



### School of Music Concerts and Events Spring 2011

#### The Wednesday Lunchtime Series

Admission to all lunchtime concerts is FREE. Performances last for just under an hour and start at **1pm**.

Date	Venue	Description
9 <sup>th</sup> February	Leggate Theatre, Victoria Gallery and Museum	To open our lunchtime concert series this spring we welcome the <b>Hope Street Singers</b> : a group of five close harmony singers from both the Metropolitan and Anglican Cathedral choirs, as well as the Liverpool Philharmonic choir. They will perform a diverse selection of Barbershop, madrigals and motets: from Tallis to Sinatra!
6 <sup>th</sup> April	University Theatre, Eleanor Rathbone Building	For our final concert this series, we will hear <b>Jacqueline Waldock (mezzo soprano)</b> and <b>James Wishart (piano)</b> perform Wagner's song cycle <i>Wesendonck Lieder</i> , a setting of poems by Mathilde Wesendonck. Jacqueline and James are both composers at the School of Music.

### Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*

Jacqueline Waldock (Mezzo Soprano), Robert Woods (Piano)

reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) 6 April 2011

at [School of Music, University of Liverpool](#)

I have to say, that I was very surprised to see the [Wesendonck Lieder](#) on the Liverpool School of Music programme. Wagner is not the composer that those early into their singing careers should even be thinking about.

There are a handful of composers whose songs and operas require of the singers that they have to have been around the block a few times. Richard Strauss and Mahler spring to mind, but Wagner is perhaps the most demanding.

An amateur singer could make a passable job of much of the Lieder canon, particularly but not exclusively, that which was composed before the 20th century. Wagner requires an opera singer; one that has worked their way through the various roles and the emotional demands those roles require. The irony is that whilst the roles of Wagnerian heroines might be young, the singers of those roles are invariably much older.

“I love Wagner, but the music I prefer is that of a cat hung up by its tail outside a window and trying to stick to the panes of glass with its claws.”

**Charles-Pierre Baudelaire**

Wagner is also a difficult composer to get to appreciate as a listener. It took me 10 years, on and off, of listening to his operas (and they are very long and so they may have seemed to be 10 years) before I could feel comfortable with his music. And it is worth the effort, which makes this particular recital all the more painful.

This recital had been arranged for a good few months (James Wishart was supposed to be the pianist, but no reasons were given for his absence in that role) and so expectations were perhaps a little high. The large music room was packed and I thought that the mostly students and staff may have known something I didn't.

Ms Waldock seemed brimming with confidence and prepared herself whilst the piano played the introduction to the first of the five songs, 'Der Engel'. "In der Kindheit frühen Tagen" was a little wobbly, but from that opening line, it was all downhill. The lyrics, written by one of Wagner's lovers, and the wife of one of his wealthy patrons (moral scruples were never very high on Wagner's 'to do' list) are hackneyed, to say the least, but that is no excuse to mispronounce the

German as Ms Waldock did throughout the five songs. She hails from Wales and a Welsh accent lends itself beautifully to German (Dame Gwyneth Jones and Bryn Terfel - both of whom 'matured' into Wagner – are just a couple of examples). It was though, the attempts at emotion that were most wanting. The songs calls for expressions of tenderness, love, sadness, joy, and it is not enough to simply suggest them. To pull off an even half-baked performance, there has to be a strong conviction that the singer is 'actually' feeling these things, and Ms Waldock didn't do this.

I can't quite understand why this event took place. Ms Waldock has a very expanding CV and is currently studying a PhD in composition at Liverpool University, so appreciating the demands of the piece is well within her grasp. Her mezzo tone suggests promise, but to do full justice to this type of repertoire requires more experience.

That this was a free recital does not excuse putting on such a poor performance, the impact on the performer's self-respect and it reflects a potentially poor view of the audience to think that a performance like this is okay. There had to have been many practices that would have indicated that this was not going to work.

It is also not a good example to set students, some of who I heard on the way out, say "At least she tried". There can be no consolation in such a response, that only speaks of low expectations. Student life should be about inspiration and that should be tempered with the knowledge that sometimes performing pieces in public that are currently out of reach of the artist should be put off until the artist has mastered the piece and can do it and the audience justice.

Thankfully this recital was the exception. I have found that these lunchtime recitals are both inspiring and informing. I have never experienced a performance as frustrating as this in my years of concert going, but that will not put me off going to more recitals and I would recommend them to anyone. Even if you are not familiar with the music it is a fantastic experience to see the serious side of young people and realise the dedication they exhibit towards their chosen instruments, that says there is a place in the world for the art of music.