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Guest Artists in Recital

Nicholas Isherwood

Mark Robson

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Guest Artists in Recital
Nicholas Isherwood, bass baritone
& Mark Robson, piano
April 21, 2013



spring 2013

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February 7

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Directed by Thomas Bradac

march

March 7

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april

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Guest Artist Recital

Nicholas Isherwood, bass-baritone

Mark Robson, piano



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April 21, 2013 ■ 8:00 P.M.

Salmon Recital Hall

Program

No Sun
Within four walls
You have not recognized me
The noisy festival day is ended
Boredom
Elegy
By the River

Modest Mussorgsky
(1839-1881)

Mandoline
C'est l'extase
Le son du cor
En sourdine
Chevaux de bois

Claude Debussy/Paul Verlaine
(1862-1918)

Maple Leaves
Evening
Afterglow
Thoreau
The Indians
Like a Sick Eagle
A Farewell to Land

Charles Ives
(1874-1954)

Urðarmána [Moon of Fate] (2012), world premiere

Jeffrey Holmes
(b. 1971)

Artists

Nicholas Isherwood has sung in the world's leading festivals (Salzburg, Aix, Festival d'Automne, Avignon, Almeida, Biennale di Venezia, Holland Festival, Munich Biennale, Wien Modern, Händel Festivals in Göttingen and Halle, Tanglewood, Ravinia, etc.) and opera houses (Royal Opera House, Berlin, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Amsterdam, Lyon, Châtelet, Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Rome, Torino, Genova, La Fenice, La Scala, etc.), working with conductors such as Joel Cohen, William Christie, Peter Eötvös, Gabriele Ferro, Nicholas McGegan, Paul McCreech, Zubin Mehta, Kent Nagano, Helmuth Rilling, David Robertson, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky and Arturo Tamayo. Isherwood has worked closely with composers such as Sylvano Bussotti, Elliott Carter, George Crumb, Hans Werner Henze, Mauricio Kagel, György Kurtág, Steve Lacy, Olivier Messiaen, Giacinto Scelsi and Iannis Xenakis.

Mark Robson has been hailed by the Los Angeles Times as a pianist with “one of the great techniques,” “an inquiring mind” and a performer capable of evoking an “exquisite engulfing pastel haze,” and he continues to impress with his multi-faceted career as a soloist, chamber musician, and teacher. Mr. Robson is equally comfortable in styles ranging from early music played on the harpsichord and organ to the great Romantic repertoire and beyond to contemporary piano works demanding theatrical participation from the performer. As a collaborative artist with singers and instrumentalists, he commands the respect of his peers in both the recital and chamber settings. He presents an annual recital for the LA series *Piano Spheres* and has performed for *Jacaranda* on numerous occasions. As an organist, he has also appeared as a soloist in the Minimalist Jukebox at Disney Hall and has performed on the organ in Mahler's 8th Symphony at the Hollywood Bowl in their 2008 season.

Program Notes

Nicholas Isherwood and Mark Robson lived down the hall from each other in French House at Oberlin. This is the first time they have performed together.

Claude Debussy had the score for Mussorgsky's *Without Sun* on his piano. His piece *Nuages* for orchestra, later transcribed for two pianos, includes a quote from *No Sun*. Jeffrey Holmes is a Wagnerian, like Debussy. Charles Ives was one of the most innovative composers of the history of American music. Holmes carries this spirit forwards.

Evening and approaching night, often as a metaphor for death, the night and the moon are themes throughout the concert. It is the protagonist of *By the River*, the last and most famous song in *No Sun*, transcribed and often performed by Horowitz. The Watteau "commedia dell'arte" characters in Debussy's *Mandolin* "whirl around in the ecstasy of a pink and grey moon." The night is present throughout the Ives group, especially in his greatest song, *A Farewell to Land*, in which "Yon sun that sets upon the sea, We follow in his flight." The text closely resembles those in *No Sun*. Jeffrey Holmes piece has the moon in its title. The winter and ravens as harbingers of death clearly illustrate the night as endless darkness.

Enjoy the night of this austere program, with its glimmer of hope in the music of Debussy, as the moon rises...

-Nicholas Isherwood

Modest Mussorgsky, *No Sun*

1)
A tiny room, quiet and pleasant,
An impenetrable darkness, irresponsive darkness;
A deep thought, a sorrowful song;
A treasured hope in the beating heart;

Speedy flight of moment after moment;
A petrified glance at a far-away happiness;
Plenty of doubt, plenty of endurance.
Here it is, my night, night of solitude.

3)
Over is the idle and clamorous day;
Human life has fallen silent and a-slumber.
Everything is quiet. The shadow of the May night
Embraces the sleeping capital.

2)
You have not recognized me in the crowd,
Your glance did not say anything.
But I felt wonder and fright
When I caught it:

It was only a moment;
But believe me, within it I re-lived again
All the delights of past love,
All the bitterness of oblivion and tears!

But sleep escapes from my eyes.
And by the rays of the next dawn
My imagination is leafing through
The pages of the lost years.

Program Notes

Alas, those are only ghosts!
I am bored with this dead crowd,
And the noise of their old chatter
Already has no power over me.

And bravely I gave to her alone
All my soul in a silent tear,
Unseen by no one, full of happiness,
In a tear I saved for so long!

4)
Be bored. You were created for boredom.
Without burning feelings there is no joy,
As there is no reunion without separation,
As without struggle there are no victories.

Be bored. From birth to the grave
Your path is written beforehand:
Drop by drop you'll waste your powers,
Then you'll die, and God be with you...
And God be with you!

5)
In the mist the night is in slumber. Silent star
Flickering, lonely, through the veil of clouds.
Sorrowfully ringing their bells in the distance,
Herds of grazing horses.
As night clouds my changing thoughts
Fly above me, disturbed and gloomy;
There are gleams of hopes in them,
which were once dear,
Which are long lost, long dead.
There are regrets in them... and tears.
Thoughts rush along endlessly;
At times, transformed into features of a loved face,
They call for me, awakening in my soul former
dreams again,
At times, merged into black darkness, full of silent
threat,
Frighten my timid mind with the future's struggle,
And I hear in the distance life's discordant noise,
Laughter of the soulless crowd, the muttering of
treacherous feuding,

As if again breathing in the poison
Of spring's amorous dreams,
I resurrect in my soul the stream
Of hopes, surges, illusions...

Only one shadow, the only one of all,
Appeared to me, breathing with love, and,
Like a true friend of the past days,
Bent down by the bedstead.

Be bored. Be bored listening to words of love,
Immersed in the stillness of your empty heart,
Responding with a fake greeting
To the truth of an innocent dream.

The irrepressible whisper of life's banality,
And the grim ringing of death!..
A rising star, as if full of shyness,
Is hiding her bright face in a joyless mist,
Like my future, mute and impenetrable.

Program Notes

6)

Pensive moon crescent, far-away stars
Admiring the waters from a blue sky.
I look in silence at the deep waters;
My heart senses magical secrets in them.
They splash mysteriously, tender-caressing waves;
There is much mystical power in their muttering.
I hear boundless thoughts and passions...
Unknown voice, which stirs my soul,
Caresses, frightens, and evokes doubts.
When it commands me to listen -- I can't move;
When it drives me away -- I want to run in fear;
When it calls into the depths -- I want to jump without hesitation.

Debussy/Verlaine

Mandolin

The givers of serenades And the lovely women who listen Exchange insipid words Under the singing branches.	A chorus of tiny voices. Oh, what a frail and fresh murmur! It babbles and whispers, It resembles the soft noise That waving grass exhales. You might say it were, under the bending stream, The muffled sound of rolling pebbles.
There is Thyrsis and Amyntas And there's the eternal Clytander, And there's Damis who, for many a Heartless woman, wrote many a tender verse.	This soul, which laments And this dormant moan, It is ours, is it not? Is it [not] mine[?] -- tell [me] -- and yours, Whose humble anthem we breathe On this mild evening, so very quietly?
Their short silk coats, Their long dresses with trains, Their elegance, their joy And their soft blue shadows,	
Whirl around in the ecstasy Of a pink and grey moon, And the mandolin prattles Among the shivers from the breeze.	
It is the langorous ecstasy	
It is the langorous ecstasy, It is the fatigue after love, It is all the rustling of the wood, In the embrace of breezes; It is near the gray branches:	

Program Notes

The Sound of the Horn

The horn sounds its distress call over by the woods
With a cry of grief like that of an orphan
And comes to die at the foot of the hill
Where the roaming north wind wails in brief outbursts.

The soul of the wolf is weeping in that voice
Which rises with the sun that sinks
With an agony that seems somehow soothing
And at once delights and distresses.

Muted

Calm in the half-day
That the high branches make,
Let us soak well our love
In this profound silence.

Let us mingle our souls, our hearts
And our ecstatic senses
Among the vague langours
Of the pines and the bushes.

Close your eyes halfway,
Cross your arms on your breast,
And from your sleeping heart
Chase away forever all plans.

Wooden Horses

Turn, turn, good horses of wood,
turn a hundred turns, turn a thousand turns,
turn often and turn always,
turn, turn to the sound of the oboes.

The red-faced child and pale mother,
the boy in black and the girl in pink,
the one pursuing and the other posing,
each getting a penny's worth of Sunday fun.

To enhance this drowsy lament
The snow is falling as long shreds of linen
Across the blood-red sunset,

And the air has the air of an autumn sigh,
So mild is this monotonous evening
In which a slow landscape coddles itself.

Let us abandon ourselves
To the breeze, rocking and soft,
Which comes to your feet to wrinkle
The waves of auburn lawns.

And when, solemnly, the evening
From the black oaks falls,
The voice of our despair,
The nightingale, will sing.

Turn, turn, horses of their hearts,
while all around your turning
squints the sly pickpocket's eye --
turn to the sound of the victorious cornet.

It is astonishing how it intoxicates you
to go around this way in a stupid circle,
nothing in your tummy and an ache in your
head,
very sick and having lots of fun.

Program Notes

Charles Ives

Maple Leaves

October turned my maple's leaves to gold;
The rest are gone now; here and there one lingers:
Soon these will slip from out the twig's weak hold,
Like coins between a dying miser's fingers.

Evening

Now came still Evening on,
and Twilight gray had in her sober libery all things clad;
Silence accompanied; for the beast and bird-
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests were slunk,
but the wakeful nighingale; She all night long her
amorous descant sung;
Silence is pleased:

Afterglow

At the quiet close of day, Gently yet the willows sway;
When the sunset light is low, Lingers still the afterglow;
Beauty tarries loth to die,
Every lightest fantasy lovelier grows in memory,
Where the truer beauties lie.

Thoreau

His meditations were interrupted only by the faint sound of the Concord bell, "A melody, as it were, imported into the wilderness. At a distance over the woods the sound acquires a certain vibratory hum as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept... a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth, interesting to the eyes by the azure tint it imparts.

He grew in those seasons like corn in the night,
Rapt in revery, on the Walden shore,
amidst the sumachs, pines and hickories,
in undisturbed solitude.

The Indians

Alas! For them their day is o'er,
No more, no more for them the wild deer bounds,
The plough is on their hunting grounds;
The pale man's axe rings through their woods,
The pale man's sail skins o'er their floods;
Beyond the mountains of the west
Their children go to die.

Program Notes

Like a sick eagle

The spirit is too weak;
mortality weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
and each imagined pinnacle and steep of Godlike hardship tells me I must die,
like a sick eagle looking towards the sky.

A Farewell to Land

Adieu, adieu!
My native shore Fades o'er the waters blue;
The night winds sigh, the breakers roar
And shrieks the wild seamew.
Yon sun that sets upon the sea,
We follow in his flight;
Farewell awhile to him and thee,
my native Land, Goodnight!

Jeffrey Holmes, Urðarmána (Moon of Fate)

I. Þat vera Urðarmána. Ok var bæði hregg ok rota...at Urðarmána kom inn hvert kveld sem annat.
[It was a moon of fate. Amidst both wind and rain...the moon of fate appeared every night as before.]

II. Vetr þann...sjúknuð. Mun hér eptir koma manndouðr.
[Winter-time...a great sickness. People will die here now.]

III. Ok var bæði hregg ok rota...Geirs Drottinn vaknaði, ok léz verr vera við Krístr alla tíma síðan.
[Amidst both wind and rain...Lord of the Spear awoke and said that from now on things would be worse between him and Christ.]

IV. Vind ek kyrr, vági á, ok svæfik allan sæ.
[I calm the wind, and the waves, and soften the whole sea.]

V. Svá sé yðr öllum innan rifja, sem þér í maura mornið haugi. Spá. Blót. Ríct gól (Viðrir). Ramt gól (Þundr). Bitra galdra.
[May you suffer within your ribs, your mound an anthill where you rot. Prophecy. Sacrifice. Mightily chanted (Stormer). Magically chanted (Thunderer). Powerful charms.]

VI. Einn, harmdrögg sleginn, grimmon tárom, hvert fellr blóðuct, úrsvalt, innfiálg.
[Alone, shroud in the dew of sorrow, the bitter tears, are drops of blood, cold as rain, heavy.]

VII. Vindr var á hvass, ok fauk askan viðá. Hann lá þar ok horfði í lopt upp ok gapði bæði munni ok nösúm ok þulði nökkut. Urðarmána.
[A brutal gale began to blow. He lay on the peak of a cliff, staring up at the sky with his mouth wide open, reciting something. Moon of Fate.]

VIII. Þó kómu þar fljúgandi hrafnar tveir ok gullu hátt. Urðarmána.
[Amidst both wind and rain...Two ravens flew by and cawed loudly. Moon of Fate.]

IX. Vil ek eigi gop geyja...sem þú feldir mér fár af höndum.
[I will not blaspheme the gods...as you saved me from near death.]

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