



YST

Yong Siew Toh
Conservatory
of Music



**DUALITY: A RECITAL BY
DANIEL CHONG**

*Daniel Chong, Tenor
Dr Choi Hye-Seon, Piano
Howard Ng, Oboe*

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Duality: A Recital by Daniel Chong

29 April 2021, 1:50 - 2:20pm, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music Concert Hall

Performers:

Daniel Chong, Tenor
Dr Choi Hye-Seon, Piano
Howard Ng, Oboe

Programme:

From *Tel jour, telle nuit*, FP. 86

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Bonne journée
Une ruine coquille vide
Le front comme un drapeau perdu
Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
À toutes brides
Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer

From *Ten Blake Songs for tenor and oboe*

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872–1958)

Infant Joy (Innocence)
A Poison Tree (Experience)
London (Experience)
The Lamb (Innocence)
The Shepherd (Innocence)
Ah! Sun-flower (Experience)
Eternity (Several Questions Answered)

Tom der Reimer

Carl Loewe (1796–1869)

Night and Day, Innocence and Experience

This recital explores the expressive possibilities of juxtaposing two opposing ideas within a single body of work. Francis Poulenc's *Tel jour, telle nuit* compares night and day, and Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Ten Blake Songs* compares innocence with experience. Carl Loewe's ballad, *Tom der Reimer*, is superficially cheerful, but masks the realities of imprisonment and trickery.

These dualities offer us a chance to discover the relationship between two polarities, as well as the qualities they share. In delving deeper, we begin to realise that one cannot exist without the other. As the sun must set before day turns to night, so too must one be naive before gaining the wisdom of experience. We may also realise that even as one side of the duality is in question, its complementary side is ever present. In pessimistic moments, there is always a glimmer of hope, and in seemingly joyous events, a darker, less certain outcome. Attempting to balance both sides of a duality in a single, cohesive, body of work is exciting, but challenging. The composers in today's programme have successfully and effectively weaved them together, creating interesting and varied works that reveal new meaning with each listen.

It is my pleasure to perform these works for you today.

The mélodies of Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) are among the most successful and valuable contributions to the genre of art song. His song cycle *Tel jour, telle nuit* (Such day, such night) contains nine songs, and it represents the full development of his unique compositional style and craftsmanship, standing as a remarkable body of work made at the height of France's artistic flourishing.

Tel jour telle nuit was composed between December 1936 and January 1937. At the time, Poulenc took an interest in the emerging Surrealist movement, and was well acquainted with many of its leading members, including Paul Éluard (1895–1952), whose poetry forms the text of this song cycle. The Surrealist movement sought to utilise disjunct and abstract imagery to provoke and engage the subconscious. Éluard's poetry contains several images of day and night, or light and darkness. The two are frequently juxtaposed, such as in the song cycle's title, *Tel jour telle nuit*. Other themes that appear in these poems are solitude, loneliness, and desire. At times, such a style of writing proves challenging for readers to comprehend, but Poulenc's setting of these poems, in their conventional harmonic language and lyricism, provides some grounding and accessibility to the intended expressions.

Notably, Poulenc credits the poetry of Éluard in inspiring greater lyricism in his vocal works. Perhaps, then, we have Éluard to thank for being the catalyst for Poulenc's ingenious writing in their collaborations. But it is undoubtedly Poulenc's own gift for melody, his unique treatment of harmony, and his affinity for his chosen texts that give voice to the rich meaning concealed in the literature.

Given that the songs chosen for this recital are part of a larger song cycle, some songs are transitory and fleeting in nature, intended to lead to the more substantial songs in the set. However, it is in these songs that Poulenc demonstrates his ability to produce concise and economic episodes of music, without losing sensitivity and evocation.

Bonne journée
(À Pablo Picasso)

Bonne journée j'ai revu qui je n'oublie pas
Qui je n'oublierai jamais
Et des femmes fugaces dont les yeux
Me faisaient une haie d'honneur
Elles s'enveloppèrent dans leurs sourires

Bonne journée j'ai vu mes amis sans soucis
Les hommes ne pesaient pas lourd
Un qui passait
Son ombre changée en souris
Fuyait dans le ruisseau

J'ai vu le ciel très grand
Le beau regard des gens privés de tout
Plage distant où personne n'aborde

Bonne journée qui commença mélancolique
Noire sous les arbres verts
Mais qui soudain trempée d'aurore
M'entra dans le coeur par surprise.

Good Day
(To Pablo Picasso)

Good day I saw again those I do not forget
Whom I will never forget
And the fleeting women whose eyes
Formed a hedge of honor for me
They enveloped themselves in their smiles

Good day I saw my friends without a care
The men were not weighed down
One who was passing by
His shadow transformed into a mouse
Escaped into the gutter

I saw the vast sky
The beautiful gaze of people deprived of
Everything
Distant beach on which nobody lands

Good day which began in melancholy
Darkness beneath the green trees
But which suddenly soaked in dawn
Entered my heart by surprise.

[All translations by Wesley Morgan]

This song's poem was subtitled 'To Pablo Picasso', as the poet and the painter were close friends and collaborators. Picasso had left without a word in the middle of a project that the two were working on, and on the day the two met again, this poem was written. Thus, the references to "[those whom] I saw again" may be references to Picasso. This poem (and many of the other poems in this song cycle) contains several allusions to eyes and sight, which places the reader in a perspective right at the heart of the images presented. As in Surrealist literature, the images are not always logical. Rather, they seek to arouse and embody emotions and thoughts that are not always discernible, but felt deep in the subconscious. Poulenc's steady musical setting of this poem contains a sense of quiet contentment, contrasted by a brief moment of radiance at its climax.

*Une ruine coquille vide
(Je croyais le repos possible)*

Une ruine coquille vide
Pleure dans son tablier
Les enfants qui jouent autour d'elle
Font moins de bruit que des mouches

La ruine s'en va à tâtons
Chercher ses vaches dans un pré
J'ai vu le jour vois cela
Sans en avoir honte

Il est minuit comme un flèche
Dans un coeur à la portée
Des folâtres lueurs nocturnes
Qui contredisent le sommeil.

A ruin an empty shell
(I believed rest was possible)

A ruin an empty shell
Weeps into its apron
The children who play around it
Make less noise than flies

The ruin moves gropingly
Searching for its cows in a meadow
I saw the day I see it
Without being ashamed

It is midnight like an arrow
In a heart within reach
Of the flashing nocturnal lights
Which negate sleep.

This poem might be the clearest example in this set of how Surrealist literature utilises imagery and analogy to create atmosphere that conveys intent through elicited emotions, rather than with literal descriptions and rational ideas. The 'ruin' in this poem is personified as "weeping" into its apron, which may refer to a mass of ivy hanging from it, long and low. The 'ruin' "groping" and "searching" refers to how its shadow moves across a meadow day by day. 'Night' is also presented in this poem as an invader of sleep. The images (not to be taken literally) serve as representations of solitude and weariness, specifically that which is experienced during a spell of insomnia. Poulenc's setting of this poem gives an impression of loneliness and sentimentality, through its hushed quality and sighing gestures.

*Le front comme un drapeau perdu
(Être)*

Le front comme un drapeau perdu
Je te traîne quand je suis seul
Dans les rues froides
Des chambres noires
En criant misère

Je ne veux pas les lâcher
Tes mains claires et compliquées
Nées dans le miroir clos des miennes

Tout le reste est parfait
Tout le reste est encore plus inutile
Que la vie

Creuse la terre sous ton ombre

Une nappe d'eau près des seins
Où se noyer
Comme une pierre.

The forehead like a lost flag
(To be)

The face like an abandoned flag
That I drag when I am alone
In the cold streets
In the dark rooms
Wailing in misery

I do not want to let go of
Your hands pure and complicated
Born in my own obstructed mirror

Everything else is perfect
Everything else is more futile
Than life

Dig out the ground beneath your shadow

A blanket of water reaching your breasts
With which to drown oneself
Like a stone.

This song depicts desperation with a declamatory and resolute tone. A moment of lyricism and tenderness appears in the second stanza, as the “hands” serve as a symbol of intimacy and self-reflection. The music then becomes more agitated and unsettled, and ends with a “strange appeasement” (Pierre Bernac, 1977).

Une roulotte
(*Rideau*)

Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
Le cheval mort un enfant maître
Pensant le front bleu de haine
A deux seins s'abattant sur lui
Comme deux poings

Ce mélodrame nous arrache
La raison du coeur.

A gypsy wagon
(Curtain)

A gypsy wagon covered in tiles
A dead horse a child master
Pondering his face blue with hatred
Two breasts beating him
Like two fists

This melodrama tears out our
Heart's reason from us.

This song has a unique place in the song cycle, and is in a more spoken, recitative style. Its setting is mysterious and sinister, and evokes the image of a wagon faltering down a street. Éluard's title, "(Curtain)", reveals the theatrical basis of the text, confirmed by Poulenc's reference to **trois coups* in the final line of music. The strange, whispered rising chromatic grace-notes of the final measure represent a curtain rising (Wesley B. Morgan, 2019).

*a French theatrical custom in which three "shots" are sounded by the banging of a stick on the ground, signaling the rising curtain (Buckland and Chimènes 1999).

À toutes brides
(*Intimes II*)

À toutes brides toi dont le fantôme
Piaffe la nuit sur un violon
Viens régner dans les bois

Les verges de l'ouragan
Cherchent leur chemin par chez toi
Tu n'est pas de celles
Dont on invente les désirs

Viens boire un baiser par ici
Cède au feu qui te désespère.

Riding full speed
(*Intimates II*)

Riding full speed you whose phantom
Paws upon a violin at night
Come to the woods to reign

The lashings of the hurricane
Look for their path to you
You are not one
Whose desires can be envisioned

Come and drink a kiss here
Give in to the fire which drives you to
despair.

À toutes brides is one of the transitional songs in this song cycle, and moves at a rapid pace. The opening reference to the violin being pawed is depicted by the plodding chords in the piano part, while the images of a galloping horse and a wild hurricane are illustrated by the perpetual motion of the accompaniment figure. As in a previous song, there is a brief moment of lyricism and a change of key, which is quickly interrupted by a disjointed and hurried climax to the end. This setting embodies an inner turmoil, which can be reckless, devastating, and full of wild abandonment.

Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer
(Intimes IV)

I have no desire but to love you
(Intimates IV)

Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer
Un orage emplît la vallée
Un poisson la rivière

I have no desire but to love you
A storm gathers in the valley
A fish the river

Je t'ai faite à la taille de ma solitude
Le monde entier pour se cacher
Des jours des nuits pour se comprendre

I created you to equal my loneliness
The whole world in which to hide
Days and nights during which to understand
one another

Pour ne plus rien voir dans tes yeux
Que ce que je pense de toi
Et d'un monde à ton image

To see nothing more in your eyes
But what I think of you
And of a world made in your likeness

Et des jours et des nuits réglés par tes
paupières.

And of the days and nights governed by
your eyelids.

The song cycle is almost brought to completion (this is the seventh out of nine songs in the cycle) with the subject matter of the poem. The references to eyes and eyelids are symbols of reflection and identity, and the themes of love and desire are used as channels for self-discovery. Where 'Day' and 'Night' are juxtaposed in the rest of the song cycle, they are used here as a unit, representing time and the movement of the world. The passion of the poetry is brought out more clearly by the unwavering movement and fluidity of this setting.

Ralph Vaughan Williams remains one of the most significant English composers of the twentieth century. He composed more than 150 art songs, along with a distinguishing collection of symphonies and other works for various instrumentations. His study and advocacy of English folk music also marked a departure of British music from the dominant German style of music at the time. His experiences in the army during World War I and his two marriages had an emotional and lasting influence on his musical output.

Given his propensity for folk idioms, Vaughan Williams seems to have been the perfect composer to set William Blake's (1757–1827) poetry to music. The combination of solo voice with oboe plainly highlights the pastoral and simplistic nature of the poems. This configuration reduces the complexity of the musical texture, allowing the text to come forth more clearly, and serves as an excellent complement to Blake's style of poetry, which tends to focus on expressing a single idea and creating a single mood. Interestingly, Vaughan Williams wrote nine of the songs within four days, with the melody for *The Lamb* coming to him in a dream, as if the coming together of poet and composer was more than mere chance.

Ten Blake Songs was commissioned by the Blake Society to mark the 200th anniversary of William Blake's birth. At the time, Vaughan Williams was 85 years old, and this would turn out to be his last completed work. Most of the poems were selected from two of Blake's collections - *Songs of Innocence* (1789), and *Songs of Experience* (1794). The final song, *Eternity*, takes its text from three excerpts of *Several Questions Answered*, a collection of *gnomic verses. This set of songs juxtaposes the ideas of innocence, youth, and naivety with experience, maturity, and wisdom. Accordingly, the tone of each song is either optimistic and blissful, or pessimistic and sombre. The folk idioms in this set are unmistakable, with modal harmonies, instrumental drones, and lilting rhythms bringing out the pastoral quality of Blake's poetry. The interaction of the oboe with the vocal line varies. At times it is conversational, and the two work in tandem to magnify the other, while at other times they are independent of each other, representing separate entities to paint a larger, more vivid picture.

*short poetic statements of wisdom and morality

Infant Joy

"I have no name: I am but two days old." What shall I call thee? "I happy am, Joy is my name." Sweet joy befall thee!	Pretty Joy! Sweet Joy, but two days old. Sweet Joy I call thee: Thou dost smile, I sing the while, Sweet joy befall thee!
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The oboe introduces the first song *Infant Joy*, setting the idyllic and reflective mood of this set. A sort of musical dialogue between the voice and oboe mirrors the dialogue between mother and child in the poem. An atmosphere of movement and tranquility is also created by the drone played by the oboe as the voice speaks.

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend: I told my wrath, my wrath did end. I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow.	And it grew both day and night, Till it bore an apple bright. And my foe beheld it shine, And he knew that it was mine.
And I water'd it in fears, Night & morning with my tears; And I sunned it with smiles, And with soft deceitful wiles.	And into my garden stole When the night had veil'd the pole, In the morning glad I see My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

A Poison Tree uses the image of a tree that bears a poisonous apple as a symbol for unresolved anger that is harboured and allowed to fester, eventually killing an enemy to whom the anger was directed. The text painting and chromatically altered harmony of this song makes for a sinister, yet truthful fable about the danger of resentment.

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage
hearse.

London is one of the three songs in this set that are written for unaccompanied voice. With poetry taken from Blake's *Songs of Experience*, it describes the city of London at a time when it was stricken with the effects of war, disease, poverty, and despair. The unaccompanied voice, together with a freedom of tempo, creates a lucid and alarming account of the city's destitution.

The Lamb

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild:
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are callèd by His name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

The oboe returns in *The Lamb*, which reverts to the plaintive mood found in the opening. The figure of the lamb functions as an expression of God's goodness, and of the beauty of His creation. The poem itself is in the words of a child, a figure of innocence, purity, and intuition. The child tells the lamb of their Creator, who was also once a child and is called "The Lamb". The sprightly little lamb is represented by the independent and ever-flowing oboe line, with the voice of the child gently trailing beside it. The two characters seem to touch briefly before they walk off into the distance in silent companionship.

The Shepherd

How sweet is the Shepherd's sweet lot!
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lamb's innocent call,
And he hears the ewe's tender reply;
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

The Shepherd is another song for unaccompanied voice. Distinctly folk-like, the song commends the life of a shepherd, who follows his sheep and guards his flock. The flock is able to live in peace under the watchful eye of their shepherd. This imagery, commonly found in the Bible, parallels the relationship between God and humankind.

Ah! Sun-flower!

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime,
Where the traveller's journey is done:

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

Ah! Sunflower carries a poignant message about humanity's flawed nature. The sunflower, longing to reach the splendor of the sun, spends its life desiring that which it cannot attain, as it is rooted to the earth. Ironically, the same sun eventually ages and withers the flower. Similarly, humankind spends its existence constantly looking to the future, squandering away youth and the present time by constantly living in expectation. The oboe and voice are imitative in this song, as the nature of the sunflower is mirrored with humanity's.

Eternity

He who binds to himself a Joy
Doth the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the Joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

The look of love alarms,
Because it's fill'd with fire;
But the look of soft deceit
Shall win the lover's hire.

Soft deceit and idleness,
These are Beauty's sweetest dress.

The closing words of *Eternity* seem to address the message found in the previous song. Blake seems to suggest that life would be better spent appreciating each happy moment as it comes, without clinging to it as it passes, or looking longingly to the future. The second and third stanzas speak of the nature of love and beauty, juxtaposing a “fiery” and “alarming” look of love with the “soft deceit” and “idleness” of outward beauty. This final song has a cautionary tone, with its steady tempo and minimal movement in the oboe line. The last stanza is mystical and mysterious, owing to a mix of modal harmony with major tonality. Finally, the oboe ends the set with a decaying A-natural, and the music drifts away.

Tom der Reimer (Thomas The Rhymer)

Johann Carl Gottfried Loewe (1796–1869)

Der Reimer Thomas lag am Bach,
Am Kieselbach bei Huntly Schloß.
Da sah er eine blonde Frau,
Die saß auf einem weißen Roß.

Thomas Rhymer lay by the burn,
The pebble burn by Huntly Castle
When he beheld a fair lady
Sitting on a white steed.

Sie saß auf einem weißen Roß,
Die Mähne war geflochten fein,
Und hell an jeder Flechte hing
Ein silberblankes Glöcklein.

She was sitting on a white steed
Whose mane was finely braided,
And brightly shining from each braid
There hung a tiny silver bell.

Und Tom der Reimer zog den Hut
Und fiel auf's Knie, er grüßt und spricht:
"Du bist die Himmelskönigin!
Du bist von dieser Erde nicht!"

And Thomas Rhymer doffed his hat
And dropped on one knee, and greets her thus:
'You must be the Queen of Heaven!
You are not of this earth!'

Die blonde Frau hält an ihr Roß:
"Ich will dir sagen, wer ich bin;
Ich bin die Himmelsjungfrau nicht,
Ich bin die Elfenkönigin!

The fair lady reins in her steed:
'I shall tell you who I am;
I am not the Queen of Heaven,
I am the Queen of the Elves.

"Nimm deine Harf und spiel und sing
Und laß dein bestes Lied erschalln,
Doch wenn du meine Lippe küßt,
Bist du mir sieben Jahr verfalln!"

Take up your harp and play and sing
And let your finest song be heard,
But if you ever kiss my lips,
You shall serve me for seven years.'

"Wohl! sieben Jahr, o Königin,
Zu dienen dir, es schreckt mich kaum!"
Er küßte sie, sie küßte ihn,
Ein Vogel sang im Eschenbaum.

'To serve you, O queen, for seven years,
Shall scarcely frighten me!
He kissed her, she kissed him,
A bird sang in the ash tree.

"Nun bist du mein, nun zieh mit mir,
Nun bist du mein auf sieben Jahr."
Sie ritten durch den grünen Wald
Wie glücklich da der Reimer war!

'Now you are mine, now come with me,
Now you are mine for seven years!
They rode through the green wood,
How happy now the Rhymer was.

Sie ritten durch den grünen Wald
Bei Vogelsang und Sonnenschein,
Und wenn sie leicht am Zügel zog,
So klangen hell die Glöcklein.

They rode through the green wood,
The birds sang, the sun shone,
And when she lightly pulled the reins,
The little bells rang brightly.

[Translation by Richard Stokes]

Carl Loewe (1796–1869) was himself a tenor, and wrote over 400 ballads and songs. During his lifetime, his music was popular and widely known. Today, he is not placed among his contemporaries as one of the more revered art song composers, perhaps due to his simplistic and episodic composition style, but his works nevertheless possess undeniable charm and candor.

Tom der Reimer is a wonderful example of Loewe's ability to set a story (which is episodic, after all) to music, effectively varying the vocal line and the piano accompaniment to paint a picture of the scene at hand. This song is a German translation of an originally Scottish tale. It tells of Thomas, a writer of rhymes and poems, who meets the queen of elves and is entranced by her beauty. In exchange for a kiss, however, he must serve her as a slave for seven years, a condition which he is more than happy to accept. The two then ride off into the woods as the birds sing and as the sun shines.

Loewe's piano writing is explicit in its text painting, featuring the sound of droning bagpipes, tinkling bells, and the trotting of a horse. The musical setting of this merry tale is simple and colourful, highlighting the folly and delight of blissful ignorance.