

## J'Nai Bridges

Tonight's program includes a beautiful selection of Brahms lieder. With its lush textures and lullaby-like atmosphere, they are emblematic of Brahms' vocal style: an elegant mix of classically-informed structure and Romantic inflection.

The selections from *Vier Gesänge* are some of the most masterful of Brahms' vocal output. "Von ewiger Liebe" is dramatic and intense: two lovers singing of the steadfastness of their attachment, alternating between happy recollection, and intense conviction. Beloved by audiences, and deserving of the attention with its skillful composition, the piece brings us along on an emotional journey with the narrators. This song is followed by "Die Mainacht": a serene first-person narrative of self-inflicted loneliness which finds its comfort in the beauty of nature.

The first song of *Zwei Gesänge*, "Gestillte Sehnsucht," also harkens to themes of longing and of nature with a text by Friedrich Rückert, who was popular among the German Romantics. The piano and voice are joined by a viola, whose melody embodies the spirit of nostalgia and longing. "Geistliches Wiegenlied" illustrates how a musical work can follow one throughout their life, finding new meaning at each stage. The piece was originally written for the marriage of Brahms' friends, violinist-violist Joseph Joachim and singer Amalie Schneeweiss. Brahms then took it back, making edits before returning it to celebrate the baptism of their first-born son, Johannes, named in honour of the composer. Later, Brahms revised the work yet again, this time as a bid to help his friends' troubled marriage.

Alongside the Brahms, Bridges performs Ravel's *Shéhérazade*. The narrator and heroine of *One Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade was a notable inspiration for European writers, artists, and musicians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ravel was not inspired directly by the original tale, but instead by a collection of free-verse poetry based off of Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic poem of the same name. These poems were written by a friend of Ravel's with the curiously Wagnerian pen name of Tristan Klingsor. This song cycle, originally written for soprano and orchestra, is an orientalist work reflective of its time written in three movements. In *Asie*, we hear the narrator's wistful longing for all of the exotic excitement of an imagined and fantastical China. In *La flûte enchantée*, Ravel evokes otherworldliness with the help of the Phrygian mode. The narrator, a young slave girl, is tending to her sleeping master when she hears her lover playing the flute outside: a winding melody that seems to reflect her joys and sorrows in love. Finally, *L'indifférent* presents a more ambiguous tale: the narrator is bewitched by an androgynous youth who unsuccessfully invites him into their home to drink wine. With oscillating string motifs, its impressionist texture is reminiscent of Debussy.

Finishing off the evening is a work by African American composer, clarinetist, and educator John Wallace Carter (1929-1991). Deeply influenced by African-American spirituals and jazz idioms, his *Cantata* in 5 movements uses the texts of well-known spirituals either in full or in paraphrased forms. The first, Prelude, is a tranquil introduction to Carter's musical language written for solo piano that leads seamlessly into the second movement. The Rondo frees itself from the constraints of a time signature, and, in a display of astounding word painting, depicts St. Peter's ebullient ringing of the bells announcing the believers' entrance into heaven. The third movement, Recitative, draws from the conventions of opera with relatively sparse accompaniment, and languid, sorrowful melody. The fourth movement is based on a Christian sacrament—communion—while the final fifth movement is a rhythmically-oriented song with an unusual 5/4 metre ostinato contrasting a 4/4 metre spiritual section. Carter's language is fascinating; combining familiar melodies with complex jazz chords, modal language, and other devices, it's a rewarding work for performers and audiences alike.

-TSM STAFF