

ALESSANDRO FISHER

A Gardener's World

Debut Recording on Rubicon Classics
for 2022 BBT Fellowship winner
Release date: 23 February 2024
RCD 1087

*"Then gather a wreath from the garden bowers,
And tell the wish of thy heart in flowers."*
(James Gates Percival text for Elgar's *The Language of Flowers*)



At the end of Winter, a collection of songs drawn from a garden canvas illustrating nature's regenerative powers has to be a welcome foretaste of Spring to come. For his debut solo recital on the Rubicon Classics label, tenor **Alessandro Fisher** (BBT Fellowship 2022) and pianist **Anna Tilbrook** spent endless lockdown months unearthing a vast repertoire of flower-themed songs from around the world and across the centuries.

Like many people during lockdown, Alessandro discovered in his garden that the unceasing progress and recurrent bounty of nature generated feelings of hope and revival. For some poets and composers though, the short-lived glory of flowers in bloom is also an allegory for loss or the transience of romantic love. From Schubert's *Die Blumensprache* to Elgar's *The Language of Flowers*, these flower-laden songs reflect the most profound human emotions from melancholy to joy.

Alessandro's research revealed the dominance of violets, anemones and daffodils, some of the first flowers to appear in Spring and bring happiness, albeit fleeting, to winter-weary souls. Indeed, Sibelius themed no fewer than half of his *Six Songs Op. 88* on various types of anemone. Muriel Herbert's poignant *To Daffodils*, composed in 1916, likens these bright spring flowers to the all too brief existence of youth, while Poulenc's *Fleurs* refers to flowers given in a youthful pledge of love turning to ashes in the hearth of memory.

The love between Robert and Clara Schumann is reflected in songs they dedicated to each other in which flowers play a key role. His first blush of love and sexual awakening is apparent in *Die Lotosblume*, an innocent love which matured to profound devotion in *Meine Rose*, while Clara reveals equal devotion and tenderness in her playful *Das Veilchen* (violet).

In songs of lost or doomed love flowers are also emblematic, such as the poor flower in Fauré's *Le Papillon et la Fleur* bemoaning the fact that it can never be with its true love, the fleeting butterfly, or the oak that is left distraught and alone when its companion, the rose, is lured away by a young maiden in Carlos Guastavino's *La Rosa y el Sauce*. Mint and rosemary symbolise protection and remembrance in folklore and in Toldrá's *Menta i Farigola* the scent of these herbs arouses an old maid's elegiac memories of her childhood sweetheart, while fields of waving grasses kindle nostalgic longing in Guastavino for his homeland of Argentina in the tango-like song, *Cortadera plumerito* (one of 12 flower songs comprising his song cycle *Flores Argentinas*).

The programme ends on a high note with Haydn Wood's *Love's Garden of Roses*, a jubilant celebration of love in a summer garden that is vibrant with scents and colours and is a vital reminder that life continues to flourish. "Its unashamed positivity felt like a message we wanted to close with. Composed in 1914 on the eve of another great cataclysm that shook the world to its core, we found it perfectly encapsulated the inspiration for the programme as a whole" comments Alessandro.

"Come to my garden of roses;
Winds whisper low.
Ne'er was so sweet a garden
With love aglow."

A bonus track at the end comes in the form of an encore at the Wigmore Hall recital – a amusing tale of a misalliance between the honeysuckle and bindweed by Flanders & Swann.

Further press information: **Debra Boraston** at **Borletti-Buitoni Trust**
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NOTES TO EDITORS

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Recorded live at Wigmore Hall 20 July 2021 (BBC Radio 3)
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Franz Schubert *Die Blumensprache/The Language of Flowers D 519* 1817 (A or E Platner)
Felix Mendelssohn *Das Erste Veilchen/The First Violet Op. 19a No. 2* 1832 (Karl Egon Ebert)
Robert Schumann *Myrthen/Myrtle Op. 25* 1840 No 7 *Die Lotosblume/The Lotus Flower* 1840 (Heinrich Heine)
Clara Schumann *Das Veilchen/The Violet* 1853 (Johann Wolfgang van Goethe)
Robert Schumann *Meine Rose/My Rose* 1850 (Nikolaus Lenau) - from *6 Gedichte von N Lenau und Requiem Op. 90*
Jean Sibelius *Six Songs Op. 88* 1917: *Blåsippan/Blue Anemone, De bägge rosorna/The Two Roses & Vitsippan/The Wood Anemone* (Frans Mikael Franzén) and *Sippan/The Anemone, Törnet/The Thorn & Blommans öde/The Flower's Fate* (Johan Ludvig Runeberg)
Gabriel Fauré *Le papillon et la fleur/The Butterfly and the Flower Op. 1 No. 1* 1861 (Victor Hugo)
Ernest Chausson *Les papillons/The Butterflies Op. 2 No. 3* 1880 (Théophile Gautier)
Francis Poulenc *Fleurs/Flowers No. 6* from *Fiançailles pour rire FP 101* 1939 (Louise de Vilmorin)
Eduard Toldrà from *A l'ombra del lledoner: A l'ombra del lledoner/In the shade of a hackberry* 1924 (Tomàs Garcés), *Menta i Farigola/Mint and thyme* 1915 (Josep Carner), *Floreix l'ametller/The almond tree blossoms* 1929 (Ignasi Iglésias)
Carlos Guastavino *La rosa y el sauce/The rose and the willow tree* (Fernán Silva Valdés) 1942 and from *Flores Argentinas* 1969 *Cortadera, plumerito* (León Benarós)
Muriel Herbert *Violets* 1927 (George Meredith) and *To Daffodils* 1916 (Robert Herrick)
Edward Elgar *The Language of Flowers* 1872 (James Gates Percival)
Haydn Wood *Love's Garden of Roses* 1914 (Ruth Rutherford)

ALESSANDRO FISHER BBT Fellowship 2022

<https://alessandrofisher.com>

<https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/alessandro-fisher/biography/>



Awards and recognition include 2022 BBT Fellowship, membership of the BBC New Generation Artists Scheme 2018-20, Associate Artist of The Mozartists, first prize Kathleen Ferrier Awards 2016.

Opera engagements have included Ferrando *Così fan tutte* (Grange Festival), Delmiro/Alindo *Hipermestra* (Glyndebourne Festival), Lucano/First Soldier *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* (Salzburg Festival), Don Polidoro, *La finta*

semplique and Christian *The First Commandment* (The Mozartists), First Armed Man/Priest *Die Zauberflöte* (Garsington Opera at West Green House), Bellecourt *Vert Vert* (Garsington Opera) title role in *Dardanus* and the *B Minor Mass* (English Touring Opera).

Concerts include Berlioz *L'Enfance du Christ* (Wimbledon Festival), Donizetti *Requiem* (Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana), Mendelssohn *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (Huddersfield Choral Society), Mozart *Mass in C Minor* (Royal Northern Sinfonia), Sørensen *St Matthew Passion* (Danish National Symphony Orchestra), Vaughan Williams *On Wenlock Edge* and *Serenade to Music* (Nash Ensemble), Bach *St Matthew Passion* (Jonathan Miller production, National Theatre), *B Minor Mass* (New London Orchestra) and *Evangelist St John Passion* (Milton Court), Britten *Les Illuminations* (Ulster Orchestra), Vaughan Williams *Symphony No. 3* and *On Wenlock Edge* (BBC Philharmonic), First Brother *The Seven Deadly Sins* (London Symphony Orchestra/Simon Rattle), *Green Spaces: A Celebration in Song* (Opera Holland Park).

Recitals include English Song, Oxford Lieder and London Song festivals, Wigmore Hall, Dublin's Hugh Lane Gallery and BBC Radio 3's *Big Chamber Day*, among others.

Recordings include Theodore in Edward Loder's *Raymond and Agnes* (Royal Ballet Sinfonia/Richard Bonyng), Harlequin in Ethel Smyth's *Fête Galante* (Lontano Ensemble/Odaline de la Martinez for Retrospect Opera), *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* (Les Arts Florissants/William Christie for Harmonia Mundi), Mercadante's *Il proscritto* (Opera Rara), *Bastien und Bastienne* (The Mozartists/Ian Page for Signum) and Rousset's *Evocations* (BBC Philharmonic/Yan-Pascal Tortelier for Chandos).

Studied modern and medieval languages at Cambridge University where he was a choral scholar at Clare College, then Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

Reviews:

Portraits of a Mind: Venables and Vaughan Williams (Albion Records 2023)

"The cycle's five songs are exceptionally well sung by Alessandro Fisher, who convincingly encompasses emotions stretching from the balmy pastoralism of the opening of 'The Lark Ascending' (with chirruping near quotations from VW) to the pained retrospection of the Rossetti setting 'Echo.'"
BBC Music Magazine

"Alessandro Fisher is already an artist with interpretive depth to match a remarkable voice...his voice has power and a degree of mettle as well as beauty and sheen" Fanfare

"I like his balance of strength and frailty in these Housman settings, mirroring the poems' subject of the fragility of life... a marvellous rendition from Alessandro Fisher." Gramophone

Ferrando: Così fan tutte / The Grange Festival 2023

"Alessandro Fisher, immaculately stylish, gives us a breathtaking Un'Aura Amorosa and an angrily disconsolate Tradito, Schernito." The Guardian

"...tenor Alessandro Fisher's Ferrando possesses exceptional lyrical appeal..." The Stage

"Alessandro Fisher as Ferrando showed great comic timing and impeccable diction in the recitatives, a Lieder singer's musicianship and care for detail in the ensembles, and delivered 'Un'aura amorosa' with a sensitivity that made one wonder anew at the beauty Mozart could dispense in the service of dubious morality." Opera

Anna Tilbrook <http://www.annatilbrook.co.uk>