2012

Wexford Festival Opera, William Vincent Wallace Bicentenary Recitals

Una Hunt
DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, una.hunt@tudublin.ie

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William Vincent Wallace Bicentenary Recitals Programme (Wexford Festival Opera, October-November 2012)

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Concert | William V Wallace Recital

24 October–4 November, 2012
William V Wallace Recital

Thursday 25 October | 15:30
Friday 2 November | 11:00

WILLIAM VINCENT WALLACE (1812–1865)

Songs and piano music from the William Vincent Wallace Album
Máire Flavin (Mezzo-soprano, 25 October) | Rachel Kelly (Mezzo-soprano, 2 November)
Una Hunt (Piano)

Salon dances
Valse Gracieuse: La Pluie d’Or
Schottisch: The Village Festival

Song
Orange Flowers (Romance)
Celtic Fantasy
The Harp that Once and Fly not Yet

Four canzonets — The Seasons
Spring – The joyful, joyful Spring
Summer – It is the happy Summer time
Autumn – The leaves are turning red
Winter – The Spring and Summer both are past

Piano solo
’Tis the Harp in the Air (romance – Souvenir de Maritana)
Invitation Polka

Song
Say my Heart, can this be Love

Opera excerpt from Maritana
How Dreary to my Heart – Scenes that are Brightest

On the cover: Images reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland (call number MU-vc-34)
A unique recital of drawing room music and opera favourites celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Irish composer, William Vincent Wallace (1812–1865). Wallace was one of the most extraordinary musical personalities of the nineteenth century – not only a composer, but a virtuoso on two instruments (piano and violin) and a global traveller. He visited parts of the world that no other Irish musician had set foot in and widened his sphere of influence by establishing a music school in Sydney, Australia where he is still regarded as the first great instrumentalist to visit that continent. From here he blazed a trail through South America where he was maestro to a season of Italian opera in Mexico City. A new career began as impresario before his return to London where his own first opera, Maritana, was an outstanding success. He was then just thirty-three years old and had already had enough experiences to fill several lifetimes! Tales of his adventures and escapades certainly helped to promote the popularity of his publications, particularly of his salon music.

Wallace had great success as a composer of drawing room music in America. His publisher in New York, William Hall and Son, produced a particularly fine collection of Wallace’s music in 1854, an original copy of which is now in the collections at the National Library of Ireland. A limited edition facsimile of the album, plus a CD has been published this year to commemorate the composer’s bicentenary. The album’s popularity was assured when it was advertised as a ‘must have’ gift for Christmas 1853. The New York Times declared ‘…This is unquestionably one of the handsomest gift books of the season … we cannot conceive of a more graceful and elegant offering to the ladies of the United States’, and in The Musical World and Times, Wallace’s prowess as a composer was highly praised: ‘the transcendent genius of Wallace has never before been so fully developed’. The book’s illustrations are indeed handsome, and were described as ‘among the finest specimens of lithographic art ever done in America’. These sumptuous embellishments were produced by the celebrated artist Napoleon Sarony, the emperor of New York lithography, and his firm Sarony and Major became one of the most successful in its field. The lithographs were coloured by Spearing and Stutzman in the United States.

Today’s concert highlights the music from Wallace’s 1854 American Music Album which is available for sale after the performance. The facsimile and CD is published by Heritage Music Productions and RTÉ lyric fm in association with the National Library of Ireland and has been generously sponsored by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

From his early years Wallace arranged and performed dance music, initially for military bands and later for Dublin theatres and ballrooms. La pluie d’or (shower of gold), a valse gracieuse, is the more difficult of the two salon dances, but was still within the reach of those who practised their scales and arpeggios. The main theme, with its cascading notes, which is similar in style to the famous Shower of Pearls by the Limerick–born composer George Alexander Osborne (1806–1893), makes good use of the upper reaches of the new seven-octave piano.

Wallace would have heard Johann Strauss the Elder’s band when it performed in London in 1849, and the band included the overture to Maritana in its repertoire – still a favourite in Vienna a year after Wallace’s opera was performed there. The schottisch originated in Bohemia and was a very popular variant of the polka. In The Village Festival Wallace captured the Viennese éclat typical of this type of lively central European dance.

Salon dances

Valse Gracieuse: La Pluie d’Or
Schottisch: The Village Festival
The critic Henry Fothergill Chorley, who also wrote the libretto for Wallace’s opera The Amber Witch, was a great admirer of the soprano Mme Henriette Sontag (1806–1854), the dedicatee of Orange Flowers. Born in Germany, Sontag had been soprano soloist in the first performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and became a star of both Italian and German opera. In his 1862 book Thirty Years’ Musical Recollections Chorley wrote that though a German ‘her tendencies were towards all that was elegant and florid in Southern music’. Orange Flowers is a virtuoso piece written to display the qualities that Chorley mentions, incorporating the Spanish atmosphere so often evoked in his compositions. The song was probably written in advance of Sontag’s visit to the USA in 1852. The published score for voice and piano contains orchestral cues, but no instrumental parts have been found.

Sing your northern prairies
In a pretty lay.
Of your tiny daisies
And pale flow’rs of may!
We have sweeter music,
Richer airs are ours
Breathing at the eventide
From the orange bow’rs.
Look! how stars of silver
’Mid the green leaves glow,
Look! how cressets golden
Hang from every bough.
Each a cap discloses
That rare nectar pours
What are all your roses?
We have orange flow’rs!

In your dreary far land
Groweth nothing fair
Fit for triumph’s garland
Twin’d in beauty’s hair
Deck the maiden yearning
By the river side
With a wreath of mourning
We adorn the Bride.
Leave to northern praises
All their chill-white may.
And their pretty daisies
Fit for child’s array
We have sweeter music
Richer airs are ours.
What are all your roses?
We have orange flow’rs!
We have orange flow’rs, La.

Orange Flowers (Romance)
Text: H.F. Chorley (1808–1872)

Celtic Fantasy

In the middle of the nineteenth century Wallace published a great number of fantasia-style pieces for the piano based on Irish and Scottish airs. His only rivals in this genre were fellow Irishman and pianist, George Alexander Osborne, and the Welsh-born Henry Brinley Richards. Wallace began issuing his fantasias shortly after his arrival in London in 1845 and published them until c. 1859. His Celtic Fantasias are not only tuneful and attractive, they contain a good deal of the melodramatic, and were thus extremely popular. This fantasy, which includes two famous airs from Thomas Moore’s Irish Melodies, opens with cascading arpeggios before introducing both themes, and builds to a dramatic conclusion.

The Seasons

Spring – The joyful, joyful Spring
Summer – It is the happy Summer time
Autumn – The leaves are turning red
Winter – The Spring and Summer both are past

Henry Cood Watson, who is now regarded as America’s first real music critic, provided the words to five out of the six songs in Wallace’s 1854 Album. A fine writer and practical musician, Watson’s lyrics are highly regarded. The seasons are used as a metaphor for the journey through life: the wonder and innocence of youth in Spring, the rapture and ecstasy of adult love in Summer, maturity in Autumn, fond memory and the approach of death in Winter. Watson’s writing is often sensuous, portraying fervent heat, ecstatic joy, rapture, bounding hearts and rapid pulses; the depiction of such passions was common in many of the songs of the day.

Four canzonets

The Seasons Texts: H.C. Watson (1818–1875)

Spring – The joyful, joyful Spring
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**Spring – The joyful, joyful Spring**

1. O Joyful, joyful Spring!
How welcome to they coming;  
The flow'rs and trees put forth their leaves,  
And busy bees are humming.  
Joyful Spring! How welcome is thy coming.  
The flow'rs and trees put forth their leaves,  
And busy bees are humming.  
The trees put forth their leaves,  
And busy bees are humming.  
And all day long,  
The happy song,  
Of birds upon the wing,  
In accents sweet  
Appear to greet,  
Thy coming gentle Spring.  
In accents sweet,  
Appear to greet,  
Thy coming gentle Spring,  
Thy coming gentle Spring.

2. O Joyful, joyful Spring!
Forgot is winter now—  
Thy flow'ry hand hath swept away  
The snow-wreath from his brow.  
Joyful Spring! Forgot is winter now;  
Thy flow'ry hand hath swept away  
The snow-wreath from his brow.  
Thy hand hath swept away  
The snow-wreath from his brow.  
The warmth is felt.  
The ice drops melt  
To dew tears from above!

3. O Joyful, joyful Spring!
The glad heart looks around!  
And feels the throb of ardent life  
In all its pulses bound  
Joyful Spring, the glad heart looks around,  
And feels the throb of ardent life  
In all its pulses bound,  
The throb of ardent life,  
In all its pulses bound.  
Then heart to heart,  
Sweet thoughts impart,  
For Love reigns sov'reign king!

**Summer – It is the happy Summer time**

1. It is the happy Summer time!  
The fruits are rip'ning fast;  
The glad earth cloth'd in brightest green  
Forgets the snowy past.  
The fruits are rip'ning fast,  
The glad earth cloth'd in brightest green,  
Forgets the snowy past.  
The quick'ning sun shines bright on all,  
The flow'rs rich odours bear;  
The streamlets flow thro' leafy bow'rs  
And joy is ev'ry where,  
The streamlets flow thro' leafy bow'rs  
And joy is ev'ry where.

2. It is the happy summer time!  
O beating heart be still!  
Bound not with such extatic joy,  
With such a rapturous shrill!  
O beating heart be still!  
Bound not with such extatic joy,  
With such a rapturous shrill!  
All living things seem to rejoice,  
The Spirit soars on wings;  
And Nature, with exultant voice,  
The praise of Summer sings,  
And Nature, with exultant voice,  
The praise of Summer sings!
Autumn – The leaves are turning red

1. The leaves are turning red,
The green has pass’d away;
The balmy air
Breathes perfume rare,
From mounds of new mown hay.

2. The corn is rip’ning fast,
And bendeth to the ground;
The peach and pear,
And melon rare,
And gen’rous grape abound!

3. The leaves are falling fast,
And o’er the earth are strown;
A chilling breeze
Sweeps tho’ the trees,
With sad and fitful moan.

[REFRAIN]
O fair as Autumn Golden Autumn!
Nature paints thy richest dyes,
Tints that shame a southern sunset,
Shed a glow o’er earth and skies,
Shed a glow o’er earth and skies!

Winter – The Spring and Summer both are past

1. The Spring and Summer both are past,
And all their pleasures flown;
The Autumn’s golden tinted leaves,
Upon the earth are strown.
The bending corn is gather’d in,
The fruit is all in store;
All barren now the meadows gay,
That we have wander’d o’er!

2. The fleecy snow is falling fast,
Upon the frozen ground;
The rivers erst so glanceing bright,
In icy chains are bound.
The Winter moon looks coldly down,
Upon the earth so drear;
The howling wind, in boding tones
Proclaims the dying year!

3. The leaves are falling fast,
And o’er the earth are strown;
A chilling breeze
Sweeps tho’ the trees,
With sad and fitful moan.

[REFRAIN]
Still fair Autumn! Golden Autumn!
Nature paints thy richest dyes;
Tints that shame a southern sunset
Shed a glow o’er earth and skies.

We read in this life’s omen sad,
Of coming winter’s thrall;
We’ve pass’d our spring and summer glad,
We’re rip’ning to the fall!

No more the summer’s fervent heat,
O’ertakes us on our way;
We roam at will with tireless feet,
Thro’out the livelong day!

We roam at will with tireless feet,
Thro’out the livelong day!


William V Wallace Recital

Notes

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Piano solo

'Tis the Harp in the Air (romance – Souvenir de Maritana)

Invocation Polka

In its review of the Album on 12 January 1854, The New York Times stated

‘The chief attraction of the instrumental portion of the album is the charming air from Maritana, The Harp in the Air, transcribed for the piano. It is by no means easy of execution, and is intended, doubtless, as a study. It is written on three staves, the melody being sustained simultaneously with a brilliant accompaniment of chords and octaves through the entire range of the instrument.’

This Souvenir de Maritana has a curious history. Having been originally a piano piece, then an operatic aria, it returns in the 1854 volume as a piano solo. Wallace’s compositions gained an individual voice during his spell in Latin America. Many of the early piano works, waltzes and nocturnes published in New York during his first visit, have a distinctive Spanish flavour, with titles such as La chilena and La mexicana. Many more had remained unpublished but were part of his repertoire when he arrived in London in 1845. Edward Fitzball (1792–1873) recounted in his memoirs that Wallace had been introduced to him with a view to their collaborating on an opera. However, Fitzball was not interested initially as Wallace was then unknown to him. Shortly after, Fitzball happened to attend one of Wallace’s performances

...happening to hear him play, I was so struck with his performance, that I speedily resolved to write some words to a splendid piece, of his composition, which has since become so excessively popular, under the somewhat romantic title of ‘The Harp in the Air’. This was our commencement, from which, piece by piece, we concluded his universally admired opera of Maritana.’

The piece that inspired Fitzball and became the genesis of Maritana was never published, though a tantalising fragment, in the same key and with a familiar arpeggio, can be found in a musical autograph Wallace presented to a friend before he began work on the opera. It would appear that the piece lost much of its Spanish quality in its transformation to suit the English stage, but exotic hints remain to remind us of its origin.

The 1840s saw the introduction of the polka, a dance in 2/4 time, which soon transcended all others in popularity. Wallace’s contribution to the genre is considerable. Together with three virtuosic Grand polkas de concert, he wrote at least six polkas for the salon. Their popularity was such that orchestral versions of these were heard at concerts and Wallace conducted a full orchestra in his World’s Fair Polka at a concert he gave in 1851. The Invitation Polka is lively, melodic and fun to perform, and brings the lovely music album to a satisfying conclusion.

Song

Say my Heart, can this be Love

words by H.C. Watson (1818–1875)

Sometimes overwhelming in its sentimentality and often lacking in musical substance, the subject matter of the Victorian ballad ranges from forlorn love to death, and many examples hold no relevance for modern listeners and performers. Yet, at their best they are superbly finished works of art, which effortlessly became concert favourites. Though written with an easy accompaniment and certainly less difficult to perform than the four songs from The Seasons, Watson and Wallace give us a melodic treat which, with careful interpretation, can be highly dramatic and almost operatic in performance. The theme of a secret passion is still a staple of popular song, and the protagonist’s mental anguish would be all too familiar to the modern adolescent. Wallace’s frequent musical hints such as con amore, con passione, and con tristezza, encourages the singer to add drama to her performance. A less-inspired composer would have used a two-section structure. Here Wallace provides a third section giving the music a higher level of intensity and substance – surely a mark of his operatic experience. This ballad became a concert favourite in Dublin in 1854.

1. Ever still he hovers round me,
   And his presence yields a thrill;
   Yet while others warmly praise me,
   I will hide it from all eyes;
   Not from fear do I thus tremble –
   Say my heart, can it be Love!
   Say my heart, can it be Love!
   Say my heart, can it be Love!

2. Night and day his image haunts me,
   In each breeze his sighs I hear;
   Somewhere feeling thrills my bosom –
   Is it Love? It is not fear!
   Fear! Ah no, those eyes so tender;
   Voice so soft, his kindness prove;
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!

3. He shall never know my feeling,
   Vainly would another sue me,
   So I would not from fear do I thus tremble –
   Say my heart, can it be Love!
   Say my heart, can it be Love!
   Say my heart, can it be Love!
   Own sad heart, own sad heart,
   Silly heart! Thy love concealing,
   Say my heart, can this be Love!

4. Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
   Say my heart, can this be Love!
How dreary to my heart – Scenes that are Brightest

Text: Edward Fitzball (1792–1873)/Alfred Bunn (1796–1860)

At the beginning of Act 3, Maritana, now the Countess de Bazan, is alone in the gilded, mirrored hall of the Villa de Aranjuez, which is adjacent to the Royal Palace south of Madrid, where she is held captive by Don José to become a plaything of the King, Charles II. Wallace cleverly bases the recitative (the most extensive one in the opera) on Maritana’s first air ‘It was a knight’ from Act I. In it she dreamt of becoming a great lady and living in a gilded palace; now, all she can think about is her happy and carefree life as a gypsy girl (‘My lonely form reflected as I pass, seems like a spectre on my steps to wait’). In the succeeding air, ‘Scenes that are brightest’, which is perhaps the best-known and most popular of the entire opera, she laments ‘With none to love us, how sad they [the fabled mirrored halls] seem’. She is, of course, eventually rescued from her plight by her new husband whom she married in prison, Don Caesar.

How dreary to my heart is this gay chamber!
Those crystal mirrors and those marble walls,
Add to my gloom, while sweetly sad remembrance
My lonely form reflected as I pass,
Seems like a spectre on my steps to wait,
Enquiring from the gold enwreathed glass,
“Can mighty grandeur be thus desolate?”

1. Scenes that are brightest
May charm awhile
Hearts which are lighted,
And when they leave us
The heart is lost.

And eyes that smile;
Yet o’er them, above us,
The joyful hours of liberty recalls
Those crystal mirrors and those marble walls,
Hopes will still deceive us
With tearful cost
And when they leave us
The heart is lost.

2. Words cannot scatter
The thoughts we fear
For tho’ they flatter,
They mock the ear.
Hopes will still deceive us
With tearful cost
And when they leave us
The heart is lost.
And when they leave us
The heart is lost.

Máire Flavin
Mezzo-soprano

Máire Flavin represented Ireland at Cardiff Singer of the World in 2011, and reached the Song Prize Final. She is a recent graduate of the National Opera Studio and the Guildhall Opera course where she studied with Janice Chapman, and is a graduate of the Royal Irish Academy of Music Masters programme where she studied with Colette McGahan-Tosh.

Máire has worked with Lyric Opera Ireland, Clonter Opera, Glyndebourne, Scottish Opera and Welsh National Opera, and has sung several roles at GSMC and RIAM. Recently she made her Royal Albert Hall debut performing Mahler’s 8th Symphony with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Máire is an alumna of the Opera Theatre Company Young Artist and Britten Pears Young Artist programmes.

Future engagements include Les Nuits d’Été in the National Concert Hall with the National Symphony Orchestra, Jacinthe in Gretry’s L’amant jaloux for Bampton opera, and a number of recitals in the UK and Ireland.

Una Hunt
Piano

Una Hunt is one of Ireland’s leading pianists and has performed concerts with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra. She has played recital programmes in Britain, Ireland, Russia and the USA and has toured extensively with her violinist sister Fionnuala.

Her interest in the music of Irish composers has led to nine world-premiere recording projects, most recently William Vincent Wallace’s music album published in New York in 1854 which has been produced as a facsimile and CD. Una is a prominent advocate for the promotion of neglected works by Irish composers and helped establish the National Archive of Irish Composers, the first digital online collection of historic music from the National Library of Ireland (www.naic.ie). Her experience as a producer and broadcaster has resulted in many documentaries, including a three-programme series on Wallace, The Road to Maritana, for RTÉ Lyric fm in October 2012.

Rachel Kelly
Mezzo-soprano

Rachel studied singing with Mary Brennan in Dublin and is presently with Janice Chapman in London, where she attends the National Opera Studio. She is a Samling Scholar and was awarded a Masters degree with distinction on the Opera Course at the Royal Academy of Music, receiving the Diploma for Excellence.

Recent roles include Fanny (London premiere, Mansfield Park), Beatrice (Béatrice et Bénédict, director John Copley, conductor Sir Colin Davies), Wu (Kommilitonen, Peter Maxwell Davies), and Dorabella (Così fan tutte). Rachel has performed as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, and at Carnegie Hall and in St Petersburg with the Thomas Moore Festival; recorded the role of Jane (Dearest Enemy) and recently gave a solo recital at the National Concert Hall, Dublin. She is kindly supported by the Ian Smith of Stornoway Legacy, the Arts Council of Ireland, the Sickle Foundation and the Sybil Tutton Award from the Musicians Benevolent Fund.