

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY®

MTD

**School of Music
Theatre and Dance**

**Patricia Thompson, Mezzo-Soprano
Amanda Arrington, Piano**

Faculty Recital

**Claude Debussy, *Chansons de Bilitis*
Richard Wagner, *Wesendonck Lieder*
Edie Hill, *The Giver of Stars***

**7:30pm
All Faiths Chapel
Kansas State University**

Chansons de Bilitis (1897-1898)
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

One of the most important musicians of his time, Claude Debussy's harmonic innovations had a profound influence on generations of composers. He may have been the first in history to become a fully modern-minded artist, joining a community of writers and painters, borrowing ideas and lending them in turn. Admittedly, before Debussy there was Richard Wagner, whose impact was sufficiently seismic that the term "Wagnerism" had to be coined to describe it. With Wagner, though, the influence tended to go in one direction: outward. Debussy was receptive. He saw, he read, he pondered, and he transformed the ineffable into sound. Initially Debussy was a great admirer and heavily influenced by Wagner, even traveling several times to Bayreuth. However, he realized he needed to free himself from Wagner's influence and find his own voice. Debussy was a restless student, exasperating his teachers and fascinating his schoolmates. When confronted with the fundamentals of harmony and form, he asked why any systems were needed. He had little trouble mastering academic exercises, and, after two attempts, he won the Prix de Rome, a traditional stepping-stone to a successful compositional career. But in his early vocal pieces, and in his legendarily mesmerizing improvisations at the piano, he jettisoned rules that had been in place for hundreds of years. Familiar chords appeared in unfamiliar sequences. Melodies followed the contours of ancient or exotic scales. Forms dissolved into textures and moods. An academic evaluation accused him of indulging in Impressionism—a label that stuck.¹

Pierre Louys's collection of poems, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, presents the reader with a detailed autobiography of the eponymous 'author,' a Greek courtesan writing in the sixth century BCE. The poems are the reflections of the mature Bilitis on the events of her life from childhood to death. The narrative is organized into three sections, each corresponding to a distinct phase of Bilitis's life: her idyllic youth in Pamphylia, her young adulthood in the city of Mytilene, and her maturity as a courtesan of Aphrodite on the island of Cyprus. Each section also presents Bilitis involved in a different manifestation of love: the pastoral first section describes the youthful relationship between Bilitis and the shepherd boy Lykas, the second section details a ten-year lesbian affair in a sophisticated urban setting, and the final section explores the sexually liberated lifestyle of a metropolitan courtesan.

Taken as a whole, the *Chansons* create an overarching narrative of the narrator's (Bilitis) life. Many readers believed that the poems had been collected and translated from Greek by the French poet Pierre Louys. This "translation;" however, was an elaborate literary conceit; Bilitis is an entirely fictional character, and the songs were written by their supposed translator, a fact not widely known until well after the work's initial publication. Authorial confusion aside, the *Chansons de Bilitis* were a great success, and in combination with the novel *Aphrodite* (1896), they established Louys as one of the preeminent literary figures of fin-de-siecle France.

The commercial and critical success of the *Chansons* prompted several enhancements to Louys's original project, including the gradual increase in the number of poems in later editions of the collection from 93 to 168. The sheer size of the collection has ramifications for its musical offspring; because the literary work presents a complex tapestry-like narrative of Bilitis's life, Debussy's selection of only three poems for the songs limits the depth of the narrative. Debussy's three songs reconstruct the narrative depth present in the youthful, idyllic life of Bilitis in the complete first section of Louys's *Chansons de Bilitis*.²

¹ Alex Ross, "The Velvet Revolution of Claude Debussy." *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/29/the-velvet-revolution-of-claude-debussy> (Accessed April 21, 2022)

² Gibbons, W. (2008). Debussy as Storyteller: Narrative Expansion in the Trois Chansons de Bilitis. *Current Musicology*, (85). <https://doi.org/10.7916/cm.v0i85.5129> (Accessed April 16, 2022)

La flûte de Pan

Pierre Louÿs

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies, il m'a donné une
syrinx faite de roseaux bien taillés,
unis avec la blanche cire
qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.
Il m'apprend à jouer, assise sur ses genoux; mais je
suis un peu tremblante. Il en joue après moi, si
doucement que je l'entends à peine.
Nous n'avons rien à nous dire, tant nous sommes
près l'un de l'autre; mais nos chansons veulent se
répondre, et tour à tour nos bouches s'unissent
sur la flûte.
Il est tard; voici le chant des grenouilles vertes qui
commence avec la nuit. Ma mère ne croira jamais
que je suis restée si longtemps à chercher ma
ceinture perdue.

La chevelure

Pierre Louÿs

Il m'a dit: «Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé. J'avais ta
chevelure autour de mon cou. J'avais tes cheveux
comme un
collier noir autour de ma nuque et sur ma poitrine.
«Je les caressais, et c'étaient les miens; et nous
étions liés pour toujours ainsi,
par la même chevelure
la bouche sur la bouche, ainsi que deux lauriers
n'ont souvent qu'une racine.
«Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé, tant nos membres
étaient confondus, que je devenais toi-même ou
que tu entras en moi comme mon songe.»
Quand il eut achevé, il mit doucement ses mains
sur mes épaules,
et il me regarda d'un regard si tendre, que je
baissai les yeux avec un frisson.

The flute of Pan

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

For Hyacinthus day he gave me a syrinx made of
carefully cut reeds,
bonded with white wax which tastes
sweet to my lips like honey.
He teaches me to play, as I sit on his lap; but I am
a little fearful. He plays it after me, so gently that I
scarcely hear him.
We have nothing to say, so close are we one to
another, but our songs try to answer each other,
and our mouths join in turn
on the flute.
It is late; here is the song of the green frogs that
begins with the night. My mother will never
believe I stayed out so long to look for my lost
sash.

The tresses of hair

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

He said to me: 'Last night I dreamed. I had your
tresses around my neck. I had your hair like a
black
necklace all round my nape and over my breast.
'I caressed it and it was mine; and we
were united thus forever
by the same tresses,
mouth on mouth, just as two laurels
often share one root.
'And gradually it seemed to me, so intertwined
were our limbs, that I was becoming you,
or you were entering into me like a dream.'
When he had finished, he gently
set his hands on my shoulders
and gazed at me so tenderly
that I lowered my eyes with a shiver.

Le tombeau des Naiades

Pierre Louÿs

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais; mes
cheveux devant ma bouche se fleurissaient
de petits glaçons,
et mes sandales étaient lourdes de
neige fangeuse et tassée.
Il me dit: «Que cherches-tu?»—
«Je suis la trace du satyre.
Ses petits pas fourchus alternent dans un manteau
blanc. Il me dit,
«Les satyres sont morts.
«Les satyres et les nymphes aussi. Depuis trente
ans il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible.
La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.
Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau.»
Et avec le fer de sa houe il cassa la glace de la
source où jadis riaient les naïades. Il prenait de
grands morceaux froids, et les soulevant vers le
ciel pâle, il regardait au travers.

The tomb of the Naiads

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

Along the frost-bound wood I walked; my hair
across my mouth, blossomed
with tiny icicles,
and my sandals were heavy with muddy,
packed snow.
He said to me: 'What do you seek?' 'I follow the
satyr's track.
His little cloven hoof-marks alternate like holes in
a white cloak.' He said to me:
'The satyrs are dead.
'The satyrs and the nymphs too. For thirty years
there has not been so harsh a winter. The tracks
you see are those of a goat.
But let us stay here, where their tomb is.'
And with the iron head of his hoe he broke the ice
of the spring, where the naiads used to laugh. He
picked up some huge cold fragments, and, raising
them to the pale sky, gazed through them.³



³ Translation ©Richard Stokes, author of *A French Song Companion* (Oxford University Press) Provided via Oxford Lieder (www.oxfordlieder.co.uk) Accessed April 21, 2022.

⁴ Illustration from *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, by Pierre Louÿs, pub. 1922 (pochoir print), Barbier, Georges (1882-1932) <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/1-illustration-from-les-chansons-de-bilitis-georges-barbier.html> (Accessed April 21, 2022)

***Wesendonck Lieder* (1857)**
Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

The circumstances under which Richard Wagner composed his *Wesendonck Lieder* are nearly legendary. In May of 1849 the fall of the provisional government that led the Dresden rebellion put an end to Wagner's revolutionary activities. He was forced to flee, first to Weimar, then, with the help of Franz Liszt, to Zurich, Switzerland, where he sought the support of friends.

While in exile in Zurich Wagner continued to work on his theoretical works and the opera *Das Rheingold*; he also participated in the local musical life. One thing that did not change for him during his exile was the precariousness of his pecuniary position. That is to say that, as usual, he was broke.

Enter Otto Wesendonck, a wealthy silk merchant who, in 1852 made Wagner a generous loan. But what is more important to the narrative is the introduction of Mrs. Wesendonck, the young, pretty, and artistic wife of the merchant, who quickly fell under Wagner's spell. Wagner, however, had equally succumbed to Mathilde's charms, resulting in her becoming both his lover and muse.

It was in 1854 that two currents came together in Wagner's life to give birth to the idea for his opera *Tristan und Isolde*: his reading of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, and his ongoing love for Mathilde. In August of 1857 he set aside work on the opera *Siegfried* to begin work on the poem for *Tristan und Isolde*. While all of this was happening, Otto Wesendonck, who had bought an estate outside of Zurich, allowed Wagner and his wife Minna to move into a cottage on the grounds for a nominal fee. This took place in late April of 1857. As he worked at the poem of *Tristan* beginning in August, the proximity to Mathilde induced him to read to her each evening his work in progress. (It was during this time that Wagner made the acquaintance of his future wife Cosima, just then a newlywed to his friend, the conductor Hans von Bülow; but that's another story.)

This intense inter-action with the poet-composer inspired Mathilde to compose five passionate poems of her own, which Wagner set for voice and piano, during the winter of 1857 as he worked on the first act of *Tristan*. Mathilde later wrote in her memoirs that he took each of her poems upon their completion and gave to them a "supreme transfiguration and consecration" with his music.

"Der Engel" is based on a passage from *Das Rheingold*. The text relates the compassion of Angels who risk the force of gravity to carry earthly spirits up to heaven. Wagner sets the first and last stanzas in G major (*however I will be singing the entire cycle down two steps—therefore the first song is in the key of E major*) when describing the angelic realm, contrasting it with G minor to render the pained human heart languishing on earth. "Stehe still" is a plea to Time to stop its ceaseless circles so that the supplicant might experience the emptiness of pure being. The restlessness of the music setting the first two stanzas gives way to a more static, tender music as "eye drinks rapture from eye." "Im Treibhaus" is perhaps the most Schopenhauerian text of the cycle with its emphases upon the nothingness of reality. The recurring ascending melodic pattern reaches toward and embraces the void. This music later found its way into the Prelude to Act III of *Tristan und Isolde*. In "Schmerzen," the poet reflects upon the paradox that "if death brings forth life/and sorrow only bring delight/O how thankful am I that Nature/granted me such sorrows." Like "Im Treibhaus," "Träume" is a study for *Tristan*. The longing for dissolution of being – so profoundly expressed in the opera by way of a harmonically chromatic palette – paints in this song "an everlasting image: oblivion, remembrance!"⁵

⁵ *Wesendonck Lieder*. <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/4655/wesendonck-lieder> (Accessed April 15, 2022)

Der Engel

Mathilde Wesendonck

In der Kindheit frühen Tagen
Hört ich oft von Engeln sagen,
Die des Himmels hehre Wonne
Tauschen mit der Erdensonne,
Daß, wo bang ein Herz in Sorgen
Schmachtet vor der Welt verborgen,
Daß, wo still es will verbluten,
Und vergehn in Tränenfluten,
Daß, wo brünstig sein Gebet
Einzig um Erlösung fleht,
Da der Engel niederschwebt,
Und es sanft gen Himmel hebt.
Ja, es stieg auch mir ein Engel nieder,
Und auf leuchtendem Gefieder
Führt er, ferne jedem Schmerz,
Meinen Geist nun himmelwärts!

Stehe still!

Mathilde Wesendonck

Sausendes, brausendes Rad der Zeit,
Messer du der Ewigkeit;
Leuchtende Sphären im weiten All,
Die ihr umringt den Weltenball;
Urewige Schöpfung, halte doch ein,
Genug des Werdens, laß mich sein!
Halte an dich, zeugende Kraft,
Urgedanke, der ewig schafft!
Hemmet den Atem, stillt den Drang,
Schweiget nur eine Sekunde lang!
Schwellende Pulse, fesselt den Schlag;
Ende, des Wollens ew'ger Tag!
Daß in selig süßem Vergessen
Ich mög' alle Wonne ermessen!
Wenn Auge in Auge wonnig trinken,
Seele ganz in Seele versinken;

Wesen in Wesen sich wiederfindet,
Und alles Hoffens Ende sich kündigt,
Die Lippe verstummt in staundendem Schweigen,
Keinen Wunsch mehr will das Innre zeugen:
Erkennt der Mensch des Ew'gen Spur,
Und löst dein Rätsel, heil'ge Natur!

The angel

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

In the early days of childhood
I often heard tell of angels
Who exchange heaven's pure bliss
For the sun of earth,
So that, when a sorrowful heart
Hides its yearning from the world
And would silently bleed away
And dissolve in streams of tears,
And when its fervent prayer
Begs only for deliverance,
That angel will fly down
And gently raise the heart to heaven.
And to me too an angel descended,
And now on shining wings
Bear my spirit, free from all pain,
Towards heaven!

Stand still!

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

Rushing, roaring wheel of time,
You that measure eternity;
Gleaming spheres in the vast universe,
You that surround our earthly sphere;
Eternal creation - cease:
Enough of becoming, let me be!
Hold yourselves back, generative powers,
Primal Thought that always creates!
Stop your breath, still your urge,
Be silent for a single moment!
Swelling pulses, restrain your beating;
Eternal day of the Will - end!
That in blessed, sweet oblivion
I might measure all my bliss!
When eye gazes blissfully into eye,
When soul drowns utterly in soul;

When being finds itself in being,
And the goal of every hope is near,
When lips are mute in silent wonder,
When the soul wishes for nothing more:
Then man perceives Eternity's footprint,
And solves your riddle, holy Nature!

Im Treibhaus

Mathilde Wesendonck

Hochgewölbte Blätterkronen,
Baldachine von Smaragd,
Kinder ihr aus fernen Zonen,
Saget mir, warum ihr klagt?
Schweigend neiget ihr die Zweige,
Malet Zeichen in die Luft,
Und der Leiden stummer Zeuge
Steiget aufwärts, süßer Duft.
Weit in sehndem Verlangen
Breitet ihr die Arme aus
Und umschlinget wahnbefangen
Öder Leere nicht'gen Graus.
Wohl ich weiß es, arme Pflanze:
Ein Geschicke teilen wir,
Ob umstrahlt von Licht und Glanze,
Unsre Heimat is nicht hier!
Und wie froh die Sonne scheidet
Von des Tages leerem Schein,
Hüllet der, der wahrhaft leidet,
Sich in Schweigens Dunkel ein.
Stille wird's, ein säuselnd Weben
Füllet bang den dunklen Raum:
Schwere Tropfen seh' ich schweben
An der Blätter grünem Saum.

Schmerzen

Mathilde Wesendonck

Sonne, weinest jeden Abend
Dir die Schönen Augen rot,
Wenn im Meeresspiegel badend
Dich erreicht der frühe Tod;
Doch erstehst in alter Pracht,
Glorie der düstren Welt,
Du am Morgen, neu erwacht,
Wie ein stolzer Siegesheld!
Ach, wie sollte ich da klagen,
Wie, mein Herz, so schwer dich sehn,
Muß die Sonne selbst verzagen,
Muß die Sonne untergehn?

Und gebietet Tod nur Leben,
Geben Schmerzen Wonnen nur:
O wie dank'ich daß gegeben
Solche Schmerzen mir Natur.

In the greenhouse

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

High-arching leafy crowns,
Canopies of emerald,
You children who dwell in distant climes,
Tell me, why do you lament?
Silently you bend your branches,
Inscribe your symbols on the air,
And a sweet fragrance rises,
As silent witness to your sorrows.
With longing and desire
You open wide your arms,
And embrace in your delusion
Desolation's awful void.
I am well aware, poor plant;
We both share a single fate,
Though bathed in gleaming light,
Our homeland is not here!
And just as the sun is glad to leave
The empty gleam of day,
The true sufferer veils himself
In the darkness of silence.
It grows quiet, a whirring whisper
Fills the dark room uneasily:
I see heavy droplets hanging
From the green edge of the leaves.

Agonies

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

Every evening, sun, you redden
Your lovely eyes with weeping,
When, bathing in the sea,
You die an early death;
Yet you rise in your old splendour,
The glory of the dark world,
When you wake in the morning
As a proud and conquering hero!
Ah, why should I complain,
Why should I see you, my heart, so depressed,
If the sun itself must despair,
If the sun itself must set?

If only death gives birth to life,
If only agony brings bliss:
O how I give thanks to Nature
For giving me such agony!

Träume

Mathilde Wesendonck

Sag, Welch wunderbare Träume
Halten meinen Sinn umfassen,
Daß sie nicht wie leere Schäume
Sind in ödes Nichts vergangen?
Träume, die in jeder Stunde,
Jedem Tage schöner blühn,
Und mit ihrer Himmelskunde
Selig durchs Gemüte ziehn!
Träume, die wie hehre Strahlen
In die Seele sich versenken,
Dort ein ewig Bild zu malen:
Allvergessen, Eingedenken!
Träume, wie wenn Frühlingssonne
Aus dem Schnee die Blüten küßt,
Daß zu nie geahnter Wonne
Sie der neue Tag begrüßt,
Daß sie wachsen, daß sie blühen,
Träumend spenden ihren Duft,
Sanft an deiner Brust verglühen,
Und dann sinken in die Gruft.

Dreams

English Translation © [Richard Stokes](#)

Say, what wondrous dreams are these
Embracing all my senses,
That they have not, like bubbles,
Vanished to a barren void?
Dreams, that with every hour
Bloom more lovely every day,
And with their heavenly tidings
Float blissfully through the mind!
Dreams, that with glorious rays
Penetrate the soul,
There to paint an eternal picture:
Forgetting all, remembering one!
Dreams, as when the Spring sun
Kisses blossoms from the snow,
So the new day might welcome them
In unimagined bliss,
So that they grow and flower,
Bestow their scent as in a dream,
Fade softly away on your breast
And sink into their grave.⁶



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⁶ Translation, ©Richard Stokes, author of *The Book of Lieder*, (Faber); provided via Oxford Lieder (www.oxfordlieder.co.uk, Accessed April 16, 2022)

⁷ *Tristan and Isolde*, August Spiess, 1881. Mural in the bedroom of Bavarian King Ludvig II's Neuschwanstein Castle. *Siminaitis Says*, "A Love Potion Gone Awry, Part 2." <https://siminaitissays.com/2020/07/18/a-love-potion-gone-awry-part-2/> (Accessed April 21, 2022)

***The Giver of Stars* (2002)**
Six Poems of Amy Lowell

Excerpted from the music drama, *Amy Lowell: a Rare Pattern*
(Hummingbird Press, 2002)

Eddie Hill (b. 1962)

The Giver of Stars is excerpted from a larger theatrical work entitled *Amy Lowell: A Rare Pattern*. Lowell's life as a poet and how it was woven into her life with the actress, Ada Dwyer Russell, fascinated the composer. Lowell's stern exterior is counterpoint to a tender-heartedness and vulnerability which she shared with her beloved Ada. This cycle represents the arc of their love and life together.⁸

American poet **Amy Lowell** was born in 1874 at Sevenels, a ten-acre family estate in Brookline, Massachusetts. Her family was at the top of Boston society. Her elder brother Abbott Lawrence, a freshman at Harvard at the time of her birth, went on to become president of Harvard College. As a young girl she was first tutored at home, then attended private schools in Boston, during which time she made several trips to Europe with her family. At seventeen she secluded herself in the 7,000-book library at Sevenels to study literature. Lowell was encouraged to write from an early age. She was deeply interested in and influenced by the Imagist movement, led by Ezra Pound. This American movement of poetry believed, in Lowell's words, that "concentration is of the very essence of poetry" and strove to "produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." Lowell campaigned for the success of Imagist poetry in America and embraced its principles in her own work.⁹

Described as "flat out beautiful" and "full of mystery," (Stereophile Magazine), **Eddie Hill's** music is performed all over the world. She has been commissioned to compose for solo voice to choir, solo instrumental to orchestral and mass band, miniature to full evening drama; and loves the challenge of exploring all combinations including electroacoustic and mixed media. A three-time McKnight Artist Fellow and a two-time Bush Artist Fellow, Hill has received grants from the Jerome Foundation, ASCAP, New Music USA, Meet The Composer and Chamber Music America. After earning a B.A. from Bennington College in Vermont under the tutelage of Vivian Fine, Hill moved from her native New York to Minneapolis where she earned her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Minnesota with principal composition teacher, Lloyd Ultan. She has also studied extensively with Libby Larsen. Composing is a life-long love for Hill. She states that writing music is always an opportunity to research, learn, muse, reach down deep, and allow inspiration to come from the stuff of life. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.¹⁰

I. Pyrotechnics

Our meeting was like the upward swish of a rocket
In the blue night.
I do not know when it burst;
But now I stand gaping,
In a glory of falling stars.
from *Pictures of the Floating World*

⁸ Eddie Hill, *The Giver of Stars*. <https://www.ediehill.com/works/giver-stars-six-poems-amy-lowell> (Accessed April 16, 2022)

⁹ "Amy Lowell." <https://poets.org/poet/amy-lowell> (Accessed April 19, 2022)

¹⁰ "Eddie Hill's Biography." <https://www.ediehill.com/about/biography> (Accessed April 19, 2022)

II. Flame Apples

Little hot apples of fire,
Burst out of the flaming stem
Of my heart,
I do not understand how you quickened and grew,
And you amaze me
While I gather you.
I lay you, one by one,
Upon a table.
And now you seem beautiful and strange to me,
And I stand before you,
Wondering.

from Pictures of the Floating World

III. Vernal Equinox

The scent of hyacinths, like a pale mist, lies between
me and my book;
And the South Wind, washing through the room,
Makes the candles quiver.
My nerves sting at a spatter of rain on the shutter,
And I am uneasy with the thrusting of green shoots
Outside, in the night.
Why are you not here to overpower me with your
tense and urgent love?

from Pictures of the Floating World

IV. The Giver of Stars

Hold your soul open for my welcoming.
Let the quiet of your spirit bathe me
With its clear and rippled coolness,
That, loose-limbed and weary, I find rest,
Outstretched upon your peace, as on a bed of ivory.
Let the flickering flame of your soul play all about me,
That into my limbs may come the keenness of fire,
The life and joy of tongues of flame,
And, going out from you, tightly strung and in tune,
I may rouse the blear-eyed world,
And pour into it the beauty which you have begotten.

from Sword Blades and Poppy Seed

V. Autumnal Equinox

Why do you not sleep, Beloved?
It is so cold that the stars stand out of the sky
Like golden nails not driven home.
The fire crackles pleasantly,
And I sit here listening
For your regular breathing from the room above.
What keeps you awake, Beloved?
Is it the same nightmare that keeps me strained with
listening
So that I cannot read?

from Pictures of the Floating World

VI. A Sprig of Rosemary

I cannot see your face.

When I think of you,

It is your hands which I see.

Your hands

Sewing,

Holding a book,

Resting for a moment on the sill of a window.

My eyes keep always the sight of your hands,

But my heart holds the sound of your voice,

And the soft brightness which is your soul.

from Pictures of the Floating World
