair almost tangible. He watches a 'strange old man', a social outcast much like himself, play his hurdy-gurdy: 'No one wants to listen / No one looks at him'. This achingly sad song concludes when the wanderer asks: 'Will you grind your hurdy-gurdy / To my songs?' leaving us none the wiser as to his fate. We thought death was certain, but now cannot be sure. The song fades and ultimately we the listener are left to share the burdens of the wanderer.

Matthew Gee



Matthew Gee

Matthew Gee has been principal trombone with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra since 2010, and also holds principal positions with the Aurora Orchestra and Septura. He is on the teaching faculty at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and is an active soloist. His passion for the trombone has driven him to release two solo albums - Paradiso e inferno. and Matthew Gee's Amazing Sliding Circus. Gee has performed with orchestras and ensembles all over the world and has recorded many film and television scores. After studies at King's College London and the Royal College of Music, Gee joined the Orchestra of Scottish Opera as section principal trombone, also performing with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Santiago and the Orchestra of Opera North. Further study saw Matthew attend the Hochschule der Künste Bern, where he was awarded the Eduard Tschumi award. As a soloist Gee has performed internationally and has had a number of works written for him. He has performed and taken masterclasses at many festivals. Gee is President of the British Trombone Society and takes an active part in promoting the trombone and developing its repertoire. He is a Getzen artist. www.matthewgee.info

Christopher Glynn



Christopher Glynn is a GRAMMY award-winning planist and accompanist. working with leading singers, instrumentalists and ensembles in concerts, broadcasts and recordings throughout the world. He is also artistic director of the Ryedale Festival, programming around 60 events each year in the many beautiful and historic venues of Ryedale, North Yorkshire. Glynn has performed with singers including Sir Thomas Allen, John Mark Ainsley, Sophie Bevan, Claire Booth, Ian Bostridge, Allan Clayton, Dame Sarah Connolly, Sophie Daneman, Bernarda Fink, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Christiane Karg, Jonas Kaufmann, Dame Felicity Lott, Christopher Maltman, Mark Padmore, Joan Rodgers, Kate Royal, Kathryn Rudge, Bryn Terfel, Sir John Tomlinson, Robin Tritschler, Roderick Williams and Elizabeth Watts among many others. He also appears with many chamber ensembles, choirs including The Sixteen, and instrumentalists such as Rachel Podger, Adrian Brendel, Julian Bliss and Matthew Gee. Glynn read music at New College, Oxford and studied piano with John Streets in France and Malcolm Martineau at the Royal Academy of Music, where he now teaches. His many accolades include the accompaniment prize in the 2001 Kathleen Ferrier Awards and the 2003 Gerald Moore Award. He has made many recordings, and is regularly heard on BBC Radio 3.

Winterreise is one of the greatest, most compelling and intense of all vocal song cycles. For the first of his explorations into the world of art song, Matthew Gee has turned to Schubert's work in this unique arrangement for trombone and piano. English titles are used for the poems to emphasise the fact that text is no longer the primary expressive vehicle here. Instead, it is entrusted to the trombone, an instrument whose vocal qualities and ability to employ glissando, vibrato, portamento and microtonal inflections – allied to the use of various mutes - offers an astonishing array of tonal possibilities.

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Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828) Winterreise ('Winter Journey') (1827) (arr. Matthew Gee, b. 1982)		12 Loneliness213 The Post2	3:45 2:53 2:14 2:48
		15 The Crow 16 Last Hope	1:49 2:04
1 Goodnight	5.45	17 In the Village	2:58
2 The Weather Vane	1:43	18 Stormy Morning	0:51
3 Frozen Tears	2:30 2:50	19 A Mirage	1:18
4 Frozen Solid5 The Linden Tree	2:50 4:27	20 The Signpost	4:10
6 Flood	4:02	21 The Inn	4:12
7 On the River	3:20	22 Courage	1:30
8 Turning Back	2:03	23 Three Suns	2:47
9 Will-o'-the-wisp	2:29	24 The Hurdy-gurdy Man	3:51
10 Rest	3:36	WORLD PREMIERE RECO	RDING

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