Bird Songs at Eventide

ROBERT WHITE
STEPHEN HOUGH
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ROBERT WHITE tenor  STEPHEN HOUGH piano
Stephen Hough writes …
These songs, lovingly selected by Robert and myself from hundreds of others, share an ‘Edwardian’ identity—dating from the late Victorian years when Edward VII was waiting in the wings, to the decade or so following his death, when the wings themselves were a memory, having been destroyed in The Great War.

The songs come from a tradition where emotions were not trivialized, and so could be sung about without shame or embarrassment. Although the tears admittedly had some sugar mixed with the salt, they could be freely shed until the adolescent 1920s made crying unfashionable. This change of fashion was not without some justification though; it was difficult to create tragic fiction when in wardrobes across the land there hung the fading clothes of millions of men—casualties not of changing fashion but of their owners’ bodies lifeless in the fields of Flanders, stained by the dye of mud and blood.

There is a profound nostalgia and a deep-rooted conservatism in this repertoire. ‘That is no country for young men!’ The young leave home, whereas these songs call us home, to take shelter from the storms of change, and to take refuge from the thundering race of Time. The nostalgia is a longing, too, for a lost cultural home, decaying with Edward VII, destroyed with George VI.

We cannot make fun of these songs when we perform them or listen to them. The slightest cynical smile or amused, knowing glance will destroy their magic completely. They are shy of the modern age. Rather we have to enter their world with respect and affection—a gentler world which the twentieth century did, in a sense, leave behind. If we do this, a great surprise can occur. We may discover that this world, with its poignant, searing emotions, is not so alien after all, but is, in a strange way, our home.

Robert White writes …
When I met Stephen Hough in New York in the mid-eighties I was astonished to find that this distinguished young solo pianist was so in tune with the beautiful English ballads of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—songs I had been singing all my life. We began to perform this repertoire together. I found it a joy to work with such a gifted pianist who, having grown up in England, understood the style of this music on a deep emotional level. When word came that Ted Perry was interested in our making an album of these songs for Hyperion we jumped at the opportunity.

We originally thought of limiting the selection to English songs written in the Edwardian era of 1901 to 1910 but, as we examined numerous works, we realized that the basic style and feelings expressed in this rich repertoire extended well beyond Edward VII’s reign. As a result, we expanded our time frame backwards and forwards, from The Lost Chord—written in 1877—to Song to the Seals—written in 1930. For the same reasons, we chose several American songs and one Irish piece, as well as a work by a French composer, for inclusion in this album.

What makes these songs so special? The vocal demands are sometimes operatic in scope—in their heyday, the general public did not make such a distinction between ‘popular’ and ‘classical’ voice production—and the melodies and harmonies were crafted by excellent musicians who cared about creating beautiful musical vehicles of human emotions. For me the songs represent a treasure of lyrical expression in the English language which is all but lost today.
Having read the above, Ted Perry is moved to write . . .

This CD contains some of the most famous and once-popular songs in the English language. Can there be anybody who does not know Bless this House and The Lost Chord? In fact these two songs are so well-known that nobody seems to want to listen to them nowadays, since they express sentiments too overt and fulsome for our cynical and hard-headed age. They’re redolent of a period long past, with no relevance to the present day. They’re songs our grandparents used to know and love. At least mine did.

When Robert and Stephen suggested making a CD of some of these favourites of yesteryear I immediately said yes. I wouldn’t have said it so readily had anybody else suggested it, but knowing Robert’s way with this repertoire I knew that if anyone could re-present some of these fading pages to a modern audience without producing a scornful response, he could—especially with the remarkable keyboard companion he has in Stephen. So they sent me a list of candidates for the programme.

I recognized many old favourites: Bird Songs at Eventide by that delightful composer Eric Coates; Haydn Wood’s Roses of Picardy from the time of World War I—surely another of those songs known to all, as is Somewhere a voice is calling and, maybe, Little grey home in the West. At Dawning I didn’t recognize by title but hearing it I remembered it as ‘I love you’.

There were many songs in the list which were unknown to me, so I’ve made a few discoveries. I specially liked Duna.

(Where is Duna? Is it a real place? I don’t know.) Chadwick’s Allah I also thought much too good to be forgotten. Bantock’s Song to the Seals was known to me by name, but I’d never heard it.

So here they are. Twenty-five songs from a time when the world was quite different from what it is today, but songs much too good to be allowed to disappear from our heritage—and in Robert and Stephen’s voice and hands here presented as perfectly as they ever could be.

TED PERRY
Hyperion Records

1 Bird Songs at Eventide
Music: ERIC COATES (1886–1957)
Words: ‘ROYDEN BARRIE’ (RODNEY RICHARD BENNETT)
After putting the whole program together, Stephen and I agreed that this lovely ballad written in 1926 by Eric Coates—with its gentle mood of introspection and longing—would provide a perfect entry into the special world of feelings reflected throughout this repertoire. ‘Royden Barrie’, who wrote the words (and also the words to A brown bird singing which ends this recital) was in fact Rodney Richard Bennett, the father of Richard Rodney Bennett.

Over the quiet hills
Slowly the shadows fall;
Far down the echoing vale
Birds softly call;
Slowly the golden sun
Sinks in the dreaming West;
Bird songs at eventide
Call me to rest.

Love, though the hours of day
Sadness of heart may bring,
When twilight comes again
Sorrows take wing;
For when the dusk of dreams
Comes with the falling dew,
Bird songs at eventide
Call me to you.

2 Duna
Music: JOSEPHINE MCGILL (1877–1919)
Words: MARJORIE PICKTHALL (1883–1922)
Josephine McGill was an authority on the songs of the Southern Appalachians. Her 1917 book Folk Songs of the Kentucky Mountains contains many of the ballads she had researched, much in the manner of Bartók in his preservation of Hungarian folk songs. This might explain the aura of folk melody which imbues Duna with such charm. It dates from 1914.
When I was a little lad
With folly on my lips,
Fain was I for journeying
All the seas in ships.
But now across the southern swell,
Ev’ry dawn I hear
The little streams of Duna
Running clear.

When I was a young man,
Before my beard was grey,
All to ships and sailormen
I gave my heart away.
But I’m weary of the sea-wind,
I’m weary of the foam,
And the little stars of Duna,
Call me home.

3 At Dawning (‘I love you’) Op 29 No 1
Music: CHARLES WAKEFIELD CADMAN (1881–1946)
Words: NELLE RICHMOND EBERHART (1871–1944)
The American composer Charles Wakefield Cadman was especially interested in American Indian music. His opera Shanewis was produced at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918. At Dawning was written in 1906 and had an enormous popularity which endures to this day. Recordings were made by such artists as Paul Robeson and John Charles Thomas.

When the dawn flames in the sky,
I love you;
When the birdlings wake and cry,
I love you;
When the swaying blades of corn
Whisper soft at break of morn,
Love anew to me is born;
I love you, I love you.
Dawn and dew proclaim my dream,
I love you;
Chant the birds one thrilling theme,
I love you;
All the sounds of morning meet,
Break in yearning at your feet,
Come and answer, come, my sweet,
I love you, I love you.

4 The Little Silver Ring
Music: CÉCILE CHAMINADE (1857–1944); Words: translated from the French of Rosemond Gérard. Translator unknown
A touching song, originally entitled L’anneau d’argent, by the French woman composer Cécile Chaminade. As is the case with many of the selections in this album, The Little Silver Ring achieved its greatest fame in association with John McCormack who recorded it in 1927.
The little silver ring that once you gave to me,
Keeps in its narrow band ev’ry promise of ours,
Each picture of the past in its circle I see,
Alone it has consoled me in my saddest hours.
E’en as a ribbon placed about fair living flow’rs
Still holds the self-same flow’rs when their short life is done.
This little silver ring that once you gave to me,
Keeps in its narrow band ev’ry promise of ours.
And so when comes the day when mem’ry’s course is run,
When life is o’er, when I no more can think of thee,
When I shall be at rest upon my bed of roses,
Still on my lifeless hand may it rest tenderly,
The little silver ring that once you gave to me.

5 Song to the Seals
Music: SIR GRANVILLE BANTOCK (1868–1946)
Words: HAROLD BOULTON
English composer Sir Granville Bantock was attracted to exotic subjects with mystical overtones. The sheet music of this 1930 composition bears the following inscription: ‘The refrain of this song was actually used recently on an Hebridean island by a singer who thereby attracted a quantity of seals to gather round and listen intently to the singing’.

All the sounds of morning meet,
Break in yearning at your feet,
Come and answer, come, my sweet,
I love you, I love you.
A sea maid sings on yonder reef,
The spell-bound seals draw near;
Her lilt that lures beyond belief
Mortals enchanted hear.

Hoiran, oiran, oiran, oiro,
Hoiran, oiran, oiran, eero,
Hoiran, oiran, oiran, eelaleuran,
Hoiran, oiran, oiran, eero.

The wond’ring ploughman halts his plough,
The maid her milking stays,
While sheep on hillside, birds on bough,
Pause and listen in amaze.

Was it a dream, were all asleep,
Or did she cease her strain?
For the seals with a splash dive into the deep
And the world goes on again,
But lingers the refrain.

6 The Fairy Tree
Music: VINCENT O’BRIEN; Words: TEMPLE LANE
This song was also written in 1930—by Doctor Vincent O’Brien, who had been choirmaster to John McCormack when the singer was still an unknown student. O’Brien dedicated the song to the tenor’s wife. It reads: ‘To Lily. Countess McCormack. In kind remembrance’. This captivating piece contains traits of paganism and Christianity—a duality often found in the Celtic tradition.

All night around the Thorn tree
The little people play,
And men and women passing
Will turn their heads away.

From break of dawn till moonrise,
Alone it stands on high,
With twisted sprigs for branches
Across the winter sky.

They’ll tell you dead men hung there,
Its black and bitter fruit,
To guard the buried treasure
Round which it twines its root.

They’ll tell you Cromwell hung them,
But that could never be.
He’d be in dread like others,
To touch the fairy tree.

But Katie Ryan saw there,
In some sweet dream she had,
The Blessed Son of Mary,
And all his face was sad.

She dreamt she heard him saying:
‘Why should they be afraid?
When from a branch of Thorn tree,
The crown I wore was made.’

From moonrise round the Thorn tree
The little people play,
And men and women passing
Will turn their heads away.

But if your heart’s a child’s heart,
And if your eyes are clean,
You’ll never fear the Thorn tree
That grows beyond Clogheen.

7 The Lost Chord
Music: SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN (1842–1900)
Words: ADELAIDE A PROCTER (1825–1864)
Sir Arthur Sullivan achieved his greatest fame in collaboration with Sir W S Gilbert in comic operettas, but he wrote many beautiful songs on his own. To me, The Lost Chord, written in 1877, is one of the finest examples of Victorian sensibilities in matters of faith and trust in the hereafter.

Seated one day at the organ,
I was weary and ill-at-ease;
And my fingers wandered idly
Over the noisy keys.
I know not what I was playing
Or what I was dreaming then,
But I struck one chord of music
Like the sound of a great Amen.
It flooded the crimson twilight
Like the close of an angel’s psalm,
And it lay on my fevered spirit
With a touch of infinite calm.
It quieted pain and sorrow
Like love overcoming strife;
It seemed the harmonious echo
From our discordant life.
It linked all perplexed meanings
Into one perfect peace,
And trembled away into silence
As if it were loth to cease.
I have sought, but I seek it vainly,
That one lost chord divine,
Which came from the soul of the organ
And entered into mine.
It may be that death’s bright angel
Will speak in that chord again;
It may be that only in heav’n
I shall hear that grand Amen.

8 Kashmiri Song (‘Pale hands I loved’)

Music: AMY WOODFORDE-FINDEN (1860–1919)
Words: ‘LAURENCE HOPE’ (ADELA FLORENCE NICOLSON) (1865–1904)
A song from the suite Four Indian Love Lyrics by Amy Woodforde-Finden. Amazingly intense feelings of yearning, passion and loss are expressed in both text and music written in 1902 by two women—Laurence Hope did the words—obviously caught up in the exotic world of the Raj.

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?
Whom do you lead on Rapture’s roadway, far,
Before you agonise them in farewell?
Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Where are you now?

Pale hands, pink-tipped, like Lotus buds that float
On those cool waters where we used to dwell,
I would have rather felt you round my throat,
Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!
Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Where are you now?

9 Till I wake

Music: AMY WOODFORDE-FINDEN (1860–1919)
Words: ‘LAURENCE HOPE’ (ADELA FLORENCE NICOLSON) (1865–1904)
Another song from Four Indian Love Lyrics.

When I am dying, lean over me tenderly, softly,
Stoop, as the yellow roses droop
In the wind from the South;
So I may when I wake, if there be an awakening,
Keep, what lulled me to sleep, the touch of your lips on my mouth.

10 Now sleeps the crimson petal Op 3 No 2

Music: ROGER QUILTER (1877–1953)
Words: ALFRED LORD TENNYSON (1809–1892)
A beautifully sophisticated 1904 musical version of Tennyson’s poem. This is one of those great pieces of music which—despite the serious intent of composer and poet alike—effortlessly became a popular favourite with the widest of audiences.

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
The fire-fly wakens: waken thou with me.
Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake;
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.
Drink to me only with thine eyes

Music arranged by ROGER QUILTER (1877–1953)
Words: BEN JONSON (1572–1637)

Quilter has set this eighteenth-century melodic gem with an elegant accompaniment that actually enhances Ben Jonson’s poetic effect on twentieth-century ears.

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss within the cup
And I’ll not ask for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honouring thee,
As giving it a hope that there
It could not withered be.
But thou thereon didst only breathe
And sent’st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee.

O dry those tears!

Words and music: TERESA DEL RIEGO (1876–1968)

Composed by Teresa del Riego in London in 1901. The opening bars of this piece bear a remarkable resemblance to the last movement of Sibelius’s Symphony No 5. Grove’s Dictionary states that Sibelius finished his work in 1915. Could it be that the great composer of Finlandia knew O dry those tears? The song’s world-wide fame in the first decade of this century makes this a tantalizing possibility.

O dry those tears,
And calm those fears;
Life is not made for sorrow.
’Twill come, alas!
But soon ’twill pass,
Clouds will be sunshine tomorrow.

Sylvia

Music: OLEY SPEAKS (1874–1948)
Words: CLINTON SCOLLARD (1860–1932)

Ohio-born Oley Speaks is best remembered for his setting of Rudyard Kipling’s On the Road to Mandalay. No two songs from the same composer could be as different in mood than that rousing ballad and the much more introverted Sylvia (1914), with its shimmeringly beautiful melodic line and a piano accompaniment worthy of a Schumann Lied.

Sylvia’s hair is like the night,
Touched with glancing starry beams;
Such a face as drifts thro’ dreams,
This is Sylvia to the sight.
And the touch of Sylvia’s hand
Is as light as milk-weed down,
When the meads are golden brown,
And the autumn fills the land.
Sylvia: just the echoing
Of her voice brings back to me,
From the depths of memory,
All the loveliness of spring: Sylvia!
Such a face as drifts thro’ dreams,
This is Sylvia to the sight.

Ah, moon of my delight

Music: LIZA LEHMANN (1862–1918)
Words: from the Rubáiyat of OMAR KHAYYÁM (c1048–c1122), translated by EDWARD FITZGERALD (1809–1883)

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly—and lo! the bird is on the wing.

This quote appears on the frontispiece of the autobiography of
Liza Lehmann, written the year she died in London—1918. It epitomizes the feelings conjured up so beautifully in *Ah, moon of my delight* from her 1896 Omar Khayyám song cycle *In a Persian Garden*. This gifted composer-singer came from a family of poets and painters. Her parents were friends of Liszt and she, as a young girl, was accompanied at the piano by none other than Clara Schumann. *Ah, moon of my delight* is a miracle of gorgeous melodic line and compelling harmonies.

Ah, moon of my delight, that knows no wane,
The moon of Heav’n is rising once again;
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same garden after me in vain!
And when thyself with shining foot shall pass
Among the guests star-scatter’d on the grass,
And in thy joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made one,
Turn down an empty glass.

---

**Allah**

*Music*: GEORGE W CHADWICK (1854–1931)

*Words*: HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807–1882)

Continuing the Eastern mood, George Chadwick’s 1887 setting of Longfellow’s poem offers the soul an alternative to Khayyám’s oblivion—the hope of joining Allah’s light. Chadwick was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1854 and died in Boston in 1931. He was a prolific composer of operas, oratorios, chamber music and song, and was a pillar of the ‘Boston Classicists’ composers at the turn of the century.

Allah gives light in darkness;
Allah gives rest in pain;
Cheeks that are white with weeping
Allah paints red again.
The flowers and the blossoms wither,
Years vanish with flying feet,
But my heart will live on for ever,
That here in sadness beat.

---

**Bless this House**

*Music*: MAY H BRAHE (1884–1956); *Words*: HELEN TAYLOR

This 1927 English sacred song has had world-wide popularity for good reason. The sentiment is direct and the melody is strong. The composer, May Hannah Brahe, was also known as May H Morgan. (She was also known as somebody else—which I will explain in the notes to the next song.) After broadcasting this song in 1983 I received a letter from Mrs Boosey saying: “I don’t suppose you know the story of ‘Bless this House’. It was originally published under the title ‘Bless the House’ and then John [McCormack] came to my husband & said “you know, Leslie, it should be ‘Bless this House’.” So it was reissued as that & it at once sold like hot cakes.”

Bless this house, O Lord we pray,
Make it safe by night and day;
Bless these walls, so firm and stout,
Keeping want and trouble out;
Bless the roof and chimneys tall,
Let Thy peace lie over all;
Bless this door, that it may prove
Ever open to joy and love.
Bless these windows shining bright,
Letting in God’s heav’ly light;
Bless the hearth a-blazing there,
With smoke ascending like a prayer.
Bless the folk who dwell within;
Keep them pure and free from sin.
Bless us all that we may be
Fit, O Lord, to dwell with Thee.
Bless us all that one day we
May dwell, O Lord, with thee.
Thanks be to God
Music: ‘STANLEY DICKSON’ (pseudonym for MAY H BRAHE, 1884—1956); Words: P J O’REILLY

‘Stanley Dickson’ was a pseudonym for May Hannah Brahe, the composer of this lovely song from 1921, as well as Bless this House. I’ve loved this song since childhood and I was enchanted early on by the rich swing of chords in $\frac{3}{4}$ time that give life to the piece.

Thanks be to God for roses rare,
For skies of blue and sunshine fair,
For ev’ry gift I raise a prayer,
Thanks be to God!
Thanks be to God for lovely night,
For mystic fields with stars bedight,
For hours of dream and deep delight,
Thanks be to God!
Thanks be to God for love divine,
The hopes that round my heart entwine;
For all the joy that now is mine,
Thanks be to God!

Roses of Picardy
Music: HAYDN WOOD (1882—1959)
Words: FRED E WEATHERLY (1848—1929)

Written in 1916 by Haydn Wood in conjunction with the famous lyricist Fred E Weatherly, ‘Picardy’ is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful songs of the First World War. I learned it from my father who sang it first in France and Belgium when he served in that war with the American Army. Incidentally, Fred E Weatherly collaborated with many other composers to produce such hits as The Holy City and Danny Boy.

She is watching by the poplars,
Colinette with the sea-blue eyes;
She is watching and longing and waiting
Where the long white roadway lies.

And a song stirs in the silence,
As the wind in the boughs above,
She listens and starts and trembles,
’Tis the first little song of love:
Roses are shining in Picardy
In the hush of the silver dew;
Roses are flow’ring in Picardy,
But there’s never a rose like you!
And the roses will die with the summertime,
And our roads may be far apart,
But there’s one rose that dies not in Picardy!
’Tis the rose that I keep in my heart!
And the years fly on forever,
Till the shadows veil their skies,
But he loves to hold her little hands,
And look in her sea-blue eyes.
And she sees the road by the poplars,
Where they met in the bygone years,
For the first little song of the roses
Is the last little song she hears:
Roses are shining in Picardy …

God be with our boys tonight
Music: WILFRID SANDERSON (1878—1935)
Words: FRED G BOWLES

Wilfrid Sanderson wrote the stirring music to this quintessentially English song of The Great War. McCormack (who else?) made a thrilling recording of it in 1918 and sang it throughout the War, raising huge sums of money for the Red Cross.

Brave eyes that look’d so tenderly,
Where are you now today?
Sad were our thoughts at break of dawn,
After you went away.
Loud sang the lark o’er fields of gold,
High in the heav’n above;
Winter alone within our hearts
Calling for you we love.
O waiting heart, I cannot tell
How dark and long the lane!
Only I know that time will bring
Our dear ones back again
Safe to a home of peace and light
Across the furthest sea;
May God be with our boys tonight,
Wherever they may be.

Brave ones who answered your country’s call,
How could we let you go
Out of the sunshine of our souls,
Save that we love you so?

There is a place within our hearts
No one on earth may fill;
Someday at last you’ll come back to us,
Watching and longing still!

Smilin’ through
Words and music: ARTHUR A PENN (1875–1941)
Arthur A Penn, born in London, was a direct descendant of William Penn. He wrote an account of how the inspiration to write ‘Smilin’ through’ came from an advert on a train which showed a country cottage with a road winding through fields. It dates from 1918. “I wrote the song in twenty minutes”, he said, “the music first, then the words, on the back of an envelope coming in one day on a Long Island train. I had no title for it—that came with the words”.

There’s a little brown road windin’ over the hill
To a little white cot by the sea;
There’s a little green gate at whose trellis I wait,
While two eyes of blue come smilin’ through at me!
There’s a grey lock or two in the brown of the hair;
There’s some silver in mine, too, I see;
But in all the long years, when the clouds brought their tears,
Those two eyes of blue kept smilin’ through at me!

Little grey home in the West
Music: HERMAN LÖHR (1871–1943)
Words: D EARDLEY-WILMOT (1883–?)
Herman Löhr wrote this delightful piece in 1911. I have sung it all my life, but nothing will ever top the time it was sung to me—in person—by the Queen Mother at a private dinner party in London in 1984. I had just finished singing A Perfect Day when she asked me to sit with her a moment and talk about the beautiful old songs. I asked her if she knew one called Little grey home in the West. She answered, “Know it? Why it was one of the favourites in my youth!” Then, to my astonishment, the Queen Mother clasped my hands in hers and, waving them back in forth in rhythm, proceeded to sing the whole song to me, to the delight of the other dinner guests!

When the golden sun sinks in the hills
And the toil of a long day is o’er,
Though the road may be long,
In the lilt of a song
I forget I was weary before.

Far ahead, where the blue shadows fall,
I shall come to contentment and rest;
And the toils of the day
Will be all charmed away
In my little grey home in the West.

There are hands that will welcome me in;
There are lips I am burning to kiss;
There are two eyes that shine
Just because they are mine,
And a thousand things other men miss.

It’s a corner of heaven itself
Though it’s only a tumbledown nest,
But with love brooding there,
Why, no place can compare
With my little grey home in the West.

Bonnie wee thing
Music: LIZA LEHMANN (1862–1918)
Words: ROBERT BURNS (1759–1796)
Another piece of exceptional beauty by Liza Lehmann. Worlds away from the splendour of Ah, moon of my delight, Lehmann sets this Robert Burns poem as a typical Scottish lullaby. In the course of this lullaby, however, she creates a climax of great
power before coming to an appropriately gentle close.

Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,
I would wear thee in my bosom,
Lest my jewel I should tyne.*

Wistfully I look and languish
In that bonnie face o’ thine;
And my heart it stounds* wi’ anguish
Lest my wee thing be na mine.

Wit, and grace, and love, and beauty,
In a starry cluster shine;
To adore thee is my duty,
Goddess o’ this soul o’ mine.

* ’tyne’ = lose; ’stound’ = a sharp pang of pain

23 The Lord is my Light
Music: FRANCES ALLITSEN (1849–1912); Words: from PSALM XXVII
Frances Allitsen wrote There is a land, a patriotic favourite at the time of the Boer War, which was sung by that formidable contralto—the one with the baritonal high notes—Dame Clara Butt. No less fervid a piece is Allitsen’s bravura setting of Psalm 27, dating from 1897. For me, the most remarkable moment in the work is the sudden musical shift to introspection at the words ‘Yet will I put my trust in Him’.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom, then, shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom, then, shall I be afraid?
Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall my heart not be afraid;
And tho’ there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him.
For, in the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His tabernacle;
Yea, in the secret places of His dwelling shall He hide me, and set me up upon a rock of stone.

24 Somewhere a voice is calling
Music: ARTHUR F TATE (1870–1950); Words: EILEEN NEWTON
Moving from evening into the night, there is an air of mystery about this song. The concept of the lover’s call coming from beyond this life is a common theme throughout this period. Composed in 1911 by Arthur F Tate, Somewhere a voice is calling was a huge hit in its day, recorded by Schipa and Tetrazzini among others.

Dusk, and the shadows falling;
O’er land and sea;
Somewhere a voice is calling,
Calling for me!

Night, and the stars are gleaming;
Tender and true;
Dearest, my heart is dreaming,
Dreaming of you!

25 A brown bird singing
Music: HAYDN WOOD (1882–1959); Words: ROYDEN BARRIE
We close this recital with another exquisite ballad by Haydn Wood, A brown bird singing—from 1922—bringing us full circle to the subject, mood and feel of our first song.

All through the night there’s a little brown bird singing,
Singing in the hush of the darkness and the dew.
Would that his song through the stillness could go winging,
Could go winging to you, to you.

All through the night-time my lonely heart is singing
Sweeter songs of love than the brown bird ever knew.
Would that the song in my heart could go a-winging,
Could go a-winging to you, to you.

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