



VENABLES

On the Wings of Love • Venetian Songs

Andrew Kennedy, Tenor • Iain Burnside, Piano Richard Hosford, Clarinet



Ian Venables (b. 1955) On the Wings of Love, Op. 38 • Venetian Songs – Love's Voice, Op. 22



Ian Venables was born in Liverpool in 1955 and was educated at Liverpool Collegiate Grammar School. He studied music with Richard Arnell at Trinity College of Music, London and later with Andrew Downes, John Mayer and John Joubert in Birmingham. His compositions encompass many genres, and in particular he has added significantly to the canon of English art-song. Described as '... one of the finest song composers of his generation...', he has written over fifty works in this genre, which includes six major song-cycles, Venetian Songs - Love's Voice, Op. 22 (1995); Invite to Eternity, Op. 31, for tenor and string quartet (1997); Songs of Eternity and Sorrow, Op. 36, for tenor, string quartet and piano (2004); On the Wings of Love, Op. 38, for tenor, clarinet and piano (2006); The Pine Boughs Past Music, Op. 39, for baritone and piano (2009) and Remember This, Op. 40 - A Cantata for soprano, tenor, string quartet, and piano (2010). Other songs for solo voice and piano include, Two Songs, Op. 28 (1997), and Six Songs, Op. 33 (1999-2003), as well as 'A Dramatic Scena' for counter-tenor and piano - At the Court of the poisoned Rose, Op. 20 (1994). His songs have been performed by national and internationally acclaimed artists that include Andrew Kennedy, Roderick Williams, Patricia Rozario, Ian Partridge, Howard Wong, Nathan Vale, Peter Wilman and Nicholas Mulroy. His many chamber works include a Piano Quintet, Op. 27 (1995), described by Roderic Dunnett in the Independent as '...lending a new late twentieth century dimension to the English pastoral...' and a String Quartet, Op. 32 (1998), as well as smaller pieces for solo instruments and piano. He has also written works for choir, Awake, awake, the world is young, Op. 34 (1999), for organ, Rhapsody, Op. 25 (1996), for brass and for solo piano. He is an acknowledged expert on the

nineteenth-century poet and literary critic John Addington Symonds, and apart from having set five of his poems for voice and piano, he has contributed a significant essay to the book *John Addington Symonds – Culture and the Demon Desire* (Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000). He is President of The Arthur Bliss Society, as well as Chairman of the Ivor Gurney Society. His continuing work on the music of Gurney has led to orchestrations of two of his songs (2003), counterparts to the two that were orchestrated by Herbert Howells, and newly edited versions of Gurney's *War Elegy* (1920) and A *Gloucestershire Rhapsody* (1919-1921), with Philip Lancaster. His music is published by Novello and Company Ltd and has been recorded on the Signum, Somm and Regent labels.

The history and development of English song is threaded through the cultural fabric of that country, spanning from the Elizabethan era to the present day, and although it became somewhat 'threadbare' in the eighteenth century, its re-emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century, supported by a musical aesthetic that encouraged its development, has given us a raft of compositions that not only have the power to nourish us spiritually, but also contribute significantly to defining our 'Englishness'. That song-writing is atill important to composers writing in this country is an indicator that the desire to 'sing songs', as Michael Tippett once said, is as strong as ever.

One such composer with that desire is Ian Venables. The writer and reviewer Roderic Dunnett best sums up Venables's contribution to English music, "Every now and then a composer emerges who has a remarkable gift of being able to sum up perfectly the spirit of music of a previous era, and yet draw fresh strength from it to create something invigorating, original and new... [and] he has an enviable ability to direct and shape his musical ideas into powerful and highly expressive statements while at the same time displaying a remarkable gift for melodic and harmonic invention." Like the American composer Ned Rorem, the centrepiece of his creative aesthetic is artsong, an area to which he has contributed significantly and written extensively. In his searching assessment of the composer's songs, the author Colin Scott-Sutherland quotes Venables as saying: "... [that] poetry and music are sister art forms. But I would go further than this and suggest that when a composer's music is in complete accord with the poet's intentions, a transformation takes place that results in an altogether new art form. This new form is called 'art-song' and as such I think it has to be approached on its own terms ... ".

Venables has to date composed over fifty songs and On the Wings of Love are settings by non-English writers. Ionian Song is by the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy. In it he suggests that, in spite of having 'driven them [The Gods] out of their temples', they are nevertheless, still 'watching' over their land. The music moves from being dramatic to poignantly lyrical; the second half of the song attempting to capture the stillness of an August morning,

when, as through a veil, one can almost see Apollo himself crossing over the Arcadian Hills. The Moon Sails Out is an energetic setting of a poem by Federico García Lorca, in a masterly translation by Robert Bly. Draped in Surrealist imagery, it expresses the joy and excitement of an evening spent amidst a moonlit landscape in which daylight has been replaced by a nocturnal world of shadows and dreams. The major theme running through Jean de Sponde's 26 Sonnets d'Amour is that of constancy. The introduction to Sonnet XI creates a mood of tranquillity and peacefulness in which the narrator reflects upon the changing nature of his love. This is evoked in the minimalist figuration of the piano accompaniment. In the second stanza, this serenity is broken as the music gives way to a passionate outpouring of emotion that tries to recapture something of the 'burning love' of youth. After an intoxicating middle section, the song builds to a ff climax, with a dramatic release of tension on the words 'That, loving you, I love without regret'. A return to the reflective mood of the opening is sustained right up until the coda. Here the music grows in affirmation, as the piano accompaniment continues its relentless figure to ffff, slowly decreasing in dynamic intensity as it fades away to a barely audible echo. In his Epitaph, the Emperor Hadrian muses upon the age-old question of what happens to the human spirit after its earthly life is over? Venables has set the words to a simple melody, which is supported by a chorale-like accompaniment and which is also presented both as a prelude for solo clarinet, and a postlude for clarinet and piano. In W. B. Yeats's When you are Old Venables evokes a heightened mood of subdued intensity in anticipation of the opening line. The seemingly simple poetic form in three four-line stanzas belies a subtly changing metre, one that builds in emotional intensity. The cycle was commissioned by Nigel and Gilly Lowson, in celebration of their 25th wedding anniversary.

From Venables's first reading of the poetry of John Addington Symonds, he was confident that he had found what Gerald Finzi described as a 'chosen identification', an empathy borne from a shared philosophical outlook on life and a common conviction about the nature and purpose of artistic endeavour. The first song in the cycle Love's Voice is a setting of a poem entitled Fortunate Isles and its dreamy atmosphere and allusions to water strongly suggests that Venice was the source of its inspiration. Above a rippling piano accompaniment a sensual vocal line plays out a wistful narrative that tells of a remote and sequestered island. The two outer stanzas flank a central one that is both slow moving and more contemplative in character. In The Passing Stranger Symonds's theme is one of disorientation as related by the narrator, who is transported to an imaginary past world. An austere harmonic language full of uncompromising dissonance heightens the power of the vocal line. In The Invitation to the Gondola, Symonds evokes Venice as a 'city seen in dreams', his fervent invitation being proclaimed in the opening stanza. His penumbrous imagery is used skilfully to evoke a highly charged atmosphere in which expectancy and amatory desire coalesce. The poem's six stanzas provided an obvious ternary structure, where, in the outer sections, the rapid piano semi-quavers of the piano accompaniment dominate. By contrast, the mood of the middle two stanzas changes to one of tranquillity. Love's Voice was commissioned by Mr Andrew Milner in 1993 and this poem is a paean to love in which Symonds re-works the Tennysonian message, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all'. The piano's delicately undulating accompaniment captures the shimmering light as it dances upon the water, giving way to a more anguished section, ultimately returning to the principal melodic material

The earliest song in Ian Venables's output is a setting of Harold Monro's poem *Midnight Lamentation*, written when the composer was nineteen. There is a simplicity in its harmonic language that allows the profundity of the poem to be balanced perfectly with the music and it is certainly a powerful interpretation of a profoundly moving poem. In the first of two songs to be recorded here for the first time, Venables sets Alfred Lord Tennyson. *Break, break, break* has a gothic austerity that is matched equally by the power of the music and is a marvellous evocation of the restlessness of the sea. The central section transforms the overall mood, however this is only fleeting, as the dramatic opening material returns to herald in the last verse. The second song, The November Piano, is by the contemporary poet Charles Bennett. Delicate piano tracery underpins a melody of limpid innocence, which becomes slightly more impassioned, before being suspended on its questioning final chord. In Ernest Dowson's poem Vitae Summa Brevis, Venables takes the two-stanza poem and treats it in a strophic manner, adding only occasional variation to the vocal line. Its musical language is suggestive of the sound world found in his earliest song Midnight Lamentation. In contrast Flying Crooked is a witty interpretation of Robert Graves's poem about the cabbage-white butterfly. Its pointillistic and harmonically ambiguous piano writing contrasts the effortless diatonicism of the vocal line. creating a whimsical, if not irreverent setting. Edna St. Vincent Millay's untitled sonnet, given the title At *Midnight*, is an early work, and is a poignant description of one woman's reminiscences on past loves. Its timeless, dream-like quality is created by an insistent rocking figure, and a rich and sensuous harmonic language, which heightens Millay's emotionally charged writing. The Hippo, by the American poet Theodore Roethke is one of the composer's shortest and most delightful songs. This whimsical poem is perfectly matched by the subtlety of the music and by a vocal line that is flexible enough to bring out the poem's humour. However, this humour is understated, and the song's overall mood is reflective, rather than mere parody. In J. A. Symonds's poem At Malvern, Venables has evoked the calm and serenity of Malvern in the 1860s. A limpid piano accompaniment, representative of the Priory bells, underpins this tripartite structure, with the middle section acting as a commentary on the virtues of living life to the full. In the final song, A Kiss, Thomas Hardy contrasts the naïve impulses of an innocent love with love as an eternal theme and in setting its two stanzas. Venables has chosen to create an almost identical sound world for both, with only subtle changes to voice and piano in texture and tessitura.

Graham J Lloyd

Andrew Kennedy



Andrew Kennedy studied at King's College, Cambridge, and the Royal College of Music in London. He was a member of the Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where he performed many solo principal rôles. In 2005 he won the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Rosenblatt Recital Prize He is a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award winner and won the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artists' Award in 2006. He was also a member of BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists Scheme. A busy international artist, he has worked with conductors that include Sir Mark Elder, Sir Colin Davis, Gianandrea Noseda, Sir Roger Norrington, Vladimir Jurowski and Ed Gardner. He gives numerous recitals in Europe and the United Kingdom and appears regularly with the pianists Julius Drake, Roger Vignoles, Jain Burnside and Malcolm Martineau. He made his La Scala début as Tom Rakewell in The Rake's Progress. Other operatic rôles include Belmonte in Die Entführung aus dem Serail, Tamino in Die Zauberflöte and Tito in La clemenza di Tito

lain Burnside



Photo: Adrian Weinbercht

Iain Burnside enjoys a unique reputation as pianist and broadcaster, forged through his commitment to the song repertoire and his collaborations with leading international singers. In recent seasons such artists have included Galina Gorchakova, Ailish Tynan, Lisa Milne, Rebecca Evans, Susan Bickley and Ann Murray, John Mark Ainsley, Mark Padmore and Andrew Kennedy, Roderick Williams and Brvn Terfel. He has a strong association with the Rosenblatt Recital Series. His recording portfolio reflects his passion for British music. Naxos CDs include the complete songs of Gerald Finzi (Ainsley/Williams), together with Vaughan Williams, Ireland and Alwyn. For Signum he has recorded Tippett (Ainsley), Judith Weir (Tynan/ Bickley/Kennedy), F.G. Scott (Milne/Williams) and Herbert Hughes (Tynan). Other acclaimed Signum releases include songs of Beethoven, Liszt and Korngold. Forthcoming CDs feature Richard Rodney Bennett for NMC (Daneman/Bicklev/Williams) and an Irish recital with Ailish Tynan (Signum). Acclaimed as a programmer, Iain Burnside has devised a number of innovative recitals combining music and poetry, presented with huge success in Brussels and Barcelona. At the Guildhall School of Music and Drama he is Research Associate, staging specially conceived programmes with student singers and pianists. He has given master-classes throughout Europe, at New York's Juilliard School and the Banff Centre, Canada.

Richard Hosford



Richard Hosford has a busy career as a soloist and chamber musician, as well as being principal clarinet of the BBC Symphony Orchestra since 1994, having previously been principal clarinet with the London Philharmonic. As a member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe for more than twenty years he toured the world, performing as a soloist with them and recording the Mozart and Copland concertos as well as all the major repertoire for wind ensemble with their Wind Soloists. He has recorded with the chamber ensemble Domus and the Florestan Trio. He is a leading member of the Gaudier Ensemble and has recorded many works for strings and wind with them. In recent years his recordings of the Copland *Concerto* and the Brahms *Trio* have both been rated 'First choice' by BBC Radio 3 Record Review. In 1998 he became a member of the Nash Ensemble. He teaches at the Royal College of Music.

Photo: Keith Saunders

lan Venables (b. 1955) On the Wings of Love, Op. 38 · Venetian Songs – Love's Voice, Op. 22

ON THE WINGS OF LOVE, OP. 38, FOR TENOR, CLARINET AND PIANO

1 Ionian Song

Constantine P. Cavafy (1863–1933) (Translation by George Barbanis Dedicated to Ned Rorem)

Just because we have broken their statues, just because we have driven them out of their temples, the gods did not die because of this at all. O Ionian land, it is you they still love, it is you their souls still remember. When an August morning dawns upon you a vigor from their life moves through your air; and at times an ethereal youthful figure, indistinct, in rapid stride, crosses over your hills.

2 The Moon Sails Out

Federico Garcia Lorca (1898–1936) (Translation by Robert Bly Dedicated to Ian Flint)

When the moon sails out the church bells die away and the paths overgrown with brush appear. When the moon sails out the waters cover the earth and the heart feels it is a little island in the infinite. No one eats oranges under the full moon. The right thing are fruits green and chilled. When the moon sails out with a hundred faces all the same the coins made of silver break out in sobs in the pocket.

3 Sonnet XI

Jean de Sponde (1557–1595) (Translation by Gilbert F. Cunningham Dedicated to Graham Lloyd)

First in my verse, I hitherto have set The burning love in which my passions glow, But now that kinder looks your eyes bestow, All but my constancy I would forget.

Even Love himself, whose spirits help avails me yet, Aware how mortal spirits often go From change to change, now stands amazed to know That, loving you, I love without regret.

Many there are who burn with hot desires, Yet in the end their self-consuming fires To wisps of smoke or scraps of ash will turn.

But in their squalor let such lovers lie; I am well pleased if you consent to learn My fire, till I am dead, will never die.

4 Epitaph

The Emperor Hadrian (76–138 AD) (Translation by Royston Lambert Dedicated to Kenneth Prendergast)

Little spirit, Gentle and Wandering, Companion and guest of the body, In what place will you now abide, Pale, stark and bare, Unable as you used, to play?

5 When you are Old

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) (Dedicated to Gilly Lowson)

When you are old and grey and full of sleep, And nodding by the fire, take down this book, And slowly read, and dream of the soft look, Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep; How many loved your moments of glad grace, And loved your beauty with love false or true, But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you, And loved the sorrows of your changing face; And bending down beside the glowing bars, Murmur, a little sadly, how Love hath fled And paced upon the mountains overhead And his face amid a crowd of stars.

VENETIAN SONGS - LOVE'S VOICE, OP. 22

John Addington Symonds (1840–1893)

6 Fortunate Isles

(Dedicated to Annie and Marc Burnside)

There are islands, there are islands On the ocean's heaving breast Where the honey-scented silence Broods above the halcyon's nest; Where the sands are smooth and golden, And the flowers bloom, one by one, Unbeloved and unbeholden Save by the all-seeing sun. I shall ne'er with friend or lover Wander on from glade to glade Through those forests, or discover Silvery fountains in the shade: But another's foot shall linger Mid the bowers whereof I dream, And perchance a careless finger Strew the roses on the stream; Happier men shall pluck the laurel For the tresses that they love, And the passionate pale coral Wreathe round brows I know not of.

7 The Passing Stranger

(Dedicated to John Pemble)

Of all the mysteries wherethrough we move, This is the most mysterious – that a face, Seen peradventure in some distant place, Whither we can return no more to prove The world – old sanctities of human love, Shall haunt our waking thoughts,

and gathering grace Incorporate itself with every phase Whereby the soul aspires to God above. Thus are we wedded through that face to her Or him who bears it; nay, one fleeting glance, Fraught with a tale too deep for utterance, Even as a pebble cast into the sea, Will on the deep waves of our spirit stir Ripples that run through all eternity.

8 The Invitation to the Gondola

(Dedicated to Joanna Brickell)

Come forth; for Night is falling, The moon hangs round and red On the verge of the violet waters, Fronting the daylight dead.

Come forth; the liquid spaces, Of sea and sky are one, Where outspread angel flame-wings, Brood o'er the buried sun.

Bells call to bells from the islands, And far-off mountains rear Their shadowy crests in the crystal Of cloudless atmosphere.

A breeze from the sea is wafted; Lamp-litten Venice gleams With her towers and domes uplifted Like a city seen in dreams.

Her waterways are a tremble With melody far and wide, Borne from the phantom galleys That o'er the darkness glide.

There are stars in the heaven, and starry Are the wandering lights below; Come forth! for the Night is calling, Sea, city, and sky are aglow!

9 Love's Voice

(Dedicated to Ian Partridge)

Love, felt from afar, long sought, scarce found, On thee I call; Here where with silvery silent sound, The smooth oars fall;

Here where the glimmering water-ways, Above yon stair, Mirror one trembling lamp that plays In twilight air!

What sights, what sounds, O poignant Love Ere thou wert flown, Quivered these darksome waves above, In darkness known!

I dare not dream thereof; the sting Of those dead eyes Is too acute and close a thing For one who dies. Only I feel through glare and gloom, Where yon lamp falls, Dim spectres hurrying to their doom, And love's voice calls:

'Twas better thus toward death to glide, Soul-full of bliss, Than with long life unsatisfied Life's crown to miss.

10 Midnight Lamentation

Harold Monro (1879–1932) adapted by the composer (Dedicated to Graham Lloyd)

When you and I go down Breathless and cold, Our faces both worn back To earthly mould, How lonely we shall be! What shall we do, You without me, I without you?

We are most nearly born Of one same kind; We have the same delight, The same true mind. Must we then part, we part; Is there no way To keep a beating heart, And light of day?

I cannot find a way Through love and through; I cannot reach beyond Body, to you. When you or I must go Down evermore, There'll be no more to say – But a locked door.

11 Break, break, break

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) (Dedicated to Nigel and Gilly Lowson)

Break, break, break, On thy cold gray stones, O Sea! And I would that my tongue could utter The thoughts that arise in me. O well for the fisherman's boy. That he shouts with his sister at play! O well for the sailor lad. That he sings in his boat on the bay! And the stately ships go on To their haven under the hill: But O for the touch of a vanished hand. And the sound of a voice that is still! Break, break, break. At the foot of thy crags, O Sea! But the tender grace of a day that is dead Will never come back to me

12 The November Piano

Charles Bennett (b.1954) (Dedicated to Mary and Nick Turner)

Text in copyright

13 Vitae Summa Brevis

Ernest Dowson (1867–1900) (Dedicated to Graham Lloyd)

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter, Love and desire and hate: I think they have no portion in us after We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses: Out of a misty dream Our path emerges for a while, then closes Within a dream. **H** Flying Crooked Robert Graves (1895–1985)

(Dedicated to Lady Trudy Bliss)

Text in copyright

15 At Midnight

Edna St Vincent Millay (1892–1950) (Dedicated to Joanne Azarnoff)

Text in copyright

16 The Hippo

Theodore Roethke (1908–1963) (Dedicated to Paul and Carol Walshe)

Text in copyright

17 At Malvern

John Addington Symonds (1840–1893) (Dedicated to Marjorie Chater-Hughes)

The winds behind me in the thicket sigh, The bees fly droning on laborious wing, Pink cloudlets scarcely float across the sky, September stillness broods o'er ev'rything. Deep peace is in my soul: I seem to hear Catullus murmuring 'Let us live and love; Suns rise and set and fill the rolling year Which bears us deathward, therefore let us love; Pour forth the wine of kisses, let them flow, And let us drink our fill before we die.' Hush! in the thicket still the breezes blow; Pink cloudlets sail across the sky; The bees warp lazily on laden wing; Beauty and stillness brood o'er ev'rything.

18 A Kiss

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) (Dedicated to Kevin McLean-Mair)

By a wall the stranger now calls his, Was born of old a particular kiss, Without forethought in its genesis; Which in a trice took wing upon the air. And where that spot is nothing shows: There ivy calmly grows, And no one knows What a birth was there!

That kiss is gone where none can tell – Not even those who felt its spell: It cannot die; that know we well. Somewhere it pursues its fight, One of a long procession of sounds Travelling aethereal rounds Far from earth's bounds In the infinite.

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Ian Venables is one of Britain's foremost composers of art-song, and has a significant catalogue of vocal and chamber music to his credit. Writing tonal music in a warm lyric vein, he has a rare gift of being able to 'locate' himself, believably, in a different period and absorb from it, both musically and poetically, all its fundamental beauty, while also producing works of astonishing freshness, naturalness and originality. On the Wings of Love are settings by non-English poets, while Love's Voice sets Venetian poetry by J. A. Symonds. All his songs are sincere expressions of a love of poetry, combined with a profound understanding of musical and poetic tradition.

Ian **VENABLES** (b.1955)

On the Wings of Love, Op. 38	23:15	10 Midnight Lamentation, Op. 6	3:42
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2 The Moon Sails Out	2:34	12 The November Piano,	2:56
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4 Epitaph	2:50	13 Vitae Summa Brevis,	3:24
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Andrew Kennedy, Tenor • Iain Burnside, Piano **Richard Hosford, Clarinet (Tracks 1-5)**

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