The Song Cycle

The song cycle was one of the most important musical genres of the nineteenth century. Famous examples by Schubert, Schumann and Mahler have received a great deal of attention. Yet many other cycles – by equally famous composers, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – have not. *The Song Cycle* introduces key concepts and a broad repertoire by tracing a history of the genre from Beethoven through to the present day. It explores how song cycles reflect the world around them and how national traditions and social relationships are reflected in composers’ choices of texts and musical styles. Tunbridge investigates how other types of music have influenced the scope of the song cycle, from operas and symphonies to popular song. A lively and engaging guide to this important topic, the book outlines how performance practices, from concert customs to new recording technologies, have changed the way we listen.

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For Alec
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Music examples


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4.1 Robert Schumann, *Frauenliebe und -leben*, no. 8, ‘Nun hast’ du mir den ersten Schmerz getan’ (‘Now you Have Caused me my
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With permission of Editio Musica Budapest.

4.3 a) Richard Wagner, Tristan und Isolde Act II, ‘Descend night of love, grant oblivion that I may live’.


b) Gustav Mahler, Kindertotenlieder, no. 5, ‘In diesem Wetter’ (‘In this weather, this howling gale, this raging storm’). Trans. Stokes, The Book of Lieder, p. 211.

5.2 Gustav Mahler, Das Lied von der Erde, no. 4, ‘Von der Schönheit’ (‘Of Beauty’).

6.1 Modest Musorgsky, Sunless, no. 1, ‘Komnatka tsnaya, tikhaya, milaya’ (‘A Little Room, Cosy, Quiet, Dear’).

6.2 Alexander Dargomízhsky, ‘Vostochniy romans’ (‘Oriental Romance’).


6.5 Tchaikovsky, Shest’ Romansov (Six Romances) op. 73, no. 6, ‘Snova, kak prezhd, odin’. ‘Again, as before, I am alone, / Once again I am wrapped in grief . . . The poplar is seen at the window, / All lit by the moon.’ Trans. David Fanning.

6.6 Jules Massenet, Poème d’avril, no. 1, ‘Prelude’. ‘A chilly rose, its heart drenched with rain, / Has just blossomed on a trembling bough. / And I feel the sweetest folly assail me once more / To create songs and recall the past! // All the dead loves asleep in my soul, / Gentle Lazarus, on whom I shed so many tears, / Laughingly raise their shroud of flowers, / And ask me the name of my new love. // O my blue-eyed darling, dress and let us flee / Through woods filled with melancholy and shade, / To seek a
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6.10 Maurice Ravel, *Chansons madécasses*, no. 2, ‘Aoua!’ ‘Aoua! Aoua! Beware of white men, dwellers of the shore. In our fathers' time, white men landed on this island; they were told; here is land, let your women work it; be just, be kind, and become our brothers.’ Trans. Stokes, *A French Song Companion*, p. 42.


7.1 Arnold Schoenberg, *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, no. 15, ‘Wir bevölkerten die abenddustern Lauben’ ('We Peopled the Evening-Dusky Arbours'). ‘Now it is true, she will leave forever.’ Trans. Stokes, *The Book of Lieder*, p. 286. Copyright 1914 by Universal Edition. Renewed copyright 1941 by Arnold Schoenberg. Text by Stefan George. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

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8.3 George Butterworth, *Six Songs from ‘A Shropshire Lad’*, no. 6, ‘Is My Team Ploughing?’

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10.1 Sylvano Bussotti, *Pièces de chair II*, no. 7, ‘Voix de femme’ (‘Woman’s Voice’).
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10.2 Luciano Berio, *Circles*, no. 3, ‘n(o)w’.
Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.
10.3 Brian Ferneyhough, Études transcendentales.
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Preface

The song cycles of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Mahler are considered some of the finest musical works of the nineteenth century and have had countless studies devoted to them. However, the history of the song cycle as a genre had not been written before this Introduction. The purpose of this book is to investigate broader contexts for the song cycle across a range of composers and centuries, to provide starting points for discussion in the classroom and suggestions for further music to explore.

The chapters are presented roughly in chronological order, but sometimes depart from that to consider themes and ideas pursued by multiple generations. A book such as this has to be selective, and there are many interesting examples that could not be included (an overview is given in the Chronology). Focusing on cycles rather than individual songs means that there have been further losses: most notably Hugo Wolf, who published his works as collections rather than cycles, even if we tend to hear them as such today. But there is much to be gained from concentrating on song cycles, particularly a sense of how they interacted with other genres, such as symphonic and operatic music and, in the second half of the twentieth century, with popular music.

The song cycle owes its established position in part to its adaptability. For example, this evening I could hear Mahler’s first song cycle, *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (*Songs of a Wayfarer*) sung by student Alex Knox with the University of Manchester Symphony Orchestra, or in a recital by Ian Bostridge and Julius Drake. I could also attend the premiere of a song cycle about characters living in a block of flats in modern Britain: according to the publicity for Alan Williams’s *Twelve Storeys High* the music has a ‘part-cabaret, part-jazzy, part-contemporary music feel to it, and draws on ideas from popular song as well as traditional notions of the song cycle’. The song cycle, in other words, can be many things: old, new, small-scale, symphonic, classical, popular, native, exotic, amateur, professional. Its scope is perhaps one reason why its history has not been attempted before. Getting to grips with that history, though, can help explain not only why song cycles came into fashion but also what is more surprising for a genre that began as salon entertainment in early
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nineteenth-century Austria: their continued appeal for a variety of performers, composers and audiences.

Most of the song cycles discussed here have dedications to poets, musicians, friends and family to whom the composer was indebted; every page of this book deserves something similar, but a brief and inevitably incomplete list of acknowledgements will have to suffice. I am grateful to Victoria Cooper and Rebecca Jones for their enthusiasm for this project throughout, and to the production team at Cambridge University Press. I have benefited greatly from the input of a number of readers: as well as those for the Press there have been Andy Fry, Wayne Heisler Jr, Zoë Kirkham, Gavin Osborn, Roger Parker, Robert Pascall, Scott Paulin, Hannah Sander, Jennifer Sheppard, Emma Shires, Sean Walsh and Susan Youens. Other friends and colleagues have improved translations, suggested and located further examples, or simply been prepared to chat about this book’s progress. They include Benjamin Binder, Mark Campbell, Carl Chastenay, Ian Cull, Julian Davis, Deniz Ertan, Rufus Hallmark, Emily Howard, Martin Iddon, Roe-Min Kok, Gundula Kreuzer, Kristina Muxfeldt, Eva Schultze-Berndt, Benjamin Walton and Ron Woodley. Thanks, with love, to my parents and brother for their gentle encouragement and support throughout.

My colleagues at Manchester have made various contributions to this project: special thanks are due to Caroline Bithell, David Fanning, Philip Grange, Camden Reeves and Susan Rutherford, and to Nina Whiteman for preparing the music examples. Finally, thanks to the students at Manchester who have helped me shape some of this material through lectures and seminars.
### Selected chronology

**Key: date, composer, cycle title op. number (poet)**

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<th>Composer</th>
<th>Cycle Title</th>
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1854 Peter Cornelius, Vater unser op. 2 (Cornelius); Trauer und Trost op. 3 (Cornelius)
1856 Cornelius, Weihnachtslieder op. 8 (Cornelius)
1859 Cornelius, Brautlieder (Cornelius)
1866 Jules Massenet, Poème d’avril op. 14 (Silvestre)
1868 Cornelius, An Bertha op. 15 (Cornelius)
1868 Antonin Dvořák, Cyprise op. 2 (Pfleger)
1868 Massenet, Poème du souvenir (Silvestre)
1869 Johannes Brahms, Romanzen aus Ludwig Tiecks ‘Magelone’ op. 33 (Tieck)
1871 Arthur Sullivan, The Window or The Loves of the Wrens (Tennyson)
1872 Modest Musorgsky, The Nursery (Musorgsky)
1873 Adolf Ander, Frauenliebe und -leben (Chamisso)
1874 Musorgsky, Sunless (Golenischschev-Kutuzov)
1876 Massenet, Poème d’octobre (Collin)
1882 Musorgsky, Songs and Dances of Death (Golenischschev-Kutuzov)
1885 Gustav Mahler, Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Mahler)
1891 Gabriel Fauré, Cinq Mélodies ‘de Venise’ op. 58 (Verlaine)
1893 Ernest Chausson, Poème de l’amour et de la mer op. 19 (Bouchor)
1894 Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Six Romances op. 73 (Rathaus)
1894 Fauré, La Bonne Chanson op. 61 (Verlaine)
1895 Edvard Grieg, Haugtussa op. 67 (Garborg)
1896 Johannes Brahms, Vier ernste Gesänge op. 121 (Luther)
1896 Chausson, Serres chaudes op. 24 (Maeterlinck)
1898 Arthur Somervell, Maud (Tennyson)
1899 Edward Elgar, Sea Pictures op. 37 (Noel, Elgar, Browning, Garnett, Gordon)
1900 Roger Quilter, Four Songs of the Sea op. 1 (Quilter)
1901 Somervell, Love in Springtime (Tennyson, Rossetti, Kingsley)
1903 Maurice Ravel, Shéhérazade (Klingsor)
1904 Mahler, Kindertotenlieder (Rückert)
1904 Ralph Vaughan Williams, Songs of Travel (Stevenson)
1905 Somervell, The Shropshire Lad (Housman)
1905 Conrad Ansorge, Waller im Schnee (George)
1905 Quilter, To Julia (Herrick)
1906 Ravel, Histoires naturelles (Renard)
1906 Sir Granville Bantock, Sappho (Bantock)
1907 Somervell, James Lee’s Wife (Browning)
1909 Arnold Schoenberg, Das Buch der hängenden Gärten (George)
1909 Mahler, Das Lied von der Erde (Bethge)
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Vaughan Williams, *On Wenlock Edge* (Housman)
Fauré, *La Chanson d’Eve* op. 95 (Van Lerberghe)

1910  Elgar, *Cycle* op. 59 (Parker)
1912  Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire* op. 21 (Giraud)
        George Butterworth, *A Shropshire Lad* (Housman)
1913  Ravel, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Mallarmé)
        Igor Stravinsky, *Trois Poésies de la lyrique japonais* (trans. Brandt)
        Ethel Smyth, *Three Moods of the Sea* (Smyth and Hamilton)
1914  Lili Boulanger, *Clairières dans le ciel* (Jammes)

Fauré, *Mirages* op. 113 (Brimont)

1921  Fauré, *L’Horizon chimérique* op. 118 (Mirmont)
1923  Paul Hindemith, *Das Marienleben* op. 27 (Rilke)
        Joseph Canteloube, *Chants d’Auvergne* (also 1927, 1930, 1954)
        Hans Pfitzner, *Alte Weisen* op. 33 (Keller)
        Othmar Schoeck, *Elegie* op. 36 (Lenau and Eichendorff)
        Schoeck, *Gaselen* op. 38 (Keller)
        Somervell, *A Broken Arc* (Browning)
1924  Anton Webern, *Sechs Lieder* (Trakl)
1925  Gurney, *Lights Out* (Thomas)
1926  Ravel, *Chansons madécasses* (Parny)
1929  Ernst Krenek, *Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen* op. 62 (Krenek)
1930  Schoeck, *Wanderung im Gebirge* op. 45 (Lenau)
1931  Krenek, *Durch die Nacht* (Kraus)
        Schoeck, *Zehn Lieder nach Gedichten von Hermann Hesse* op. 44 (Hesse)
1933  Ravel, *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* (Morand)
        Schoeck, *Notturno* op. 47 (Lenau)
1934  Webern, *Drei Gesänge aus ‘Viae inviae’* (Jone)
1935  Francis Poulenc, *Cinq Poèmes de Paul Éluard* op. 77 (Éluard)
1936  Olivier Messiaen, *Poèmes pour Mi 1/17a* (Messiaen)
        Benjamin Britten, *Our Hunting Fathers* op. 8 (Auden, Ravenscroft)
1937  Poulenc, *Tel jour, telle nuit* (Éluard)
        Schoeck, *Wandsbecker Liederbuch* op. 52 (Claudius)
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1938  Messiaen, Chants de terre et de ciel 1/19 (Messiaen)
1939  Arthur Honegger, Poèmes de Claudel H. 138 (Claudel)
1940  Britten, Les Illuminations op. 18 (Rimbaud)
1942  Hanns Eisler, Die Hollywood-Elegien (Brecht, Eisler)
       Britten, Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo op. 22 (Michelangelo)
1943  Schoeck, Unten Sternen op. 55 (Keller)
       Britten, Serenade op. 31 (Cotton, Tennyson, Blake, Jonson, Keats)
1944  Krenek, The Ballad of the Railroads op. 98 (Krenek)
1945  Messiaen, Harawi 1/28 (Messiaen)
       Britten, The Holy Sonnets of John Donne op. 45 (Donne)
1946  Schoeck, Spielmannsweisen op. 56 (Leuthold)
1948  Poulenc, Calligrammes op. 140 (Apollinaire)
       Strauss, Vier letzte Lieder TrV 296 (Hesse and Eichendorff)
       Ned Rorem, Three Incantations from a Marionette Tale (Boultenhouse)
1949  Britten, Winter Words op. 52 (Hardy)
       Schoeck, Das still Leuchten op. 60 (Meyer)
       William Grant Still, Songs of Separation (Bontemps, Marcelin, Dunbar,
       Cullen, Hughes)
1950  Poulenc, La Fraîcheur et le feu op. 147 (Éluard)
       Aaron Copland, Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson (Dickinson)
       Rorem, Flight for Heaven (Herrick)
1951  Rorem, Cycle of Holy Songs (Psalms)
1952  Michael Tippett, The Heart’s Assurance (Keyes, Lewis)
1953  Samuel Barber, Hermit Songs op. 29 (Irish monks’ marginalia)
       Rorem, Poèmes pour la paix (Regnier, Ronsard, Magny, Daurat, Baïf)
1954  Rorem, Four Dialogues (O’Hara)
       Priaulx Rainier, Cycle for Declamation (Donne)
1955  Pierre Boulez, Le Marteau sans maître (Char)
1956  Poulenc, Le Travail du peintre op. 161 (Éluard)
       Schoeck, Das holde Bescheiden op. 62 (Mörike)
       Schoeck, Nachhall op. 70 (Lenau, Claudius)
       Sofia Gubaidulina, Fatseliya (Prishvin)
1958  Sylvano Bussotti, Pièces de chair II (various)
       Britten, Songs from the Chinese op. 58 (trans. Waley); Nocturne op. 60 (Shelley,
       Tennyson, Coleridge, Middleton, Wordsworth, Owen, Keats, Shakespeare);
       Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente op. 61 (Hölderlin)
       Hans Werner Henze, Kammermusik 1958 (Hölderlin)
1960  Luciano Berio, Circles (cummings)
1961  Rorem, King Midas (Moss)
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1962  Tippett, *Songs for Ariel* (Shakespeare)
      Milton Babbitt, *Du* (Stramm)
1963  Rorem, *Poems of Love and Rain* (various)
      George Crumb, *Night Music I* (Lorca)
1965  Franz Waxman, *Das Lied von Terezin* (poetry by concentration camp children)
      Boulez, *Pli selon pli* (Mallarmé)
      Britten, *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* op. 74 (Blake); *The Poet's Echo* op. 76 (Pushkin)
1966  Rorem, *Hearing* (Koch)
1967  Dmitri Shostakovich, *Seven Verses of Alexander Blok* op. 127 (Blok)
1968  Rorem, *Some Trees* (Ashbery)
      Crumb, *Songs, Drones and Dances of Death* (Lorca)
1969  Britten, *Who Are these Children?* op. 84 (Soutar)
      Tippett, *Songs for Dov* (Tippett)
      György Kurtág, *Memory of a Winter Sunset* op. 8 (Gulyás)
      Barber, *Despite and Still* op. 41 (Graves, Rilke, Joyce)
      Rorem, *War Scenes* (Whitman)
      Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (Stow)
1970  Crumb, *Ancient Voices of Children* (Lorca)
1971  Rorem, *Ariel* (Plath)
1972  Rorem, *Last Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Stevens)
1973  Shostakovich, *Six Verses of Marina Tsvetayeva* op. 143 (Tsvetayeva)
      Henze, *Voices* (various)
1974  Shostakovich, *Suite on Texts by Michelangelo Buonarroti* op. 145; *Four Verses by Captain Lebyadkin* op. 146 (Dostoevsky)
1975  Elliott Carter, *A Mirror on which to Dwell* (Bishop)
      Britten, *A Birthday Hansel* (Burns)
1977  Kaija Saariaho, *Bruden (The Bride)* (Södergran)
1979  Rorem, *The Nantucket Songs* (Williams, Ashbery, Rossetti)
1980  Rorem, *The Santa Fe Songs* (Bynner)
1981  Carter, *In Sleep, in Thunder* (Lowell)
      Kurtág, *Messages of the late R.V. Troussova* op. 17 (Dalos)
      Gordon Getty, *The White Election* (Dickinson)
      George Benjamin, *A Mind of Winter* (Stevens)
      Wolfgang Rihm, *Wolfi-Liederbuch* (Wölfi)
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1982  Rorem, *Three Calumus Poems* (Whitman)
1984  Harrison Birtwistle, *Songs by Myself* (Birtwistle)
1985  Brian Ferneyhough, *Études transcendentales* (Meister, Moll)
       Birtwistle, *Words Overheard* (Birtwistle)
1986  Gubaidulina, *Perception* (Tanzer)
       Simon Holt, *Canciones* (Lorca)
1989  Henze, *Drei Lieder über den Schnee* (Treichel)
       Witold Lutoslawski, *Chantefleurs et chantefables* (Desnos)
       Rihm, *Das Rot* (Günderrode)
1993  Alfred Schnittke, *Mutter* (Lasker-Schüler)
1994  Rorem, *Songs of Sadness* (Strand, Merrill, Hopkins, Burns)
       Carter, *Of Challenge and of Love* (Hollander)
       Schnittke, *Fünf Fragmenten zu Bildern von Hieronymous Bosch* (Aeschylus, Pevsner)
       Birtwistle, *Pulse Shadows* (Celan)
       Gubaidulina, *Galgenlieder à 3, à 5* (Morgenstern)
1998  Gérard Grisey, *Quatre Chants pour franchir le seuil* (Guez-Ricordi, Erinna of
       Telos, Epic of Gilgamesh etc.)
       Birtwistle, *Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker* (Niedecker)
       Henze, *Sechs Gesänge aus dem Arabischen* (Henze)
       Rihm, *Nebendaussen* (Lenz)
1999  Birtwistle, *The Woman and the Hare* (Harsent)
2000  John Corigliano, *Mr Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (Dylan)
       Rorem, *Another Sleep* (fourteen authors)
       Birtwistle, *There is Something Between Us* (Brendel)
       Judith Weir, *woman.life.song* (Morrison, Angelou, Pinkola Estés)
2002  Rorem, *Aftermath* (thirteen authors)
       Saariaho, *Quatre Instants* (Amin Maalouf)
       Camden Reeves, *Night Descending* (Tennyson, Blake, Poe)
2004  Phil Kline, *Zippo Songs* (Zappa)
       Osvaldo Golijov, *Ayre* (Maalouf)
2005  Richard Causton, *La terra impareggiabile* (Quasimodo)
2006  Carter, *In the Distances of Sleep* (Stevens)
       Jonathan Dove, *Hojoki, An Account of My Hut* (Kamo-no-Chomei)
2007  
Sally Beamish, *Songs of Hafez* (trans. Peacock)
Simon Holt, *Sueños* (Machado)
Philip Glass, *The Book of Longing* (Cohen)
Henri Dutilleux, *Le Temps l'horloge* (Tardieu, Desnos)
Michael Finnissy, *Whitman* (Whitman)

2008  
Mark Glanville and Alexander Knapp, *A Yiddish Winterreise*
Gabriel Kahane, *Craigslistlieder* (anon.)

2009  
Mark Anthony Turnage, *A Constant Obsession* (Keats, Hardy, Thomas, Graves, Tennyson)