**Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)**

**Mörike-Lieder**

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Beware of meeting your heroes - they may not be as heroic as you thought! That was certainly Hugo Wolf’s experience when, in 1879 as an eager, hot-headed, and passionate ex-composition student (he had been thrown out of the Vienna Conservatory two years earlier for threatening in a letter – which he foolishly signed with his own name – to assassinate the Director) he first met his great musical hero, Johannes Brahms. He had gone to see Brahms in order to show the great man some songs he had written and ask for advice. But Wolf was rebuffed with the admonition that he should start taking things seriously, knuckle down properly, and undergo a course of study in counterpoint with the eminent Beethoven scholar and early editor of Bach’s works, Gustav Nottebohm.



Joseph Hellmesberger – Beware Conservatory Directors sporting beards!

It may be that Brahms’s rebuff of Wolf was not unconnected with the fact that the Director whom the young man had so foolish threatened to kill was none other than Brahms’s good friend, Josef Hellmesberger. So incensed was Wolf at Brahms’s surly rejection of him, that hero-worship was transformed overnight into sheer, vicious hatred. From that moment onwards, Wolf did all he could to undermine Brahms’s reputation, using his later role as an influential music critic to pour contempt on him; an example of his vitriolic criticism exemplified by this published comment; “The art of composing without ideas has found its most worthy representative in Brahms”.

From any standpoint, Hugo Wolf appears to have been a pretty debauched character, driven by an obsession for cigarettes, alcohol and loose women (and not drawing the line when it came to seducing members of his own family). He was small in stature, ravished from an early age by the disease (a consequence of consorting with all those loose women) which eventually turned him insane and caused his premature death, and his rudeness was legendary. Yet, whether he knew it or not, Brahms was doing him a favour by rejecting him; the two men were creatively and artistically so far apart that any forging of links could only have been to the detriment of Wolf’s own creative genius.



Hugo Wolf

Hugo Wolf’s obsession with music began at the age of eight when he attended a performance of Donizetti’s *Belisario.* His wayward and rebellious personality led to most attempts at formal training being prematurely curtailed, and nobody wanted to employ him in any capacity. However, his passion for music along with his keen literary tastes, led to him becoming an outspoken music critic and, most importantly, an extremely perceptive song-writer. He wrote over 300 songs in the space of just six years, and despite his early death and his lack of formal training, history places him up alongside Schubert and Schumann as one of the three pre-eminent masters of *lieder*.

For Wolf, the song was the perfect vehicle, allowing him his adventures into the world of complex harmonies, without the need for some kind of long-term structure, and providing, through the text, the emotional stimulus he so desperately needed. He composed songs only intermittently, interspersing periods of great activity with long periods of musical silence, one such burst of activity occurring between 16th February and 18th May 1888 when he composed 43 songs to texts by Eduard Mörike (1804-1875). His enthusiasm for these is reflected in comments he made to a friend; “I have just written down a new song, a divine song, I tell you…I feel my cheeks glow like molten iron with excitement, and this state of pure inspiration is to me exquisite torment, not pure happiness”. He set 10 more in October 1888 and the complete 53 song collection was published in 1889 as his *Mörike Lieder*. As the German scholar Gerhard Persché has put it, “The composer has looked around and settled down in all the rooms of Mörike’s poetic house, in the meditative and religious ones, just as in those where deliberate naivety and the folksong are domiciled, or the ghostly, the comic and the light-hearted joke, and has added his own accents”.



Eduard Mörike (1804-1875)

Eduard Mörike was another of Wolf’s heroes. Luckily, the two men never met, so the disillusionment he had experienced on encountering Brahms did not sour that relationship; as Susan Youens suggests, “had they met in real life, one can imagine their mutual disgust with each other”, since they were divided by “an enormous aesthetic gap”. Mörike was a Lutheran pastor who wrote poetry very much as a means of escapism from the pressures of daily life. In his younger days he had suffered badly from a disastrous failed love affair with a Swiss barmaid of exceptional beauty, and vowed thereafter to devote himself to a life of tranquillity and simplicity. He embraced simplicity and moderation, lived an uneventful life of relative solitude, found himself unable to cope with the social interaction required by his role as a pastor, so resigned and ended his days in solitude. His artistic preferences were firmly rooted in the past: the polar opposite of Wolf. And whatever Mörike intended to convey in his poetry, Wolf invested it with a level of passion (“voluptuous pleasure in pain”) and emotional power (“written with blood, and such tones can only strike one who, suffering, surrenders his innermost being to deeply truthful knowledge”) that he effectively reinvented the poet completely. As the famous Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick wrote of Wolf (whom, it has to be said, he despised), he “did not compose poems; “he composed entire poets”. Yet the artistic meeting of these two wildly different characters resulted in a collection of some of the finest songs composed in the latter half of the 19th century, from which Alan Bennett has selected 11 which he presents in three thematic groups.

**Wanderlust**

As Richard Stokes has written, although Mörike “never travelled far in the real world, he journeyed extensively in his imagination”. These three songs are journeys in the poet’s imagination.

**Fussreise (“Journey on Foot”)**

Am frischgeschnittnen Wanderstab,

Wenn ich in der Frühe

So durch [die]**1** Wälder ziehe,

Hügel auf und ab:

Dann, wie's Vöglein im Laube

Singet und sich rührt,

Oder wie die gold'ne Traube

Wonnegeister spürt

In der ersten Morgensonne:

So fühlt auch mein alter, lieber

Adam Herbst und Frühlingsfieber,

Gottbeherzte,

Nie verscherzte

Erstlings Paradiseswonne.

Also bist du nicht so schlimm, o alter

Adam, wie die strengen Lehrer sagen;

Liebst und lobst du immer doch,

Singst und preisest immer noch,

Wie an ewig neuen Schöpfungstagen,

Deinen lieben Schöpfer und Erhalter.

Möcht' es dieser geben

Und mein ganzes Leben

Wär' im leichten Wanderschweiße

Eine solche Morgenreise!

With my fresh-cut walking staff

Early in the morning

I go through the woods,

Over the hills, and away.

Then, like the birds in the arbour

That sing and stir,

Or like the golden grapes

That trace their blissful spirits

In the first morning light

I feel in my age, too, beloved

Adam's spring- and autumn-fever --

God fearing,

But not discarded:

The first delights of Paradise.

You are not so bad, oh old

Adam, as the strict teachers say;

You love and rejoice,

Sing and praise --

As it is eternally the first day of creation --

Your beloved Creator and Preserver.

I would like to be given to this

And my whole life

Would be in simple wandering wonder

Of one such morning stroll.

**Im Frühling (“In Spring”)**

Hier lieg' ich auf dem Frühlingshügel:

Die Wolke wird mein Flügel,

Ein Vogel fliegt mir voraus.

Ach, sag' mir, all-einzige Liebe,

Wo du bleibst, daß ich bei dir bliebe,

Doch du und die Lüfte, ihr habt kein Haus.

Der Sonnenblume gleich steht mein Gemüte offen,

Sehnend,

Sich dehnend,

In Lieben und Hoffen.

Frühling, was bist du gewillt?

Wann werd ich gestillt?

Die Wolke seh' ich wandeln und den Fluß,

Es dringt der Sonne goldner Kuß

Mir tief bis in's Geblüt hinein;

Die Augen, wunderbar berauschet,

Thun, als schliefen sie ein,

Nur noch das Ohr dem Ton der Biene lauschet.

Ich denke Dieß und denke Das,

Ich sehne mich, und weiß nicht recht, nach was:

Halb ist es Lust, halb ist es Klage;

Mein Herz, o sage:

Was webst du für Erinnerung

In golden grüner Zweige Dämmerung?

-- Alte unnennbare Tage!

Here I lie on the hill in springtime:

The clouds become my wings,

A bird flies before me.

Ah, tell me, one and only love,

Where you live, so that I may live with you!

But you and the breezes have no home.

Like the sunflower, my mind stands open,

Yearning,

Stretching,

In love and hope.

Spring, what do you want of me?

When shall I be stilled?

I see the clouds moving, and the river,

The sun’s golden kiss penetrates

Deeply into my veins;

The eyes, wonderfully enchanted,

Close, as if in sleep,

Only my ear captures the buzz of the bee.

I think of this and that,

I am yearning, but I do not know hat for?

It is half rapture, half lament;

My heart, oh tell me,

What memories are you weaving

In the golden-green boughs?

-- Ancient, unnamed days!

**Auf einer Wanderung (“On a Walk“)**

In ein freundliches Städtchen tret' ich ein,

In den Straßen liegt roter Abendschein.

Aus einem offnen Fenster eben,

Über den reichsten Blumenflor

Hinweg, hört man Goldglockentöne schweben,

Und eine Stimme scheint ein Nachtigallenchor,

Daß die Blüten beben,

Daß die Lüfte leben,

Daß in höherem Rot die Rosen leuchten vor.

Lang' hielt ich staunend, lustbeklommen.

Wie ich hinaus vor's Tor gekommen,

Ich weiß es wahrlich selber nicht.

Ach hier, wie liegt die Welt so licht!

Der Himmel wogt in purpurnem Gewühle,

Rückwärts die Stadt in goldnem Rauch;

Wie rauscht der Erlenbach, wie rauscht im Grund die Mühle,

Ich bin wie trunken, irrgeführt --

O Muse, du hast mein Herz berührt

Mit einem Liebeshauch!

Into a friendly little town I stroll -

in its streets lie the red evening glow.

From an open window,

across the most splendid riot of flowers,

one can hear gold chimes floating past,

and its one voice sounds like a chorus of nightingales,

so that the blossoms tremble,

so that the breezes come to life,

and so that the roses glow even redder.

Long I pause, astounded and oppressed by joy.

How I finally found myself past the gate

I truly do not myself know.

Ah, here, how lightly does the world lie!

The heavens sway in a purple crowd,

back there, the town is a golden haze:

how the alder brook rushes, how the mill roars on the ground;

I am as if drunk and disoriented;

O Muse, you have stirred my heart

with a breath of love!

**Little Ones**

Again to quote from Richard Stokes, “The naivety, the idylls and the humour of many Mörike poems are, in fact, a bastion erected by the poet against those extreme emotions which threatened to overwhelm him throughout his life”. These four songs hint at darker things through their use of child-like imagery and humour.

**Zitronenfalter im April (“Brimstone Butterfly in April”)**

Grausame Frühlingssonne,

Du weckst mich vor der Zeit,

Dem nur in Maienwonne

Die zarte Kost gedeiht!

Ist nicht ein liebes Mädchen hier,

Das auf der Rosenlippe mir

Ein Tröpfchen Honig beut,

So muß ich jämmerlich vergehn

Und wird der Mai mich nimmer sehn

In meinem gelben Kleid.

Cruel spring sun,

You wake me prematurely --

It is not until May

That my delicate food grows!

If there is no dear girl here

To offer me a drop of honey

From her rosy lips,

Then I must perish in misery,

And May will never see me

In my yellow garb.

**Der Tambour (“The Drummer Boy”)**

Wenn meine Mutter hexen könnt,

Da müßt sie mit dem Regiment,

Nach Frankreich, überall mit hin,

Und wär die Marketenderin.

Im Lager, wohl um Mitternacht,

Wenn Niemand auf ist als die Wacht,

Und Alles schnarchet, Roß und Mann,

Vor meiner Trommel säß' ich dann:

Die Trommel müßt' eine Schüssel sein,

Ein warmes Sauerkraut darein,

Die Schlegel Messer und Gabel,

Eine lange Wurst mein Sabel,

Mein Tschako wär' ein Humpen gut,

Den füll' ich mit Burgunderblut.

Und weil es mir an Lichte fehlt,

Da scheint der Mond in mein Gezelt;

Scheint er auch auf Franzö'sch herein,

Mir fällt doch meine Liebste ein:

Ach weh! Jetzt hat der Spaß ein End!

- Wenn nur meine Mutter hexen könnt!

If my mother could work magic

she would go off with the regiment

to France and everywhere.

She would be a camp-follower

Selling supplies.at midnight,

When there is no one up except the guard,

and everybody is snoring, horses and men.

That's when I would sit by my drum.

The drum would turn into a bowl

with warm sauerkraut in it,

The drumsticks would be the knife and fork,

My sabre, a long sausage;

My shako would be a tankard

Filled with red Burgundy.

And because I would not have a light

the moon would shine into my tent.

Even if it was shining in French

I would still be reminded of my love.

Oh dear! That's brought the fun to an end.

* If only my mother could work magic!

**Elfenlied (Elf Song”)**

Bei Nacht im Dorf der Wächter rief:

„Elfe!“

Ein ganz kleines Elfchen im Walde schlief --

Wohl um die Elfe! --

Und meint, es rief ihm aus dem Tal

Bei seinem Namen die Nachtigall,

Oder Silpelit hätt' ihm gerufen.

Reibt sich der Elf' die Augen aus,

Begibt sich vor sein Schneckenhaus

Und ist als wie ein trunken Mann,

Sein Schläflein war nicht voll getan,

Und humpelt also tippe tapp

Durch's Haselholz in's Tal hinab,

Schlupft an der Mauer hin so dicht,

Da sitzt der Glühwurm Licht an Licht.

»Was sind das helle Fensterlein?

Da drin wird eine Hochzeit sein:

Die Kleinen sitzen bei'm Mahle,

Und treiben's in dem Saale.

Da guck' ich wohl ein wenig 'nein!«

-- Pfui, stößt den Kopf an harten Stein!

Elfe, gelt, du hast genug?

Gukuk! Gukuk!

At night in the village the watchman cried:

"Eleven!"

Aver small elf was asleep in the forest --

Just at eleven o’clock! --

And he thinks that the nightingale

Called him by name from out of the valley!

Or that Silpelit had sent for him.

The elf rubs his eyes,

Steps out in front of his snail-shell house,

And is like a drunken man,

His sleep had been interrupted;

And he hobbles about, tip tap

Through the hazel wood and into the valley,

Slips right up to the wall;

There sits the glow-worm, light on light.

"What bright windows are those?

There must be a wedding celebration inside;

The little folk are sitting at the feast

And dancing in the ballroom.

I shall just peep inside!"

-- Shame! He bumps his head on the stone!

Well, elf, I guess you’ve had enough?

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

**Der Knabe und das Immlein (“The Boy and the Bee”)**

Im Weinberg auf der Höhe

ein Häuslein steht so winde bang;

hat weder Tür noch Fenster,

die Weile wird ihm lang.

Und ist der Tag so schwüle,

sind all' verstummt die Vögelein,

summt an der Sonnenblume

ein Immlein ganz allein.

Lieb hat einen Garten,

da steht ein hübsches Immenhaus:

kommst du daher geflogen?

schickt sie dich nach mir aus?

O nein, du feiner Knabe,

es hieß mich Niemand Boten gehn;

dieses Kind weiß nichts von Lieben,

hat dich noch kaum gesehn.

Was wüßten auch die Mädchen,

wenn sie kaum aus der Schule sind!

Dein herzallerliebstes Schätzchen

ist noch ein Mutterkind.

Ich bring' ihm Wachs und Honig; ade!

ich hab' ein ganzes Pfund;

wie wird das Schätzchen lachen,

ihm wässert schon der Mund -

Ach, wolltest du ihr sagen,

ich wüßte, was viel süßer ist:

nichts Lieblichers auf Erden

als wenn man herzt und küßt!

In a vineyard on a hill

stands a ruined cottage;

It has neither door nor window

and time hangs heavy on it.

But when the day is sultry

And all the birds are silent,

you will hear buzzing round the sunflower.

A solitary bee.

My sweetheart has a garden

in which there is a pretty beehive.

Is that where you have flown from?

Did she send you to me?

"Oh no, you handsome boy,

nobody has sent me with any message.

The child knows nothing of love.

And she has hardly noticed you.

What on earth can girls know

when they have only just left school?

Your beloved sweetheart

is still her mother's child.

I'm taking her some wax and honey.

Goodbye. I've got a whole pound.

How your sweetheart will laugh!

Her mouth will be watering already!"

Ah, I wish you would tell her

I know of something that is much sweeter:

There is nothing lovelier on earth

than a hug and a kiss.

**Solitary Ones**

We have already seen how the poet craved solitude and the final four songs look at solitude from three very different perspectives.

**Selbstgeständnis (“Confession”)**

Ich bin meiner Mutter einzig Kind,

Und weil die andern ausblieben sind,

Was weiß ich wieviel, die sechs oder sieben,

Ist eben alles an mir hängen blieben;

Ich hab' müssen die Liebe, die Treue, die Güte

Für ein ganz halb Dutzend allein aufessen,

Ich will's mein Lebtag nicht vergessen.

Es hätte mir aber noch wohl mögen frommen,

Hätt' ich nur auch Schläg' für Sechse bekommen.

I am my mother's only child

And since the others did not stay,

(Who knows how many, six or seven) Everything was given to me;

Love, loyalty, kindness, devotion

Enough for a full half-dozen

I will never forget it as long as I live,

It may have made me more pious

If I had received the smacks for all six as well.

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**Zur Warnung (“By Way of Warning”)**

Einmal nach einer lustigen Nacht

War ich am Morgen seltsam aufgewacht:

Durst, Wasserscheu, ungleich Geblüt;

Dabei gerührt und weichlich im Gemüt,

Beinah poetisch, ja, ich bat die Muse um ein Lied.

Sie, mit verstelltem Pathos, spottet' mein,

Gab mir den schnöden Bafel ein:

"Es schlägt eine Nachtigall

Am Wasserfall;

Und ein Vogel ebenfalls,

Der schreibt sich Wendehals,

Johann Jakob Wendehals;

Der tut tanzen

Bei den Pflanzen

Ob bemeldten Wasserfalls --"

So ging es fort; mir wurde immer bänger.

Jetzt sprang ich auf: zum Wein! Der war denn auch mein Retter.

-- Merkt's euch, ihr tränenreichen Sänger,

Im Katzenjammer ruft man keine Götter!

Once after a merry night

I woke one morning feeling odd:

thirst (but not for water), pounding blood,

feeling disturbed and sentimental;

almost poetic, yes, I asked my Muse for a song.

Pretending pathos, she mocked me

with me this contemptible piece of doggerel:

"A nightingale is singing

by the waterfall;

and another bird as well,

Wendehals is his name,

Johann Jakob Wendehals;

who dances

by the plants

of the aforementioned waterfall."

and so it continued, and my anxiety grew.

Now I sprang up: Wine! That would restore me!

Mark you well, weeping bards,

Call not on God when you have a hangover!

**Der Jäger (“The Hunter”)**

Drei Tage Regen fort und fort,

Kein Sonnenschein zur Stunde;

Drei Tage lang kein gutes Wort

Aus meiner Liebsten Munde!

Sie trutzt mit mir und ich mit ihr,

So hat sie's haben wollen;

Mir aber nagt's am Herzen hier,

Das Schmollen und das Grollen.

Willkommen denn, des Jägers Lust,

Gewittersturm und Regen!

Fest zugeknöpft die heiße Brust,

Und jauchzend euch entgegen!

Nun sitzt sie wohl daheim und lacht

Und scherzt mit den Geschwistern;

Ich höre in des Waldes Nacht

Die alten Blätter flüstern.

Nun sitzt sie wohl und weinet laut

Im Kämmerlein, in Sorgen;

Mir ist es wie dem Wilde traut,

In Finsterniß geborgen.

Kein Hirsch und Rehlein überall!

Ein Schuß zum Zeit vertreibe!

Gesunder Knall und Wiederhall

Erfrischt das Mark im Leibe. --

Doch wie der Donner nun verhallt

In Tälern, durch die Runde,

Ein plötzlich Weh mich überwallt,

Mir sinkt das Herz zu Grunde.

Sie trutzt mit mir und ich mit ihr,

So hat sie's haben wollen,

Mir aber frißt's am Herzen hier,

Das Schmollen und das Grollen.

Und auf! und nach der Liebsten Haus!

Und sie gefaßt um's Mieder!

"Drück' mir die naßen Locken aus,

und küß' und hab' mich wieder!"

Three days of non-stop rain,

No sunshine as yet:

Three whole days without a good word

From my love's mouth.

She defied me and I her;

Which is just what she wanted.

It's gnawing at my heart

all this sulking and grumbling.

So welcome to the joy of the hunt

to thunderstorms and to rain!

My hot breast is well wrapped up

ready to exult in taking you on!

Now she'll be sitting at home laughing

and joking with her brothers and sisters;

but I am in the woods at night listening to

the whispers of the old leaves.

Now she'll be sitting and crying her eyes out.

She'll be in her little room with her cares;

but I am cosy like a wild animal

hidden in the darkness.

There is no stag or fawn anywhere.

A shot to kill time.

A healthy bang and an echo

refreshes you deep down inside the body.

But as the thunder dies away

in the valleys and all around

a sudden pain overwhelms me,

my heart sinks to the depths.

She defied me and I her;

Which is just what she wanted.

It's eating into my heart

all this sulking and grumbling.

So, get up! To my love's house

to put my arms round her waist,

"Dry my wet locks,

Kiss me and take me back!"

**Abschied (“Farewell”)**

Unangeklopft ein Herr tritt Abends bei mir ein:

»Ich habe die Ehr', Ihr Rezensent zu sein!«

Sofort nimmt er das Licht in die Hand,

besieht lang meinen Schatten an der Wand,

rückt nah und fern:

»Nun, lieber junger Mann,

sehn Sie doch gefälligst mal

Ihre Nas' so von der Seite an!

Sie geben zu, daß das ein Auswuchs is'.«

Das? Alle Wetter - gewiß!

Ei Hasen! ich dachte nicht, all' mein Lebtage nicht,

daß ich so eine Weltsnase führt' im Gesicht!

Der Mann sprach noch[Verschiedenes hin und her,

ich weiß, auf meine Ehre, nicht mehr;

meinte vielleicht, ich sollt' ihm beichten.

Zuletzt stand er auf; ich tat ihm leuchten.

Wie wir nun an der Treppe sind,

da geb' ich ihm, ganz frohgesinnt,

einen kleinen Tritt,

nur so von hinten aufs Gesäße mit -

alle Hagel! ward das ein Gerumpel,

ein Gepurzel, ein Gehumpel!

Dergleichen hab' ich nie gesehn,

all' mein Lebtage nicht gesehn

einen Menschen so rasch die Trepp' hinabgehn!

One evening, without knocking, a gentleman comes visiting me:

"I am honoured to be your critic!", he says.

Immediately he takes the light in his hand,

gazes long at my shadow on the wall,

stepping close and then stepping back: "Now, my good young man,

kindly see how your nose

looks from the side!

You must admit that it is a protuberance."

This? Good gracious - so it is!

My word! I never imagined in my whole life long

that I bore a world-sized nose on my face!

The man said various other things about this and that,

and on my honour, I remember no more;

perhaps he thought I should make a confession.

Finally, he stood up and I lit his way out.

As we stood at the top of the stairs,

I gave him, cheerfully,

a small kick

from behind, on the backside,

and by hail! what a jolting,

tumbling, and hobbling!

The equal I have never seen,

my whole life long,

of a man going so quickly down the stairs!