

London Philharmonic Orchestra

**ZEMLINSKY**  
**A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY**  
**SIX MAETERLINCK SONGS**

**VLADIMIR JUROWSKI** *conductor*

**PETRA LANG** *mezzo soprano*

**HEIKE WESSELS** *mezzo soprano*

**SERGEY SKOROKHODOV** *tenor*

**ALBERT DOHMEN** *baritone*

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**



## ALEXANDER ZEMLINSKY (1871–1942)

### A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY, Opera in one act, Op. 16

The scandalous success of Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* at its premiere in Dresden in 1905 sent tremors rippling all over Europe. Aside from the musical challenges posed by Strauss's sensationally innovatory score, *Salome* also awoke new interest in the works of Oscar Wilde, on whose play Strauss had based his libretto. Wilde had in effect been a non-person, culturally as well as personally, since his trial for 'gross indecency' in 1895 and his death five years later. All of this had a powerful effect on the 34-year-old Viennese composer Alexander Zemlinsky, whose music – like that of Strauss at the time – was poised between a very lush, very late post-Wagnerian romanticism and the emerging modernism of his slightly younger friend Arnold Schoenberg. Some time later, Zemlinsky came across a new translation of an unfinished verse drama by Wilde, *Eine florentinsche Tragödie* ('A Florentine Tragedy'), and he seems to have realised quickly that it could fulfil a pressing professional and personal need.

Wilde's story tells of a rich 16th-century Florentine merchant, Simone, who returns home to find his young wife Bianca alone with the handsome Guido. Simone rightly suspects an affair, but as he hasn't actually caught the lovers *in flagrante*, and moreover as Guido is the son of the Duke of Florence, Simone cannot challenge him to a duel on the spot. Instead he pretends to treat him as a potential

customer, displaying ever more fabulous fabrics and ornaments, as the cornered Guido is forced to feign interest. Provoked by Guido's tactics, and egged on by Bianca, Guido accepts the challenge to duel, but Simone proves the stronger: discarding his sword, he strangles Guido. Then comes a breathtaking reversal. Ignoring the body of her lover, Bianca turns in admiration to her husband: 'Why didn't you tell me you were so strong?' 'Why didn't you tell me you were so beautiful?' Simone replies, and the curtain falls with husband and wife reconciled – and on one of the most perverse 'happy endings' in theatre.

Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy* offered Zemlinsky the chance he needed to rise to Strauss's challenge. Even the absence of a first scene (the most glaring problem with Wilde's fragmentary text) was an opportunity. To depict love-making on the stage in Vienna in 1916 (the year of the opera's completion) would have been impossible. So like Strauss in *Der Rosenkavalier* (premiered in 1911), Zemlinsky has the orchestra do the job for him in a prelude of searing sexual ardour. As this subsides into a dreamy afterglow, the sumptuous interior of Simone's house, and still more the display of his sumptuous silks and tapestries that follows, is mirrored in music that recalls the lavish textures and glittering colours of Zemlinsky's Viennese contemporary Gustav Klimt. A superbly engineered sense of mounting

unease explodes in the duel scene, but at the end comes a dramatic stroke that is entirely Zemlinsky's own, enhancing the perversity of Wilde's ending: as husband and wife are reconciled, themes from the original 'love-making' prelude are recalled, gorgeously transfigured. Simone finally slips almost effortlessly into his vanquished young rival's role.

If Zemlinsky was hoping for a success to rival Strauss, he was sadly disappointed. As the conductor Otto Klemperer put it, 'Salome was a huge success – then along came Zemlinsky with something similar, but nothing came of it: it was too late.' By the time the opera had its premiere, in Stuttgart 1917, three years of war had deadened the opera-going public's taste for titillating horrors. But half-hidden behind Zemlinsky's desire for success lay a more private agenda. At the turn of the 20th century Zemlinsky had had an intense, but not quite consummated, affair with the talented and powerfully alluring Alma Schindler, daughter of one of Vienna's most celebrated painters, Emil Schindler. But then Alma got to know the more charismatic – and at that time much more successful – Gustav Mahler, and after some initial vacillation, she chose to become the latter's wife. Zemlinsky's feelings of grief and unfulfilled longing resurfaced in work after work. Like Bianca in *A Florentine Tragedy*, Alma had taunted Zemlinsky for his ugliness, and that wound too seems never to have healed.

Then, almost certainly in 1910, Zemlinsky learned of Alma's infidelity with the architect Walter Gropius, the discovery of which had surely hastened Mahler's final decline the following year. When Alma saw the Viennese premiere of *A Florentine Tragedy* she saw herself, Gropius and Mahler in the opera's love triangle, but this time with Mahler avenged. She wrote to Zemlinsky in fury; Zemlinsky's reply rammed home the connection with Alma's own perfidy:

'The treachery of fate drives two people apart ... To bring the two back to reality a terrible catastrophe is called for. This is a real tragedy, because one life has to be sacrificed to save two others. And you, of all people, have failed to understand that?!'

And with a deft one-word tweak to the opera's last line, Zemlinsky delivered the *coup de grace*: 'Why did you not tell me you were so – weak?'

# ZEMLINSKY A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY

## Translation of German libretto

*The scene is a room in the house of a prosperous Florentine merchant. Guido Bardi is kneeling in front of Bianca, their hands entwined. He is smiling up at her when she suddenly gives a start, stands up and breaks free from him. Just at that moment Simone enters by the middle doors. He is wearing travelling clothes. In one hand he carries a sword, while with the other he is dragging a large, heavy pack behind him. He gazes around the room for a moment, then looks expectantly towards Bianca. She goes slowly towards him, her eyes lowered.*

01 Overture

**Simone**

02 My good wife, you come slowly, were it not better to run to meet your lord?

*[Bianca offers him her hand.]*

Here, take my cloak. Take this pack first. 'Tis heavy.

*[She drags his pack to the alcove, then she takes off his hat and cloak, puts everything down and closes the curtains.]*

I have sold nothing.

*[As if only just noticing Guido]*

But who is this? Why, you have here some friend. Some kinsman doubtless, newly returned from foreign lands and fallen upon a house without a host to greet him? I crave your pardon, kinsman. For a house lacking a host is but an empty

thing and void of honour; a cup without its wine, a flowerless garden widowed of the sun.

*[Once more obsequious and friendly]*

Again I crave your pardon, my sweet cousin.

**Bianca** *[darkly]*

This is no kinsman and no cousin neither.

**Simone**

No kinsman, and no cousin! Who is it then who with such courtly grace deigns to accept our hospitalities?

**Guido**

03 My name is Guido Bardi.

**Simone**

What! The son of that great lord of Florence whose dim towers like shadows silvered by the wandering moon I see from out my casement every night! Sir Guido Bardi, you are welcome here, twice welcome. For I trust my honest wife hath not with foolish chatterings wearied you.

**Guido**

Your gracious lady, whose beauty is a lamp that pales the stars, has welcomed me with such sweet courtesies that if it be her pleasure, and your own, I will come often to your simple house. And when your business bids you walk abroad I will sit here and charm her loneliness lest she might sorrow for you overmuch. What say you, good Simone?

**Simone**

My noble lord, I thank you, from my heart's core. It is such things as these that knit a state together, when a Prince so nobly born and of such fair address, comes to an honest burgher's honest home as a most honest friend. And yet, my lord, I fear I am too bold. Some other night we trust that you will come here as a friend, tonight you come to buy my merchandise. Is it not so? Silks, velvets, what you will, I doubt not but I have some dainty wares will woo your fancy.

*[to Bianca, roughly]*

04 Where is my pack? Where is my pack, I say?

*[Bianca fetches the pack from the alcove.]*

Open it, my good wife.

*[Bianca tries to open the pack.]*

Kneel down upon the floor.

*[She does so, opens the pack and searches among the robes and fabrics.]*

You are better so. Nay not that one, the other. Despatch, despatch!

*[Bianca takes a heavy, sumptuous damask robe out of the pack.]*

*[enraptured]* Ay! 'tis that, give it to me; with care. It is most costly.

*[He takes the robe from her hands, holds it with loving gentleness and then spreads it out in front of Guido.]*

And now, my noble lord – nay, pardon, I have here a Lucca damask, the very web of silver and the roses so cunningly wrought that they lack perfume merely to cheat the wanton sense. Touch it my lord. Is it not soft as water, strong as steel? And then the roses! Are they not finely woven? I think the hillsides that best love the rose, at Bellosguardo or at Fiesole, throw no such blossoms on the lap of spring, look closer still. Why in this damask here it is summer always, and no winter's tooth will ever blight these blossoms. For every ell I paid a piece of gold. Red gold, and good, the fruit of careful thrift.

**Guido** *[smiling]*

05 Honest Simone, enough, I pray you. I am well content.

Tomorrow I will send my servant to you, who will pay twice your price.

**Simone**

My generous Prince! I kiss your hands.

*[He tries to kiss Guido's hands, but Guido, smiling, turns away from him towards Bianca. Simone looks at him gravely, suddenly reverting to obsequious friendliness.]*

And now I do remember another treasure hidden in my house which you must see. It is a robe of state; woven by a Venetian: the stuff, cut-velvet: the pattern, pomegranates: each separate seed wrought of a pearl: the collar all of pearls

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY *continued*

as thick as moths in summer streets at night, and whiter than the moons that madmen see through prison bars at morning. A male ruby burns like a lighted coal within the clasp. The Holy Father has not such a stone, nor could the Indies show a brother to it. The brooch itself is of most curious art, Cellini never made a fairer thing to please the great Lorenzo. You must wear it and it will suit you well. Upon one side a slim and horned satyr leaps in gold to catch some nymph of silver. Upon the other stands Silence with a crystal in her hand, no bigger than the smallest ear of corn, that one would say it breathed, or held its breath.

06 Worthy Bianca, would not this noble and most costly robe suit young Lord Guido well? Nay, but entreat him; he will refuse you nothing, though the price be as a prince's ransom. And your profit shall not be less than mine.

### **Bianca**

Am I your prentice?

Why should I chaffer for your velvet robe?

### **Guido**

Nay, fair Bianca, I will buy your robe, and all things that the honest merchant has I will buy also. *[smiling]* Princes must be ransomed, and fortunate are all high lords who fall into the white hands of so fair a foe.

### **Simone**

I stand rebuked. But you will buy my wares? Will you buy them? Fifty thousand crowns would scarce repay me. But

you, my lord, shall have them for forty thousand. Is that price too high? Name your own price. I have a curious fancy to see you in this wonder of the loom amidst the noble ladies of the court, a flower among flowers. They say, my lord, these highborn dames do so affect your Grace! I have heard also of husbands that wear horns, and wear them bravely.

### **Guido** *[annoyed; imperiously]*

Simone, your reckless tongue needs curbing; and besides, you do forget this gracious lady here.

*[He again turns towards Bianca.]*

### **Simone** *[obsequious again]*

True: I had forgotten, nor will offend again. Yet, my sweet lord, you'll buy the robe of state. Will you not buy it?

### **Guido**

Settle this thing tomorrow with my steward and you will have a hundred thousand crowns.

*[Simone seems beside himself with joy.]*

### **Simone** *[animatedly]*

A hundred thousand! Said you a hundred thousand? Ay! From this time forth my house, with everything my house contains is yours, and only yours. A hundred thousand! My brain is dazed. This night shall prove the herald of my love, which is so great that whatsoever you ask it will not be denied you.

### **Guido** *[suddenly struck by an idea, turning towards Simone]*

07 What if I asked for white Bianca here?

*[Simone gives a start, but immediately controls himself and smiles as if at a joke.]*

**Simone**

You jest, my lord, she is not worthy of so great a Prince. She is but made to keep the house and spin. Is it not so, good wife? It is so. *[with increasing earnestness]* Look! Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and spin.

**Bianca** *[displeased]*

What shall I spin?

**Simone**

Oh! Spin some robe which, dyed purple, sorrow might wear for her own comforting: or a dainty sheet which, delicately perfumed with sweet herbs, might serve to wrap a dead man. Spin what you will; I care not, I.

**Bianca** *[soberly]*

The brittle thread is broken, the dull wheel wearies of its ceaseless round, the dull distaff sickens of its load; I will not spin tonight.

**Simone** *[peremptorily, but calmly]*

Tomorrow you shall spin, and every day shall find you at your distaff.

*[Visibly excited, he goes to the window and stays there for some time, lost in thought. Guido has turned Bianca round and is calming her. Simone turns back again, looks sadly at Bianca, then comes forward, sits down beside Guido and begins to*

*chatter harmlessly again.]*

08

And now, my lord, what news abroad? I heard today at Pisa that certain of the English merchants there would sell their woollens at a lower rate than the just laws allow, *[increasingly agitated]* and have entreated the Signory to hear them. Is this well? And should the stranger living in our land seek by enforced privilege or craft to rob us of our profits?

**Guido** *[with a bored smile]*

What should I do? Wool selling is for you. *[with a meaningful smile]* My wits have other quarries.

**Bianca**

Noble lord, I pray you pardon my good husband here, his soul stands ever in the market-place, and his heart beats but at the price of wool. Yet he is honest in his common way.

*[to Simone]* And you, have you no shame? A gracious Prince comes to our house, and you must weary him with most misplaced assurance.

**Simone** *[remorsefully]*

I ask it humbly. We will talk tonight of other things. *[animated again]* I hear the Holy Father has sent a letter to the King of France bidding him cross the Alps, and make a peace in Italy, which will be worse than war of brothers.

**Guido**

What are these things to me? There are other things closer, and of more import, good Simone.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY *continued*

**Simone** [*seriously and thoughtfully*]

Is it so then? Is all this mighty world narrowed into the confines of this room [*softly, increasingly lost in thought*] with but three souls for poor inhabitants?

[*seriously, half to himself*] Let this mean room be as that mighty stage whereon kings die, and our ignoble lives become the stakes God plays for.

[*He heaves himself wearily out of his chair.*]

I do not know why I speak thus. My ride has wearied me. And my horse stumbled thrice, which is an omen that bodes not good to any.

[*He goes to the back, bundles his pack together and carries it into the next room.*]

**Bianca** [*quickly and softly to Guido*]

09 How like a common chapman does he speak!

I hate him, soul and body. Cowardice has set her pale seal on his brow. His hands whiter than poplar leaves in windy springs, shake with some palsy; and his stammering mouth blurts out a foolish froth of empty words like water from a conduit.

**Guido** [*softly*]

Bianca, he is not worthy of your thought or mine. The man is but a very honest knave selling most dear what he must hold most cheap.

**Bianca** [*softly and bitterly*]

Oh, would that Death might take him where he stands!

[*Simone has re-entered on Bianca's last words.*]

**Simone** [*vehemently*]

Who spake of Death? Let no one speak of Death. [*calm and smiling again*] What should Death do in such a merry house, with but a wife, a husband, and a friend to give it greeting? Let Death go to houses where there are vile, adulterous things, chaste wives who grow weary of their noble lords, draw back the curtains of their marriage beds, and in polluted and dishonoured sheets feed some unlawful lust. [*calmly cordial*] Ah! 'tis so strange, and yet so. You do not know the world. You are too single and too honourable. I know it well. And would it were not so. But wisdom comes with winters. My hair grows grey, and youth has left my body.

[*His dejected tone suddenly becomes effusive and lively.*]

10 Enough of that. Tonight is ripe for pleasure, and indeed, I would be merry, as beseems a host who finds a gracious and unlooked-for guest waiting to greet him.

[*He notices the lute.*]

But what is this, my lord? [*taking it*] Why, you have brought a lute to play to us. Oh! play, sweet Prince. And, if I am bold, pardon, but play.

**Guido**

I will not play tonight. Some other night, Simone.

*[softly to Bianca]*

You and I together, with no listeners but the stars, or the more jealous moon.

**Simone** *[obviously fascinated by the sight of the lute]*

Nay, but my lord! *[offering the lute to Guido]* Nay, but I do beseech you. For I have heard that by the simple fingering of a string, or delicate breath breathed along hollowed reeds, or blown into cold mouths of cunning bronze, those who are curious in this art can draw poor souls from prison-houses. I have heard also how such strange magic lurks within these shells and innocence puts vine-leaves in her hair and wantons like a mænad. Let that pass. Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore play: ravish my ears with some sweet melody; my soul is in a prison-house, and needs music to cure its madness.

**Guido** *[with a friendly, sympathetic smile]*

Honest Simone, some other night. Tonight I am content with the low music of Bianca's voice, who, when she speaks, charms the too amorous air, and makes the reeling earth stand still, or fix his cycle round her beauty.

**Simone**

You flatter her. She has her virtues as most women have, but beauty is a gem she may not wear. It is better so, perchance. Well, my dear lord, if you will not draw melodies from your lute to charm my moody and o'er-troubled soul you'll drink with me at least?

*[gesturing to the laid table]*

Your place is laid. Fetch me a stool, Bianca. Close the shutters. Set the great bar across.

*[Bianca puts a third stool at the table, closes both windows and draws the curtains.]*

I would not have the curious world with its small prying eyes to peer upon our pleasure. Now, my lord, give us a toast from a full brimming cup.

*[He starts back.]*

**11** What is this stain upon the cloth? It looks as purple as a wound upon Christ's side. Wine merely is it? I have heard it said when wine is spilt blood is spilt also, but that's a foolish tale.

*[He controls himself, gestures to Bianca and Guido to sit, and fills the glasses.]*

My lord, I trust my grape is to your liking? The wine of Naples is fiery like its mountains.

**Guido** *[taking hold of the glass]*

I like it well, honest Simone, and, with your good leave, will toast the fair Bianca *[effusively]* when her lips have like red rose-leaves floated on this cup and left its vintage sweeter.

*[He passes her the glass.]*

Taste, Bianca.

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY *continued*

*[Bianca sips from the glass while looking at Guido. He then takes the glass from her hand and drinks deeply from it.]*

*[enraptured]* Oh, all the honey of Hyblean bees, matched with this draught were bitter!

*[He takes another drink.]*

*[Simone, who has been watching in growing agitation, jumps up and moves away from the table.]*

*[displeased]* Good Simone, you do not share the feast.

**Simone** *[sombrely]*

It is strange, my lord, I cannot eat or drink with you tonight. Some humour, or some fever in my blood at other seasons temperate, or some thought that like an adder creeps from cell to cell, poisons my palate and makes appetite a loathing, not a longing.

*[He opens the door to the garden, as if for air, then goes out into the garden, which can be seen in the light of the full moon. Bianca and Guido are downcast, and sit in silence for a time.]*

**Guido** *[rising]*

12 Sweet Bianca, this common chapman wearies me with words. I must go hence. Tomorrow I will come. Tell me the hour.

**Bianca** *[also rising]*

Come with the youngest dawn! Until I see you all my life is vain.

**Guido**

Ah! loose the falling midnight of your hair, and in those stars, your eyes, let me behold mine image, as in mirrors. Dear Bianca, though it be but a shadow, keep me there, nor gaze at anything that does not show some symbol of my semblance. I am jealous of what your vision feasts on.

**Bianca** *[with utmost expressiveness]*

Oh! be sure your image will be with me always. Dear, love can translate the very meanest thing into a sign of sweet remembrances. But come before the lark with its shrill song has waked a world of dreamers. *[softly, expressively]* I will stand upon the balcony.

**Guido** *[in a whisper]*

And by a ladder wrought out of scarlet silk and sewn with pearls will come to meet me. White foot after foot, like snow upon a rose-tree.

*[He kisses her long on the mouth.]*

**Bianca** *[She frees herself from his embrace.]*

You know that I am yours for love or death.

*[She gives him her hands and gazes at him tenderly for a long time. Simone comes back from the garden, stands for a moment on the threshold and looks gravely and sadly at the two.]*

**Guido**

13 Simone, I must go to mine house.

**Simone**

So soon? Why should you? The great Duomo's bell has not yet tolled its midnight, stay awhile.

I fear we may not see you here again.

**Guido** *[smiling at Bianca]*

Be not afraid, Simone, I will stand most constant in my friendship.

**Simone**

Well, well, so be it. Good night, my lord. Fetch a pine torch, Bianca.

*[Bianca goes into the garden to get the torch.]*

The old staircase is full of pitfalls, and the churlish moon grows, like a miser, niggard of her beams, and hides her face behind a muslin mask as harlots do when they go forth to snare some wretched soul in sin. Now, I will get your cloak and sword. Nay, pardon, my good lord, it is but meet that I should wait on you who have so honoured my poor burgher's house, drunk of wine ...

*[At this point Bianca returns with a flaming torch, which she fixes to a ring by the door.]*

... and broken bread, and made yourself a sweet familiar. Oftentimes my wife and I will talk of this fair night and its great issues.

*[Simone goes to the alcove to get Guido's sword. He takes the sword from the chair and examines it closely.]*

**14**

Why, what a sword is this! Ferrara's temper, pliant as a snake, and deadlier, I doubt not. With such steel one need fear nothing in the moil of life. I never touched so delicate a blade. I have a sword too, somewhat rusted now. We men of peace are taught humility. Yet I remember how once upon the road to Padua a robber sought to take my pack-horse from me, I slit his throat and left him. *[increasingly threatening]* I can bear dishonour, public insult, many shames, shrill scorn, and open contumely, but he who filches from me something that is mine, ay! though it be the meanest trencher-plate from which I feed mine appetite – oh! he perils his soul and body in the theft and dies.

**Guido** *[suddenly grave]*

Why do you speak like this?

**Simone**

I wonder, my lord Guido, if my sword is better tempered than this steel of yours? Shall we make trial? Or is my state too low for you to cross your rapier against mine, in jest, or earnest?

**Guido**

Naught would please me better than to stand fronting you with naked blade in jest, or earnest. Give me mine own sword.

*[Simone, who has been looking at him as if paralysed, now hands him the sword.]*

## A FLORENTINE TRAGEDY *continued*

Fetch yours. Tonight will settle the great issue of whether the Prince's or the merchant's steel is better tempered. Was not that your word? Fetch your own sword. Why do you tarry, sir?

**Simone** *[as if awakening from a trance]*

15 Bianca, fetch my sword.

*[Bianca runs to fetch Simone's sword. He pushes the table and chairs aside.]*

Thrust back that stool and table. *[smiling cordially again]*  
Good Bianca here shall hold the torch lest what is but a jest grow serious.

**Bianca** *[to Guido, softly and quickly]*

Oh! Kill him, kill him!

**Simone** *[now quite earnest]*

Hold the torch, Bianca.

*[Bianca takes the torch and stands behind Guido. Simone and Guido take up position. The stage is now lit only by the shimmering blood-red torch and the candles, which are almost completely burned down. Guido attacks with force and passion. Simone parries coolly and expertly.]*

*[almost speaking]* Have at you! Ah! Ha! would you?

*[Guido lunges again and wounds Simone.]*

A scratch, no more. The torch was in mine eyes.

*[He pulls up his sleeve and examines the wound.]*

Do not look sad, Bianca. It is nothing. Your husband bleeds, 'tis nothing. Take a cloth, bind it about mine arm.

*[Bianca binds his wound with her handkerchief. He winces at the pain.]*

Nay, not so tight. More softly, my good wife. And be not sad, I pray you be not sad. No: take it off. What matter if I bleed?

*[He tears the bandage off.]*

Again! Again!

*[They begin to fight again. Simone slips Guido's sword from his grasp and disarms him.]*

My gentle lord, you see that I was right. My sword is better tempered, finer steel,

*[throwing his own sword aside]*  
but let us match our daggers.

**Bianca** *[passionately, to Guido]*

Kill him! Kill him!

**Simone**

Put out the torch, Bianca.

*[Bianca puts the torch out on the ground. It is completely dark.]*

Now, my good lord, now to the death of one, or both of us, or all the three it may be.

*[They attack one another with drawn daggers.]*

There and there. Ah, devil! Do I hold thee in my grip?

*[Simone overpowers Guido, throws him to the ground and, kneeling on his chest, grasps him round the neck with both hands.]*

**Guido**

16 Fool! Take your strangling fingers from my throat. I am my father's only son.

**Simone**

Hush! Your father when he is childless will be happier.

**Guido** *[with increasing horror, in a strangled tone]*

Take off your hands. Take off your damned hands. Loose me, I say!

**Simone**

Nay, you are caught in such a cunning vice that nothing will avail you, and your life narrowed into a single point of shame ends with that shame and ends most shamefully.

**Guido**

Oh! Help me, sweet Bianca! Help me, Bianca, thou knowest I am innocent.

**Simone**

What, is there life yet in those lying lips? Die like a dog with lolling tongue! Die! Die! *[with vehemence]* And the dumb river shall receive your corpse and wash it all unheeded to the sea.

*[He lets go of him and Guido falls back.]*

**Guido**

Lord Christ receive my wretched soul tonight!

*[He dies.]*

**Simone**

Amen to that.

17 Now for the other.

*[He stands up slowly, without looking round. When the fight with daggers began Bianca was standing by in a state of fear and excitement, watching Guido expectantly, but as the fight progressed she moved back unconcernedly to the doors. She has opened the curtain and doors so that the light of the full moon shines across the stage. She is standing at the threshold, watching Simone with growing enchantment. Now she walks towards him, as if dazed in wonder.]*

**Bianca** *[tenderly passionate]*

Why did you not tell me you were so strong?

**Simone** *[his infinite astonishment turning into wonder at her beauty]*

Why did you not tell me you were so beautiful?

*[He stretches his arms out to her. Bianca sinks to her knees in front of him and he kisses her on the mouth.]*

*Libretto by Max Meyerfeld after the play by Oscar Wilde.*

*English translation by Edward Downes.*

*Reproduced by arrangement with Universal Edition A.G. Wien.*

## ALEXANDER ZEMLINSKY

### SIX MAETERLINCK SONGS, Op. 13

- 1 *Die drei Schwestern (The Three Sisters)*
- 2 *Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen (The Maidens with Bound Eyes)*
- 3 *Lied der Jungfrau (Song of the Virgin)*
- 4 *Als ihr Geliebter schied (When her lover went away)*
- 5 *Und kehrt er einst heim (And should he return one day)*
- 6 *Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen (She came towards the castle)*

'My God, how beautiful it all is!' That was the composer and conductor Anton Webern's reaction to the fifth of these songs, 'Und kehrt er einst heim', in a letter to the composer; 'the passage, "Say, for fear lest he weep, that I smiled." Indescribable.' Did Webern realise that he'd touched a tender nerve – probably the very place where this sensitive, secretive composer felt most vulnerable? As in *A Florentine Tragedy*, begun five years later, we find Zemlinsky attempting to work through his feelings of grief at the loss of the woman he adored, Alma Schindler. It was to be a lifelong preoccupation. The exquisitely poignant ending of Zemlinsky's great *Lyric Symphony* (1923) deals with two lovers parting for the last time. And in these *Six Maeterlinck Songs*, all written in 1910, emotional betrayal and loss feature increasingly. Even the hymn-like 'Lied der Jungfrau' has an expressively telling moment at the phrase,

'Verirrt sich die Liebe' ('If love goes astray'); and the personal element becomes increasingly clear in the last three songs.

The date of composition has intensely personal significance. It was in the summer of 1910 that Mahler had discovered Alma's affair with the architect Walter Gropius, and the last three of Zemlinsky's *Six Maeterlinck Songs* present compelling evidence that the news reached him soon afterwards. In 'Und kehrt er einst heim' a woman leaves her husband, but not before instructing her maid on how to break the news to him. When Alma re-established contact with Zemlinsky in 1913, telling him how much she'd enjoyed the songs, Zemlinsky told her to 'take a good look' at this song. But if he felt any *Schadenfreude* towards Mahler, his once-successful rival, the music reveals none of it. Instead we have only exquisite tenderness, mingled with sadness at the husband's irretrievable loss. In the previous song, No. 4, 'Als ihr Geliebter schied', it is the woman who is betrayed, finally throwing herself to her death from a tower window. But the theme of betrayal and loss resurfaces in 'Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen'. The old king watches powerlessly as his much younger wife leaves him, in the arms of a mysterious lover. The use of the feminine pronoun 'sie' to describe the lover suggests a woman, but this is a direct translation of the much more ambiguous 'elle' in Maeterlinck's French original – could it be death, 'la mort',

that terrifies the knights and silences the women? Whatever the case, the king's repeated anguished question, 'Wohin gehst du?' ('Where are you going?'), is left unanswered.

*Programme notes © Stephen Johnson*

### **1. Die drei Schwestern**

Die drei Schwestern wollten sterben,  
Setzten auf die güldnen Kronen,  
Gingen sich den Tod zu holen.

Wähnten ihn im Walde wohnen.  
„Wald, so gib uns, dass wir sterben,  
Sollst drei güldne Kronen ererben.“

Da begann der Wald zu lachen,  
Und mit einem Dutzend Küssen  
Liess er sie die Zukunft wissen.

Die drei Schwestern wollten sterben,  
Wähnten Tod im Meer zu finden,  
Pilgerten drei Jahre lang.

„Meer, so gib uns, dass wir sterben,  
Sollst drei güldne Kronen ererben.“  
Da begann das Meer zu weinen,

Liess mit dreimal hundert Küssen  
Die Vergangenheit sie wissen.

### **The Three Sisters**

The three sisters were fain to die,  
put on their crowns of gold,  
went in search of death,

thought to find him in the forest.  
'Forest, shouldst thou grant us death,  
thou shalt inherit three golden crowns.'

At that the forest began to laugh  
and with a dozen kisses  
let them know the future.

The three sisters were fain to die,  
thought to find death at sea,  
journeyed three long years.

'Sea, shouldst thou grant us death,  
thou shalt inherit three golden crowns.'  
At that the sea began to weep,

and with three times one hundred kisses  
let them know the past.

## SIX MAETERLINCK SONGS *continued*

Die drei Schwestern wollten sterben,  
Lenkten nach der Stadt die Schritte,  
Lag auf einer Insel Mitte.

„Stadt, so gib uns, dass wir sterben,  
Sollst drei güldne Kronen ererben.“

Und die Stadt tat auf die Tore  
Und mit heißen Liebesküssen  
Liess die Gegenwart sie wissen.

### **2. Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen**

Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen  
(Tut ab die goldenen Binden!)  
Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen  
Wollten ihr Schicksal finden.

Haben zur Mittagsstunde  
(Lasst an die goldenen Binden!)  
Haben zur Mittagsstunde  
Das Schloss geöffnet im Wiesengrunde,

Haben das Leben gegrüsst,  
(Zieht fester die goldenen Binden!)  
Haben das Leben gegrüsst,  
Ohne hinaus zu finden.

Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen  
Wollten ihr Schicksal finden.

The three sisters were fain to die,  
turned their steps towards the city  
lying mid an island.

‘City, shouldst thou grant us death,  
thou shalt inherit three golden crowns.’

And the city opened its gates  
and with passionate kisses of love  
let them know the present.

### **The Maidens with Bound Eyes**

The maidens with bound eyes  
(take off the golden blindfolds!)  
the maidens with bound eyes  
wished to meet their destiny.

At stroke of noon  
(leave on the golden blindfolds!)  
at stroke of noon  
they opened the castle on the grassy plain,

they greeted life,  
(make tighter the golden blindfolds!)  
they greeted life,  
yet did not find their way out.

The maidens with bound eyes  
wished to meet their destiny.

### **3. Lied der Jungfrau**

Allen weinenden Seelen,  
Aller nahenden Schuld  
Öffn' ich im Sternenkränze  
Meine Hände voll Huld.

Alle Schuld wird zunichte  
Vor der Liebe Gebet,  
Keine Seele kann sterben,  
Die weinend gefleht.

Verirrt sich die Liebe  
Auf irdischer Flur,  
So weisen die Tränen  
Zu mir ihre Spur.

### **4. Als ihr Geliebter schied**

Als ihr Geliebter schied  
(Ich hörte die Türe gehn)  
Als ihr Geliebter schied,  
Da hab ich sie weinen gesehn.

Doch als er wieder kam  
(Ich hörte des Lichtes Schein)  
Doch als er wieder kam,  
War ein anderer daheim.

Und ich sah den Tod  
(Mich streifte sein Hauch)

### **Song of the Virgin**

To all weeping souls,  
all sinners who approach,  
haloed by stars  
I open my arms, full of grace.

All sin will perish  
before love's prayer,  
no soul can die  
which, weeping, repents.

If love goes astray  
on earthly plains,  
then tears will show me  
whither it has gone.

### **When her lover went away**

When her lover went away  
(I heard the door close)  
when her lover went away  
I saw her weeping.

Yet when he returned  
(I heard the light of the lamp)  
yet when he returned  
another was at home.

And I saw death  
(his breath touched me lightly)

## SIX MAETERLINCK SONGS *continued*

Und ich sah den Tod,  
Der erwartet ihn auch.

### **5. Und kehrt er einst heim**

Und kehrt er einst heim,  
Was sag ich ihm dann?  
– Sag, ich hätte geharrt,  
Bis das Leben verrann.

Wenn er weiter fragt  
Und erkennt mich nicht gleich?  
– Sprich als Schwester zu ihm;  
Er leidet vielleicht.

Wenn er fragt, wo du seist,  
Was geb ich ihm an?  
– Mein Goldring gib  
Und sieh ihn stumm an ...

Will er wissen, warum  
So verlassen das Haus?  
– Zeig die offene Tür,  
Sag, das Licht ging aus.

Wenn er weiter fragt  
Nach der letzten Stund’?  
– Sag, aus Furcht, dass er weint,  
Lächelte mein Mund.

and I saw death  
awaiting him also.

### **And should he return one day**

And should he return one day,  
what am I to tell him?  
– Tell him, I waited  
till my life ebbed away.

If he asks further  
without knowing me straight?  
– Speak to him as a sister;  
perhaps he is suffering.

If he asks where you are,  
how should I answer?  
– Give him my golden ring  
and say not a word ...

Should he want to know why  
the house is so desolate?  
– Show him the open door,  
say the light was blown out.

If he asks further,  
about your last moment?  
– Say, for fear lest he weep,  
that I smiled.

## 6. Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen

Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen,  
Die Sonne erhob sich kaum.  
Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen,  
Die Ritter blickten mit Bangen  
Und es schwiegen die Frauen.

Sie blieb vor der Pforte stehen,  
Die Sonne erhob sich kaum.  
Sie blieb vor der Pforte stehen,  
Man hörte die Königin gehen  
Und der König fragte sie:

Wohin gehst du? Wohin gehst du?  
Gib acht in dem Dämmerchein!  
Wohin gehst du? Wohin gehst du?  
Harrt drunten jemand dein?  
Sie sagte nicht ja noch nein.

Sie stieg zur Fremden hernieder  
Gib acht in dem Dämmerchein.  
Sie stieg zu der Fremden hernieder,  
Sie schloss sie in ihre Arme ein.  
Die beiden sagten nicht ein Wort  
Und gingen eilends fort.

*Poems by Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949).*

© Copyright 1914 by Universal Edition A.G., Wien/UE 5540.  
Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

## She came towards the castle

She came towards the castle  
– the sun was hardly risen –  
she came towards the castle,  
the knights watched uneasily  
and the women grew silent.

She stopped before the gate  
– the sun was hardly risen –  
she stopped before the gate,  
the queen's footsteps were heard  
and the king asked her:

Where are you going? Where are you going?  
– Take heed, it is not yet quite light! –  
Where are you going? Where are you going?  
Does someone await you down there?  
She answered neither yes nor no.

She climbed down to the stranger  
– take heed, it is not yet quite light –  
she climbed down to the stranger,  
she embraced her tightly.  
Neither spoke a word  
and they hurried away.

*Translations by Mari Pračkauskas*

© and reproduced by kind permission of Decca Music Group Limited.

## VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*

© Chris Christodoulou



One of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment, Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow in 1972 and studied at the Music Academies of Dresden and Berlin. In 1995 he made his international debut at the Wexford Festival conducting

Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*, and the same year saw his debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with *Nabucco*.

Vladimir Jurowski was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003, becoming the Orchestra's Principal Conductor in September 2007. He also holds the titles of Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra. He has previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister of the Komische Oper Berlin (1997–2001), Principal Guest Conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna (2000–03), Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra (2005–09), and Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera (2001–13).

Vladimir Jurowski is a regular guest with many leading orchestras in both Europe and North America, including the Berlin, Vienna and St Petersburg Philharmonic orchestras; the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; The Philadelphia Orchestra; the Boston, San Francisco, Chicago and Bavarian Radio symphony orchestras; and the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden and Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

His opera engagements have included *Rigoletto*, *Jenůfa*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; *Parsifal* and *Wozzeck* at Welsh National Opera; *War and Peace* at the Opéra national de Paris; *Eugene Onegin* at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan; *Ruslan and Ludmila* at the Bolshoi Theatre; *Iolanta* and *Der Teufel von Loudon* at the Dresden Semperoper; and numerous operas at Glyndebourne including *Otello*, *Macbeth*, *Falstaff*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Peter Eötvös's *Love and Other Demons*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

## HEIKE WESSELS

*mezzo soprano (Bianca)*

German mezzo soprano Heike Wessels studied at the Folkwang-Hochschule Essen and the Conservatoire National de Strasbourg, later taking masterclasses with Brigitte Fassbaender, Thomas Hampson and Dame Gwyneth Jones.

She has won prizes in several singing competitions including the Alexander Girardi Competition in Coburg (2003) and the GEDOK-Liedwettbewerb in Wuppertal (2006). She also received a scholarship from the International Wagner Association in 2003. In 2006, Heike Wessels won the 5th International Competition for Young Wagnerian Voices, the finals of which were held at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. She has appeared in guest engagements at the Wuppertaler Bühnen, Staatsoper Berlin, Staatstheater Braunschweig, Opernhaus Bonn and Staatstheater Wiesbaden.

In 2008 Heike Wessels joined the Ensemble of the Nationaltheater in Mannheim, where she has appeared as Magdalene in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Brangäne in *Tristan und Isolde*, Ulrica in *Un ballo in maschera*, Gertrud in *Hansel and Gretel*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, and both Fricka and Waltraute in the *Ring Cycle*.

## SERGEY SKOROKHODOV

*tenor (Guido Bardi)*

Born in St Petersburg, Sergey Skorokhodov studied at the Glinka Choral School in St Petersburg and the St Petersburg State Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatoire. He made his debut at the Mariinsky Theatre in 1999 as Guido Bardi in Zemlinsky's *A Florentine Tragedy*. Since 2007, he has been one of the Mariinsky Theatre's leading tenors.

He has appeared as Vaudémont in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* both at Welsh National Opera under Valery Gergiev and on tour in Europe with Anna Netrebko in the title role, as well as with the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under Sir Antonio Pappano, and at the Dallas Opera.

Other appearances include Giasone in *Medea* in Valencia; Grigory Otrepyev in *Boris Godunov* and Froh in *Das Rheingold* at the Bavarian State Opera; Bacchus in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Ivan in *The Nose* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; Alfredo in *La traviata* in Berlin; Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* in Bologna; Erik in *Der fliegende Holländer* in Düsseldorf; Ismaele in *Nabucco* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago; and Rachmaninoff's *The Bells* in London and at the Edinburgh Festival with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Vladimir Jurowski.

## ALBERT DOHMEN

*baritone (Simone)*

Albert Dohmen has enjoyed a long international career, during which he has worked with conductors including Zubin Mehta, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Claudio Abbado, Lorin Maazel, James Levine, Kurt Masur, Christian Thielemann and many others. He has sung all the major bass/baritone roles including Kurwenal, Pizarro, Amfortas, Holländer, Scarpia, Bluebeard, and Hans Sachs at the world's major opera houses.

Dohmen is one of the leading Wotan singers of his generation. He has sung the role in complete *Ring* Cycles at the Deutsche Oper Berlin; the Vienna State Opera; De Nederlandse Opera; The Metropolitan Opera; and the Bayreuth Festival. Highlights of the past few years include role debuts as Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*) in Geneva, Barak (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) in Florence, King Heinrich (*Lohengrin*) at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Falstaff in Stuttgart.

Albert Dohmen is also a successful concert singer. He has sung the entire bass repertoire, from Bach to Schoenberg, in all the world's major concert halls. He has recorded numerous discs, including the *Ring* Cycle at the Vienna State Opera under Christian Thielemann and three recordings under Sir Georg Solti (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Fidelio* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*).

## PETRA LANG

*mezzo soprano*

Frankfurt-born Petra Lang studied violin and singing in Darmstadt and Mainz. She later joined the opera studio of the Bavarian State Opera and then quickly established herself with the major international opera companies.

Early in her career she turned to the music of Wagner and she has since become one of the most sought-after singers in this repertoire. She is known for her outstanding interpretations of roles such as Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*), Ortrud (*Lohengrin*), Kundry (*Parsifal*), Venus (*Tannhäuser*), Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*) and Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*), which she has sung on international stages including the Bayreuth Festival; La Scala, Milan; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; and the Munich, Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, Amsterdam, Chicago and San Francisco operas. Her vast repertoire also includes such roles as Judith (*Bluebeard's Castle*), Marie (*Wozzeck*) and Strauss's Ariadne, as well as the vocal works of composers such as Mahler and Zemlinsky.

In addition to appearing in recital at Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw, La Scala, the Salle Pleyel and Carnegie Hall, Petra Lang gives masterclasses worldwide. She has won numerous awards including two Grammys for her *Cassandra* on the LSO Live recording of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*.

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is known as one of the world's great orchestras with a reputation secured by its performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, its trail-blazing international tours and its pioneering education work. Distinguished conductors who have held positions with the Orchestra since its foundation in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham include Sir Adrian Boult, Sir John Pritchard, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Franz Welser-Möst and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003 and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been Resident Symphony Orchestra at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall since 1992 and there it presents its main series of

concerts between September and May each year. In summer, the Orchestra moves to Sussex where it has been Resident at Glyndebourne Festival Opera for 50 years. The Orchestra also performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous tours to America, Europe and Japan, and visited India, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Australia, South Africa and Abu Dhabi.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. [lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)



**ALEXANDER ZEMLINSKY (1871–1942)**

01–17 **54:37**

**Eine florentinische Tragödie (A Florentine Tragedy), Op. 16**

Opera in one act based on Oscar Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy*

**HEIKE WESSELS** *mezzo soprano (Bianca)*

**SERGEY SKOROKHODOV** *tenor (Guido Bardi)*

**ALBERT DOHMEN** *baritone (Simone)*

**19:35**

**Six Maeterlinck Songs, Op. 13**

- |    |      |   |
|----|------|---|
| 18 | 4:02 | Die drei Schwestern (The Three Sisters)                             |
| 19 | 2:51 | Die Mädchen mit den verbundenen Augen (The Maidens with Bound Eyes) |
| 20 | 2:14 | Lied der Jungfrau (Song of the Virgin)                              |
| 21 | 1:59 | Als ihr Geliebter schied (When her lover went away)                 |
| 22 | 3:11 | Und kehrt er einst heim (And should he return one day)              |
| 23 | 5:18 | Sie kam zum Schloss gegangen (She came towards the castle)          |

**PETRA LANG** *mezzo soprano*

**VLADIMIR JUROWSKI** *conductor*

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

**Pieter Schoeman** *leader*

*Recorded live at* **SOUTHBANK CENTRE'S ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, London**