

Presented at Carnegie Hall by



Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 7:30 PM
Judy and Arthur Zankel Hall

Rachel Willis-Sørensen

Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Soprano
Tamar Sanikidze, Piano

AMY BEACH
(1867–1944)

Three Browning Songs, Op. 44 (1899–1900;
Text by Robert Browning, 1812–1889)
The Year's at the Spring
Ah, Love, but a Day!
I Send My Heart up to Thee

SERGEI
RACHMANINOFF
(1873–1943)

Six Songs, Op. 38 (1916)
In my Garden at Night (Text by Alexander Blok)
To Her (Text by K. Biély)
Daisies (Text by Igor Syeveryanin)
The Pied Piper (Text by V. Briussov)
Dreams (Text by F. Sologoub)
“A-Oo” (The Quest) (Text by K. Balmont)

JEAN SIBELIUS
(1865–1957)

Five Songs, Op. 37 (1900–1902)
The First Kiss (Text by J. L. Runeberg)
Little Lasse (Text by Z. Topelius)
Sunrise (Text by Tor Hedberg)
Was it a dream? (Text by J. J. Wecksell)
The Tryst (Text by J. L. Runeberg)

INTERMISSION

S. ANDREW LLOYD
(b. 1979)

Amaranthine (World Premiere;
Text by Francis Thompson, 1857–1907)
I fled Him
Fear wist not to evade
Heaven and I wept together
That voice is round me like a bursting sea
(Vocalise)

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864–1949)

“Morgen!,” Op. 27, No. 4 (Text by John Henry Mackay)

“Schlechtes Wetter,” Op. 69, No. 5
(Text by Heinrich Heine)

“Cäcilie,” Op. 27, No. 2
(Text by Heinrich Hart)

“Allerseelen,” Op. 10, No. 8
(Text by Hermann von Gilm)

“Frühlingsfeier,” Op. 56, No. 5
(Text by Heinrich Heine)

The Program

Tonight's recital illuminates the pervasive tension between the hidden and the revealed, the familiar and the feared, the gulf (often heartbreaking) between hope and reality. It's perhaps in the heightened emotional world of the *fin-de-siècle* that these themes dominate in musical genres, not merely informing the narratives but forming them wholly. Every song on this program includes either music or lyrics (and occasionally both) written between 1885 and 1918. The dramatic, Romantic-era polarities manifest themselves not only in the songs, but in the lives of the poets and composers who created them.

AMY BEACH (1867–1944)

Three Browning Songs, Op. 44 (1899–1900; Text by Robert Browning, 1812–1889)

New England composer Amy Cheney Beach was commissioned to write the first of her *Three Browning Songs* by the Browning Society of Boston in 1899, then dedicated the other two songs to the Society the following year. “This Year’s at the Spring” draws its text from Robert Browning’s 1841 verse drama *Pippa Passes*, in which an innocent servant girl sings and muses to herself as she strolls by several groups of people one day, artlessly bestowing moral uplift in passing. Beach composed this joyful paean to freshness and new beginnings in just a few minutes while riding a train, the rhythm of train-tracks leaving their indelible impression on the accompaniment.

“Ah, Love, but a Day!” is drawn from Robert Browning’s poem “James Lee’s Wife” of 1864, and is perhaps more autobiographical for both Browning and Beach. Some scholars have claimed that the sentiments expressed here reflect the poetic traits of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Robert’s wife and acclaimed poet in her own right), who wrote often about love failing to reach its idealized heights. In this poem, the devoted wife is never named—a parallel to Amy Beach’s professional identity in which she routinely published and performed under her husband’s name, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.”

Browning penned the words “I Send My Heart Up to Thee!” in 1842 as an exhibition catalog caption for Daniel Maclise’s painting *The Serenade* in which a young Venetian man sings to his beloved. Browning later expanded on this caption in his poem “In a Gondola,” fabricating an extended dialog between the young lovers that ends tragically. For the moment, though, the young man’s serenade, accompanied by the rocking of a Venetian gondola in the piano part, is the fresh, exuberant profession of romanticized love.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)

Six Songs, Op. 38 (1916)

The “Six Songs,” Op. 38, of Sergei Rachmaninoff emerged from a somewhat clandestine relationship with an anonymous female correspondent, known at first to the composer only as “Re.” Rachmaninoff eventually discovered the identity of his admirer and muse; it was the emerging Soviet author Marietta Shaginyan, who continued for some years to supply the composer with ideas for song lyrics. Their connection is most notably represented by Rachmaninoff’s Op. 34 song cycle, dedicated to Shaginyan, but perhaps is equally significant in his Op. 38 songs, for which Shaginyan selected the poems.

These songs bear the hallmark of Rachmaninoff’s legendary pianism. So salient is the piano accompaniment, in fact, that some of them begin to resemble solo piano works with an obbligato soprano part.

Each of the lyrics in Op. 38 was penned by a Russian Symbolist poet of the Silver Age, all of them still living (and most of them younger than the composer) when Rachmaninoff set their texts to music in 1916. Typical of Symbolist poetry, the locus of artistic value is not so much the meaning of the words as their sound, their ability to evoke and suggest the idealized and imagined world of dreams. The themes of the set—hope, love, and yearning—are both recapitulated and diminished in the loneliness of the final song.

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

Five Songs, Op. 37 (1900–1902)

For Jean Sibelius, a negotiation between the overt and the inscrutable was inherent in the culture, language, and history of his native Finland. Finnish nationalist sentiment intensified during the late 19th century, and it was Sibelius who took on board the role of defining the sounds of Finnish concert music. But, like many of Finland’s cultural and administrative leaders of the day, Sibelius’s first language was Swedish, and his nearly 100 songs were composed to Swedish texts.

Sibelius’s “Five Songs,” Op. 37, date from the early years of the new century, a particularly fecund period in his career in which he completed not only several other song cycles but also his beloved “Finlandia” tone poem, the First and Second Symphonies, and the Violin Concerto.

All of the poets for these “Five Songs” were late Romantics, two of them—Hedberg and Wecksell—still living when Sibelius set their texts. Johan Runeberg, the poet for the first and last songs in this cycle, wrote the lyrics for Finland’s de facto national anthem, and is considered the country’s national poet.

The “Five Songs” of Op. 37 all deal with death, either as a hidden observer in the margins of life or the active thief of happiness and love. The fourth song, “Var det en dröm?” (“Was it a dream?”), is by far the most frequently performed of the set; Sibelius himself considered it his best song.

S. ANDREW LLOYD (b. 1979)

Amaranthine (World Premiere; Text by Francis Thompson, 1857–1907)

The song cycle *Amaranthine* by S. Andrew Lloyd, winner of the 2022 Prize of the Ariel Bybee Endowment at the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, is the musical outlier in this program—the only selection not composed in the late Romantic period. Lloyd is a contemporary composer and organist currently based at the University of Texas at San Antonio. But, despite working more than a century after the other composers on the program, Lloyd wanted this particular cycle to sit securely within Rachel Willis-Sørensen’s mastery of Romantic operatic repertoire. In *Amaranthine*, he has woven a contemporary musical texture from threads steeped in the Romantic late- and post-tonal traditions of Britten, Strauss, Wagner, and other opera composers.

The source of the title and lyrics for *Amaranthine* (which means “eternal” or “undying”) is the 1890 poem “The Hound of Heaven,” the most celebrated work of English author Francis Thompson. This poem is a quasi-metaphysical reversal of traditional devotional poetry where the believer seeks peace, comfort, and refuge in God’s embrace. In Thompson’s poem, the protagonist seeks instead for a hiding place, hoping to avoid becoming prey to the relentless “hound” of God’s eternal love, even while reluctantly comprehending that the divine conquest is inevitable and, ultimately, good. Lloyd’s heartfelt setting—a monodrama in which God’s voice is alluded to but not verbalized—includes cyclic musical references across the movements, connecting them symbolically in infinite circles.

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

Selected Songs

The five songs by Richard Strauss all present narratives remote from the prosaic world, as they explore idealized romance, imagined tales, mythology, yearning, and escapism—the lingua franca of Romantic drama. Strauss was a master of the dramatic vignette in song, writing more than 200 lieder through the course of his illustrious career.

The rapturous “Morgen!” (1890) was written by Strauss as a wedding gift to his wife, the soprano Pauline de Ahna. Its idyllic setting contrasts dramatically with the miserable winter scene of “Schlechtes Wetter” (1918), though here the poet still invents a story of domestic coziness, despite the raging storm. “Cäcilie” (1890) is from the same wedding collection as “Morgen!,” and sets a poem that Heinrich Hart wrote to his own wife,

sharing dreams of happiness and a blissful life together. “Allerseelen” (1885) comes from the first set of songs Strauss published. Death in this poem is literal—a direct reference to All Souls’ Day when loved ones who have passed are remembered. “Frühlingsfeier” (1906) could be translated literally as “Rite of Spring.” It’s an impassioned lament on the death of the mythological Adonis whose drops of blood, according to legend, sprang up into red flowers in an amaranthine regeneration of life.

—Luke Howard

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The Artists

Rachel Willis-Sørensen

American soprano Rachel Willis-Sørensen is known for her diverse repertoire ranging from Mozart to Wagner. A regular guest at the leading opera houses around the world, *Le Monde* enthused, “...the American soprano has without a doubt one of the most impressive voices in the opera world.” In 2021, Willis-Sørensen signed a multi-record deal with Sony Classical. Her debut album was released on April 8, 2022, and her second CD, *Strauss: Vier Letzte Lieder*, came out on March 10, 2023. Willis-Sørensen opens the 2023–2024 season with a return to the Grand Théâtre de Genève to perform the role of Elisabeth in Verdi’s *Don Carlos* which she debuted in Chicago last year. She will perform two Verdi operas at the Wiener Staatsoper this season; first, a return to the role of Desdemona in *Otello*, followed by Elena in the Italian version of *I Vespri Siciliani*. She makes her first role debut of the season, as Antonia in Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* at Opéra national de Paris, also marking her house debut. She performs the role of Elsa in *Lohengrin* and Desdemona in *Otello* at the Bayerische Staatsoper, and makes her Hong Kong debut in the title role of R. Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* as part of the 52nd Hong Kong Arts Festival with the Bayerische Staatsoper. In the spring, she returns to LA Opera as Violetta in *La Traviata*. At the Santa Fe Opera, she will perform the role of the Marschallin in Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*. And on the concert stage, she performs Mahler’s Eighth Symphony at the Bayerische Staatsoper, and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony at the Wiener Konzerthaus, as well as her debut recital at Carnegie Hall tonight. Willis-Sørensen also performs R.

Strauss's Four Last Songs with Houston Symphony as part of their Strauss Festival under the baton of Maestro Juraj Valčuha.

Previous engagements include Elisabeth (*Don Carlos*) with Lyric Opera of Chicago; Rusalka (*Rusalka*) at the San Francisco Opera and NDR Hamburg; Marschallin (*Der Rosenkavalier*) at Glyndebourne, Semperoper Dresden, and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden; Violetta (*La Traviata*) at Opéra national de Bordeaux and the Bayerische Staatsoper; Marguerite (*Faust*) as part of the Royal Opera House's tour of Japan; Elsa (*Lohengrin*) at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opernhaus Zurich, and Oper Frankfurt; Desdemona (*Otello*) at the Wiener Staatsoper, LA Opera, and the Bayerische Staatsoper; Mimi (*La bohème*) at the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Wiener Staatsoper, and Semperoper Dresden; Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at the Metropolitan Opera and the Wiener Staatsoper; Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Wiener Staatsoper, Houston Grand Opera, and Semperoper Dresden; Hélène (*Les Vêpres siciliennes*) at the Bayerische Staatsoper; Valentine (*Les Huguenots*) at the Grand Théâtre Genève; Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) at the San Francisco Opera and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden; Ellen Orford (*Peter Grimes*) at the Bayerische Staatsoper; Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*) at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Staatskapelle Dresden, and the Wiener Staatsoper; Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*) at the Houston Grand Opera; Leonore (*Fidelio*) at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia; and Leonora (*Il Trovatore*) at the Teatro Regio di Torino, the Royal Opera House, and Gran Teatre del Liceu. Equally at home on the concert stage, she has performed Strauss's Four Last Songs multiple times, including notably at Buckingham Palace for an HRH Prince Charles birthday celebration, and joined Jonas Kaufmann in 2019 and 2020 for a multi-city European tour in support of his latest recording, *Wien*, on which she is featured. Other repertoire includes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Mahler's Second, Fourth, and Eighth Symphonies, Mendelssohn's *Elias*, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, and the Verdi Requiem.

Willis-Sørensen was a member of the ensemble at the Dresdner Semperoper for three years, where she sang the title role in (*Die Lustige Witwe*), Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*), Vitellia (*La clemenza di Tito*), Elettra (*Idomeneo*), Diemut (*Feuersnot*), Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*) and Mimi (*La bohème*). She won first prize at the 2014 Operalia competition in Los Angeles and at the 2011 Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition, and she was a winner of the 2010 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She holds both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Brigham Young University and is an alumna of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. An active presence on social media, she can be found on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok @rachewillissorensen and on X under @RWSing.

Tamar Sanikidze

A “technically nimble and supportive pianist” (*The New York Times*), Tamara Sanikidze has performed on the world’s most prestigious stages and serves as the head of voice division, director, producer, and principal coach of the Butler Opera Center, and artistic director of Butler Opera International Competition. A graduate of the Cafritz Young Artist Program at Washington National Opera and the Adler Fellowship at San Francisco Opera, Sanikidze regularly serves numerous music staff positions in San Francisco Opera and Los Angeles Opera, working with James Conlon, Nicola Luisotti, Donald Runnicles, and Eun Sun Kim. As official pianist for Operalia, Sanikidze has performed in Hungarian State Opera house in Budapest, La Scala in Milano, Galina Vishnevskaya’s Opera Centre in Moscow, Teatro Filarmonico in Verona, Royal Opera house in London, Dorothy Chandler Auditorium in Los Angeles, Teatro Degollado in Guadalajara, São Carlos in Lisbon, and National Opera Theater in Prague.



As an active recitalist, she partners with Nadine Sierra, Thomas Hampson, Leah Crocetto, Lianna Haroutounian, and Quinn Kelsey. By special invitation, Sanikidze performed at the White House for President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush. She frequently coaches for the Merola Opera Program, Wolf Trap Opera Center, as well as Young Artist Programs at Washington National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Teatro De’ll Opera di Roma, and LA Opera. In 2015, she joined the Lehrer Vocal Institute at the Music Academy of the West as faculty artist and audition/casting judge. She is the recipient of the Marilyn Horne Foundation Award for Excellence in Vocal Accompanying. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Maryland, College Park, and is an alumna of the Wolftrap Opera Center, Merola Opera Center, as well as the Music Academy of the West, Aspen Opera Center, Cleveland Art Song Festival, and SongFest.

Center for Latter-day Saint Arts

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The Ariel Bybee Endowment at the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts

The Center for Latter-day Saint Arts established an endowment in perpetuity to honor Ariel Bybee, who sang with the Metropolitan Opera for 18 seasons (1977–1995) with more than 450 performances as a principal artist. Tonight's concert includes the premiere of *Amaranthine* by S. Andrew Lloyd, the inaugural winner of the Ariel Bybee Endowment prize, in 2022. The Endowment gives an annual award for the creation of new works of art or scholarship that correspond to career highlights and passions of Ariel Bybee. Each year, the Endowment announces a call for submissions open to Latter-day Saint artists and scholars in one of nine, rotating categories: opera, dance, scholarship, art songs, youth education, hymns, visual arts, collaborative arts, and choral music. The 2023 prize went to Susana Isabel Silva and Gonzalo Silva from Argentina, whose art installation based on the pioneering electroacoustic music of Hilda Dianda will open soon at Sargent's Daughters in New York City. The 2024 Prize, announced just last month, with additional funding support from the Sorenson Legacy Foundation, was given to Mia Black for the creation of an elementary school textbook on the topic of American Folk Music, specifically, to trace the immigrant experience in America through folk music. To learn more, including to contribute to the Endowment, visit centerforlatterdaysaintarts.org/arielbybee.

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