

# Rebirth

**Songs of death, transitions, renewal,  
and hope.**

**Dr. Ylona Hartford, *soprano***

*with*

**Dr. Joshua Tanis, *piano***

**Saturday November 16, 2024  
2:00 p.m.  
Bethlehem UCC in Ann Arbor, Michigan**

©2024 Ylona Hartford

# Dedication

To all the beautiful souls who've gone before us through the veil.

*The Four Last Songs are dedicated specifically to Jerald (Jerry) Reynolds. Thank you for all you did for me and so many other singers. Thank you for hearing something you could work with in my terrible audition. I am still honored to consider myself one of Jerry's Kids. I am so sorry I was unable to keep my promise to fulfill your request to sing these at your funeral. I hope this makes up at least a tiny bit. I love and miss you very much.*

# Program

The infinite shining heavens	Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
Will there really be a morning	Ricky Ian Gordon (b. 1956)
I never saw a moor	Richard Pearson Thomas (b. 1957)
I have trod the upward and the downward slope	Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

*15-minute intermission*

<i>Vier Letzte Lieder</i> <i>(Four Last Songs)</i>	Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
1. Beim Schlafengehen	
2. September	
3. Frühling	
4. Im Abendrot	

**Please: No flash photography during the performance!**  
Recordings (audio and video) are ok without flash.

**Please silence your devices!**

# Program Notes

## The Infinite Shining Heavens - Ralph Vaughan Williams

Vaughan Williams's *The infinite shining heavens* is the sixth song in the song cycle *Songs of Travel* and was originally composed for baritone and piano and has since been transposed for tenor voices. Women do not typically perform this cycle, but we are modern women and can pick and choose what we'd like to sing! This cycle was composed between 1901 and 1904. The poetry used in this cycle was drawn from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*. The songs were first performed as an 8-song cycle in 1904 in London by a baritone whose name seems lost to history. Even though they were conceived of and performed as an 8-song set, they were published as two four-song cycles for a few years with the exact songs to be included not being agreed upon until much later.

This song has the feeling, for me, of when I was in the hospital. While struggling, Roy's dead came to see me multiple times. Not mine, only his which I believe says I wasn't as close to death as everyone feared—I was just at the point of the veil. While there, I got to meet his mom, dad, and Gram all of whom passed before I even met him. I also got to see his aunt Carlene and uncle Dick again too—both of whom I did have the pleasure of knowing in life. They were my “angel stars” coming down to shine their light on me to send me back because Roy needed me here still. They protected me for weeks with love and light. It is why I chose to open this Rebirth recital with this song.

### Poetry by Robert Louis Stevenson

*The infinite shining heavens  
Rose and I saw in the night  
Uncountable angel stars  
Showering sorrow and light.*

*Night after night in my sorrow  
The stars looked over the sea,  
Till lo! I looked in the dusk  
And a star had come down to me.*

*I saw them distant as heaven,  
Dumb and shining and dead,  
And the idle stars of the night  
Were dearer to me than bread.*

## Will There Really Be a Morning - Ricky Ian Gordon

This is one of two settings of an Emily Dickinson poem included in this program. It is a standalone art song (not part of a larger cycle or work) composed by Gordon in 1983.

Gordon was born in 1956 in Oceanside, New York. Interestingly, Donald Katz based his book, *Home Fires: An Intimate Portrait of One Middle-Class Family in Postwar America*, on Gordon's family life. As a composer, Gordon is most interested in the musical gesture and feeling more than in having every note perfect. In fact, Dr. Joshua Tanis has worked with Gordon and has never heard him critique a singer on pitch-related elements—Gordon had more to say about interpretation and emotion. He also mentioned to Josh that being in the general harmony rather than being tied to what is written should be the goal. This is a newer attitude by composers as most I have worked in person with or read historical documents about discuss how they are sticklers for the exact thing they wrote—be it rhythm, pitch, harmony, or instrumentation.

This piece resonates with me because of the questions it poses about what comes next. The song doesn't provide an answer nor does it really even offer hope unlike several of the others on this program. Instead, we are left wondering where the place called morning does lie. I have felt this way many times in the last two years. Will things get better? Can I do the things I once did? Do I still even want to?

Like the song, I am not sure what the answers are even still. Unlike the song, I still have hope which I feel is exemplified by all the other songs in this program!

### Poetry by Emily Dickinson

Brackets around words indicate a modification of poem text by the composer

*Will there really be a morning?*

*Is there such a thing as day?*

*Could I see it from the mountains*

*If I were as tall as they?*

*Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!*

*Oh, some wise man from the skies!*

*Please to tell [this] little pilgrim*

*Where the place called morning lies!*

*Has it feet like water-lilies?*

*Has it feathers like a bird?*

*[Does it come from famous places]*

*Of which I have never heard?*

## **I Never Saw a Moor - Richard Pearson Thomas**

This is the second setting of an Emily Dickinson poem in this program and is in Thomas's song cycle based on Dickinson's poems called *At Last to be Identified*. Thomas composed this cycle around 1992.

Thomas was born in 1957 in Montana and is an active pianist as well as composer. Along with song cycles like the one this piece comes from, Thomas has composed everything from vocal works, instrumental works, operas, and even musicals.

I am not an Emily Dickinson fan. In fact, I only liked these pieces included here once they were set to music! However, I know many other people enjoy her, and I do enjoy reading interpretations of her works. For example, this poem uses the power of imagination, or even faith some might say, to transcend physical boundaries and knowledge. For me, this falls into the realm of collective knowledge we can all tap into, similar to how animals are born with innate instincts and knowledge. I love the peaceful certainty of there being a heaven or something after with no waver.

I have known and even performed this piece since I was in grad school back in 2004. In fact, it was on my graduate recital that year! I am thrilled to get to bring it into this part of my life and share it with you.

When I mentioned this piece to my voice teacher, Michelle, she was inspired to mention the previous piece by Gordon as another beautiful setting of a Dickinson poem that fit into my rebirth theme. Whereas *Will There Really Be a Morning* questions, *I Never Saw a Moor* has gentle but steadfast certainty.

### **Poetry by Emily Dickinson**

*I never saw a moor;  
I never saw the sea,  
Yet know I how the heather looks  
And what a wave must be.*

*I never spoke with God,  
Nor visited in heaven.  
Yet certain am I of the spot  
As if the chart were given.*

## **I Have Trod the Upward and the Downward Slope - Ralph Vaughan Williams**

This is the final piece in Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel* song cycle. After his death in 1958, Vaughan Williams's wife, Ursula, found this composition. She decided to posthumously publish it. For years, the cycle was argued on how to be published (2 sets of 4 songs at first with this one not included). I find this one and *The Infinite Shining Heavens* to both feel dreamy and remind me of my time in the hospital recovering. This song is indicated to only be performed to close the entire 9-song cycle; but if I can break the gender roles, I can perform this piece without the rest of the full cycle. This piece was not included in the original performance.

Roy found this song sad on his first read through. I do not see it as sad in the slightest! I have experienced all of these in my life and especially in this time of recovery. I have trod both the upward and downward slopes. I have endured and had to do things now I never did before and know that now I might never do the things I have done in days before again. Yes, this caused a longing for all of the things I feel I could have or should have or would have done which did cause me to let go of those hopes. However, I have indeed lived and loved so much more in these last two years than I think I ever did before in my life. And, I have indeed shut the door on many things. This allows me to look forward with such joy and excitement and hope without being tied to the past. As I have ensured Roy, this is such a gift! Yes, this explanation to him did make him smile and feel better about it. 😊

### **Poetry by Robert Louis Stevenson**

*I have trod the upward and the downward slope;*

*I have endured and done in days before;*

*I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope;*

*And I have lived and loved, and closed the door.*

## Vier Letzte Lieder (Four Last Songs) - Richard Strauss

This is one of my absolute favorite song cycles ever. The really cool thing is Strauss never intended this as a cycle at all—they were simply his last four vocal compositions before his death. He knew he was dying too and was apparently heavily contemplating his life and upcoming death as these songs work through some very deep concepts. Knowing he was going to pass away, he entrusted these to Kirstin Flagstad, one of the premier dramatic sopranos of all times, not just in her time, to premier these songs. Just because it is interesting to me to see the composition order verses the performed order verses the current “official” order, I am sharing it here for you too.

<b>Order of composition</b>	<b>Order sung at premiere</b>	<b>Order in published editions</b>
"Im Abendrot"	"Beim Schlafengehen"	"Frühling"
"Frühling"	"September"	"September"
"Beim Schlafengehen"	"Frühling"	"Beim Schlafengehen"
"September"	"Im Abendrot"	"Im Abendrot"

I have always sung in the order of most published editions until now. Today, I am presenting them in the premiered order as chosen by Flagstad. You might be wondering why I decided to change from the order in the published editions. Strauss never intended these to be a song cycle. I am ok with having them be a cycle of his last four pieces since the themes are similar; however, arbitrarily forcing them into an order that makes them feel like they are seasons like Strauss’s friend and chief editor for Boosey & Hawkes, Ernst Roth, did before publishing them the first time in 1950 never sat well with me. So when I realized Flagstad premiered them in a different order, I decided to follow her lead this time.



If you are familiar with these at all in modern performances, you will be expecting them to be much slower. This is thanks to the great Jessye Norman who took the performance time average of about 20 minutes and lengthened all the songs by singing them slower to show off her amazing breath control making the song cycle last about 25 minutes. I used to subscribe to this belief. However, my mind has changed since I last sang these, and I find a pace more like pre-Jessye times to be much more satisfying. After all, the songs talk about floating, soaring, and flying. When they are taken too slow, I now hear them as dirge-like. While the songs do deal with the subject of death, it isn't meant to be a lament or a funeral march! For me, I feel it serves the music much more faithfully to not drag the tempo.

Richard Strauss was born in 1864 Munich in Bavaria. He is considered one of the leading composers of the late Romantic period and the early Modern period. Some even consider him the successor to Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt. His father, Franz Strauss, was an accomplished musician himself composing and playing principal horn in major houses as well as acting as professor at Königliche Musikschule. Richard Strauss's mother was Franz's second wife, Joséphine Pschor. Richard Strauss began studying piano at 4 and was composing at 6.

Richard Wagner did have an influence on young Strauss. In 1874, at ten years of age, Strauss attended performances of Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* and by 1879, he had attended 5 other Wagner operas. It is said that Wagner had impacted young Richard Strauss enough that his father forbade Wagner's music in the house. Even with his father's dislike of Wagner, Strauss obtained a copy of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* score by 16 years old. Richard Strauss attended the Bayreuther Festspiele, which is still a prominent venue for the works of Richard Wagner to be performed, to hear his father perform with the orchestra for the premiere of *Parsifal* by Wagner in 1882. Interestingly, Richard Strauss himself had some negativity to Wagner's more progressive works that he regretted later in

life.

By the age of 18, Strauss had studied with several prominent musicians of the time. In 1882, his 18th year, he graduated from the Ludwigsgymnasium and went on to attend the University of Munich for one year.

Strauss's wife, Pauline De Ahna, whom he married in 1894, was an accomplished musician herself being a dramatic soprano of some renown. They met while she was a student at the Königliche Musikschule where his father worked. She served as the inspiration for many of Strauss's compositions and performed many of his pieces and roles with him as conductor or pianist. Strauss described her as "very complex, very feminine, a little perverse, a little coquettish, never like herself, at every minute different from how she had been a moment before." I think Roy relates! They had a very happy marriage and one son, named for Richard Strauss's father, Franz. Pauline outlived Strauss only by 8 months.

*The Four Last Songs* are sourced from two different poets' works. The first three are by the German-Swiss poet, novelist, and painter Hermann Hesse who was a contemporary of Strauss living from 1877 to 1962. The final piece, and the first composed by Strauss, *Im Abendrot*, was written by Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff who was a poet, novelist, and playwright among other things and lived from 1788 to 1857.

Hermann Hesse was born in July 1877 in Calw in the German Kingdom of Württemberg. He has been a perennial favorite of mine since I started studying the German language in high school. I have read, slowly, a few of his works in German with a good dictionary on hand. Hesse was a writer composing poetry, short stories, novellas, and even novels during his fairly successful career which started in 1898 til his death in 1962. *Frühling* was composed in 1899 just after Hesse achieved financial independence from his family the year prior. In 1911, Hesse wrote *Beim Schlafengehen*, and he penned *September* in 1927.

All the poetry here is my literal, word-for-word translations, so it might sound a bit odd! Dr. Tanis will read the poetic translations for you.

### **Beim Schlafengehn**

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,  
Soll mein sehnlisches Verlangen  
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht  
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun  
Stirn, vergiß du alles Denken,  
Alle meine Sinne nun  
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht  
Will in freien Flügen schweben,  
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht  
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

### **September**

Der Garten trauert,  
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.  
Der Sommer schauert  
Still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt  
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.  
Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt  
In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen  
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach Ruh.  
Langsam tut er die [großen]  
Müdigewordnen Augen zu.

### **Frühling**

In dämmrigen Grüften  
Träumte ich lang  
Von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,  
Von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen  
In Glanz und Zier,  
Von Licht übergossen  
Wie ein Wunder vor mir.

### **At Bedtime**

Now the day me weary made  
Shall my ardent desire  
friendly the starry night  
Like a weary child received

Hands let go of all doing  
Forehead forget you all thinking  
All my senses now  
Will themselves in slumber sink

And the soul unguarded  
Wants to in free flights soar  
In the magic circle of the night  
Deep and thousandfold to live

### **September**

The garden mourns  
Cool sinks into the flowers the rain  
The summer shudders  
Silently its end against

Golden drops leaf upon leaf  
Down from the high acacia tree  
Summer smiles in amazement and dullness  
In the dying garden dream

Long still by the roses  
Still he stands, longs himself to rest  
Slowly does he the  
Tired eyes close

### **Spring**

In dim tombs  
Dreamt I long  
From your trees and blue airs  
Of your fragrance and birdsong

Now lie you unlocked/developed  
In glitter and adorned  
With light drenched  
Like a miracle before me

Du kennst mich wieder,  
Du lockst mich zart,  
Es zittert durch all meine Glieder  
Deine selige Gegenwart.

You know me again  
You lure/tempt me tenderly  
It shakes through all my limbs  
Your blessed presence

Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff was born in March 1788 at Schloß Lubowitz near Ratibor (now Racibórz, Poland). Eichendorff was both a major critic of and writer during the Romantic Era, and he has been a popular staple for the German-speaking world ever since the time of publication for many of his works.

As I mentioned, this final song was composed first of his four last by Strauss. It is said that on his deathbed in 1949, Strauss said to his daughter-in-law, "It's a funny thing Alice, dying is just the way I composed it in *Tod und Verklärung* (*Death & Transfiguration*).” The “transfiguration” motif from this early composition returns at the end of *Im Abendrot*, written 61 years after *Death & Transfiguration*, accompanying the soprano’s final line, “Ist dies etwa der Tod?” (“Is this perhaps the death?”).

### **Im Abendrot**

Wir sind durch Not und Freude  
Gegangen Hand in Hand,  
Vom Wandern ruhen wir  
Nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Täler neigen,  
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,  
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen  
Nachträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her, und lass sie schwirren,  
Bald ist es Schlafenszeit,  
Dass wir uns nicht verirren  
In dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter, stiller Friede!  
So tief im Abendrot  
Wie sind wir wandermüde—  
Ist dies etwa der Tod?

### **In the Sunset**

We are through need and joy  
Gone hand in hand  
From wandering rest we  
Now over the silent land

Rings around the valley slope  
It is darkening already the air  
Two larks only climb up  
Up dreaming in the fragrance

Step here and let them buzz  
Soon is it sleep time  
That we ourselves don't get lost  
In this solitude/loneliness

Oh further silent peace  
So deep in the evening redness (sunset)  
How are we wander weary  
Is this perhaps the death?

# About Dr. Ylona Hartford



Seventeen years ago, K. Marie Konsol was working on a promising career as a classical singer (very specifically, a hochdramatischer Sopran also called a dramatic soprano or a Wagnerian soprano). Then, her world changed. She found she couldn't sing comfortably any more. She gave up singing and moved from Florida back to Michigan, met and married Roy Hartford and was happy enough as a housewife who always aspired to get back to singing.

To further that goal, she went to school to become a naturopathic doctor to heal herself.

It worked! She is now a board certified naturopathic doctor. She also changed her name from Kim Marie Konsol Hartford to Ylona Marie Kim Konsol Hartford.

There have been many changes in Ylona's life. The most dramatic one, perhaps, being that two years ago tomorrow, Ylona almost left this life after having surgery to remove a VP shunt because she had healed enough to not need it (something they never do without putting another back in). There was a complication though, and Ylona suffered a brain hemorrhage of a type that kills or renders 80% of people who have it to remain in a vegetative state until they pass on. Ylona has beaten those odds and feels blessed to be able to return to sharing music with others!

In the words of American composer Lee Hoiby:

I want to be where the music comes from, where the clock stops, where it's now.  
I want to be with the friends around me, who have found me, who show me how.  
I want to sing to the early morning; see the sunlight melt the snow. And oh, I want to grow.

I want to wake to the living spirit here inside me where it lies. I want to listen till I can hear it; let it guide me and realize that I can go with the flow unending that is blending, that is real. And oh, I want to feel.

I want to walk in the earthly garden far from cities, far from fear. I want to talk to the growing garden, to the devas, to the deer. And to be one with the river flowing, breezes blowing, sky above. And oh, I want to love.

I love all of you for joining me today. Thank you.

# About Dr. Joshua Tanis



Collaborative Pianist and Music Theorist, Dr. Joshua Tanis holds a joint faculty position in the Departments of Music Theory and Conducting at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. He received the Doctor of Philosophy in Music Theory and Composition from Florida State University, the dual Master's Degree in Music Theory and Collaborative Piano from the City University of New York—Hunter College, and the dual Bachelor's

Degree in Music and Biology from the State University of New York at Albany.

As a Collaborative Pianist, Dr. Tanis routinely works with singers from the Metropolitan Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Teatro alla Scala, the Royal Opera House, the Vienna State Opera, the Paris Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, the Sydney Opera House, the New York City Opera, the Teatro Real, the Teatro di San Carlo, and the Broadway community. In addition to maintaining a private coaching studio, he has accompanied singers in the studios of Marilyn Horne, Harolyn Blackwell, and others. In all, Dr. Tanis's credits include multiple performances at Carnegie Hall, off-Broadway theatres, and international concert venues.

As a Music Theorist and faculty member at the University of Michigan, Dr. Tanis directs the undergraduate and graduate aural skills, keyboard harmony, and score-reading curricula. Before joining the University of Michigan faculty, Dr. Tanis held a Music Theory faculty position at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. His primary research focuses on the intersection of musical and poetic forms in Richard Strauss's songs for voice and piano. His research in this—and other—areas has been presented at numerous national and international conferences, in addition to appearing in several award-winning publications. [www.JoshuaTanis.com](http://www.JoshuaTanis.com)