



# FACULTY CONCERT SERIES

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023 | 2:30 PM

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, MacLaurin Building  
University of Victoria

## ACROSS THE BOUNDARIES: SONGS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

ANNE GRIMM SOPRANO & BRUCE VOGT PIANO  
WITH GUEST ARTIST ANNA BETUZZI OBOE

### PROGRAM

Songs of Poldowski (Régine Wieniawska - 1879-1932)

I.	i. <i>L'heure exquise</i> ii. <i>Mandoline</i> iii. <i>Dimanche Avril</i> iv. <i>L'attente</i>	Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)
II.	i. <i>Dansons la Gigue</i> ii. <i>Brume</i> iii. <i>Spleen</i>	
III.	i. <i>Sérénade</i> ii. <i>Circonspection</i> iii. <i>En sourdine</i>	Adolphe Retté (1863-1930) Paul Verlaine
IV.	i. <i>Effet de neige</i> ii. <i>Berceuse d'Armorique</i> iii. <i>Soir</i>	Anatole le Braz (1859-1926) Albert Samain (1858-1900)

### INTERMISSION

<b>The Owl and the Pussycat</b> , by Edward Lear	Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
<b>Und was bekam des Soldaten Weib</b> ( <i>And what was sent to the Soldier's wife</i> )	Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) Kurt Weil (1900-1950)
<b>Three Songs: "Aspects of Love"</b>  <i>I Wish I Were In Love Again</i> <i>You Took Advantage of Me</i> <i>Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered</i>	Lorenz Hart (1895-1943) Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)
<b>Four Songs</b> <i>J'aimais (I Loved)</i> <i>Les Toros (The Bulls)</i> <i>Fils de (Sons of)</i> <i>Quand on a que l'amour (If We Only Have Love)</i>	Jacques Brel (1929-1978)

We acknowledge and respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

## PROGRAM NOTES

- Poldowski (1879-1932), née Irène Régine Wieniawska, was among the group of early twentieth century composers instrumental in shaping the genre of French art song. Poldowski produced a number of chamber and orchestral works, but it is her thirty-six surviving mélodies that represent her greatest contribution as a composer. And yet, despite numerous performances of her songs by major European and American artists during her lifetime – and critical recognition by major publicists – her music fell by the wayside following her death in 1932 and was largely forgotten for several decades. The modest revival of her songs in recent years, in both live performances and several recording projects, has brought renewed interest in her music and her life.

Poldowski's mother, Isabella Bessie Hampton, was from a genteel, music-loving Irish family that had settled in London. Her father was the renowned Polish composer and violinist, Henryk Wieniawski (1835–80). Unsurprisingly, Poldowski was encouraged towards a thorough music education, with studies in Brussels, London and Paris.

The period from about 1870 to 1920 is one of the richest for the genre of the French mélodie, which drew on the resurgence of French poetry launched by Baudelaire in the middle of the nineteenth century. The symbolist poets, Mallarmé and particularly Verlaine, inspired a great flowering of vocal music by Fauré, Duparc, Debussy, Ravel, Chausson, and others. While Poldowski's compositional voice was certainly influenced by these strong creative personalities, hers was almost immediately distinctive, her originality unmistakable, and her place in their company well deserved. She had a gift for engaging, sensual melody and refined harmony, and, above all, a great sensitivity to the meaning, rhythms, nuances, and colours of each poem.

Her stylistic range is extensive. Some of the songs are in the manner of folksongs (**Berceuse d'Armorique**). Occasionally one finds operatic grandiloquence (**Spleen**) or impressionistic understatement (**Circonspection** and **Effet de neige**). Late romantic (**L'heure exquise** and **Brume**) and early modernist styles (**Mandoline**) rub shoulders. And yet - almost Fauve-like - she allows the music suddenly to flower with a profusion of rich primary colours drawn from the poetry itself.

Almost all her chosen French poems are associated with the symbolist movement. It is not surprising that Poldowski gravitated towards this poetic sensibility. When Mallarmé describes the goal of the symbolists as depicting "*not the thing itself but the effect it produces*," he might well have been describing Poldowski's own aspiration. Her settings go beyond description to the very nerve endings of the text.

"*The sensuous beauty of Verlaine's language, his intimacy and simplicity, have made new landscapes for me.*" With these words, Poldowski captured the essence of her response to Paul Verlaine's poetry as reflected in her twenty-two settings of his poetry that span her entire composing career. The much-vaunted musicality of his verse seemed to speak to Poldowski as did none other, for in it she found a language of aesthetic beauty, playfulness, and perversity that resonated with her spirit and musical imagination.

- Anatole le Braz (1859–1926) was a Breton poet, a translator, and a respected folklore collector. **Berceuse d'Armorique** comes from his poetry collection *La Chanson de la Bretagne* (1892).

- At a very young age, Adolphe Retté (1863–1930) earned a considerable reputation as a symbolist poet – though he ultimately turned against the movement and established himself as a reactionary in his writings and in his politics. **Sérénade** comes from an early poetic publication, *La forêt bruissante* (1896), a collection of poems suffused with the healing power of nature.

- The poetry of Albert Samain (1858–1900) express the renewed fascination for Antiquity and the predilection for sorrowful evenings that characterized the symbolist sensibility at the turn of the century. **Soir** comes from Samain's first collection of poems, *Au jardin de l'infante* (1893).

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- **The Owl and the Pussycat** was perhaps Igor Stravinsky's last composition. The poem was a favourite of his wife Vera and his setting is dedicated to her. Edward Lear's playfully haunting verses remain the primary focus with the accompaniment remaining discreet throughout.

- Kurt Weill wrote a great deal of music in many genres but he is best known for his numerous collaborations with the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, with whom he created six musical dramas, the most famous being Threepenny Opera. **Und was bekam des Soldaten Weib?** (And what was sent to the Soldier's wife?) was a single ballad written in collaboration with Brecht not long after Hitler had launched his disastrous invasion of Russia.

- Richard Rodgers is somewhat better known for the many Broadway shows that he wrote between 1943 and 1959, partnering with the lyricist Oscar Hammerstein. His partnership with Lorenz Hart was of even longer duration – from 1919 to 1943 – and if it produced fewer shows that have lived on, nevertheless their songs have their compensations. There is a wry and honest approach about life and love of a kind that can scarcely be found in the later more sentimental partnership.

- Jacques Brel was a Belgian songwriter, singer and actor who composed powerfully satirical and poetically brilliant songs, performing them in Belgium and France and finally throughout the western world. He is considered one of the great creators of the modern Chanson. Most of his songs were recorded in French – occasionally in Dutch – but through translations and performances by well-known English-speaking songwriters and performers, English versions of his songs have continued to be performed widely.