

December 11, 2019 at 8:00pm | **Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall**

JOYCE DIDONATO MEZZO-SOPRANO
YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN PIANO

**FRANZ
SCHUBERT**
(1797–1828)

Winterreise ("Winter Journey,"), Op. 89, D. 911

Gute Nacht
Die Wetterfahne
Gefrorne Tränen
Erstarrung
Der Lindenbaum
Wasserflut
Auf dem Flusse
Rückblick
Irrlicht
Rast
Frühlingstraum
Einsamkeit
Die Post
Der greise Kopf
Die Krähe
Letzte Hoffnung
Im Dorfe
Der stürmische Morgen
Täuschung
Der Wegweiser
Das Wirtshaus
Mut
Die Nebensonnen
Der Leiermann

Please hold your applause until the end of the song cycle.

This recital runs approximately one hour and 15 minutes in duration and is performed without intermission.

The translation used in the supertitles for this recital was created by Richard Stokes and generously shared by the University Musical Society of the University of Michigan. The program note "Winterreise" was graciously provided for reprint by Martin Katz.

The Girl Spoke of Love...

By Joyce DiDonato, ©2019

The word “masterpiece” appears often in my line of business, and while the majority of works I participate in unquestionably fall into that category, there still remains THE Masterpieces: those holy relics of unparalleled genius that have changed the course of the art form entirely. *Winterreise* is this singular, crowning achievement in song.

And yet, as much as I have always loved the great recital repertoire, it never once occurred to me to personally tackle this mammoth undertaking until, just over a year ago, when Yannick approached me with the bold idea of performing Schubert’s masterful journey together. Naturally, I was compelled to give it great consideration: “But it must *really* speak to you,” he warned. “You must feel deeply called to enter into this world and live there for some time.”

And so naturally I dove in. Completely. And yet, diligent as I was, I couldn’t quite find my way into the protagonist’s world, despite the utterly compelling journey in front of me. It wasn’t a question of gender—I’m used to donning pants on the stage. No. Instead, a persistent question took hold of me and simply wouldn’t let go: “But what about *her*?” my heart kept asking. In most writings about this cycle, authors gloss over her involvement dismissively: “We don’t know much about her,” the papers reveal, and the discussion promptly closes.

Perhaps it’s my identification with Charlotte in Jules Massenet’s *Werther* that kept this question front and center in my mind. (I’ve always wondered what happens to her when the curtain comes down. Does she cave in to her passion and follow Werther into his fate of suicide? Does she obediently return to her life with Albert, dutifully, yet completely hollowed-out?) This girl—this catalyst—that prompts our protagonist to flee his life, to embark on his pilgrimage of sorrow and despair, and to journey into oblivion presumably must know of his departure. She must *feel* it. She must surely wonder about him...after all, she “spoke of *love*.” Has she mourned his loss? Has she simply gone about her life as is expected of a girl of her stature? How has she moved forward in her life?

This lingering question provided no resolution in Wilhelm Müller's poetry, and so I set out to create my own story: what if He sent His last journals to Her before he parted? As tormented and painful as this scenario would be to face, what if His final words arrived to her as a kind of suicide note? What if He wanted Her to understand Him? To feel His pain? To experience His torment and despair? To force her to wander alongside Him? And what if She reads the writings? Word for word. Over and over. (*"Ces lettres... ces lettres,"* Charlotte screams out.)

What happens to the winter's journey when we feel it through the heart of the one who was the impetus of such agony and despair? The survivor. The one left behind.

What happens to the winter's journey when we feel it through the heart of the one who was the impetus of such agony and despair? The survivor. The one left behind. What does a singular event look like through the differing eyes of two separate people, two separate perspectives? The lives that have entwined so closely cannot be separated or disregarded so easily.

Perhaps one element of a true masterpiece is that it invites itself to be experienced in new light.

So what about she who spoke of love? This can also be her journey...

About the Program

By Lucy Caplan, © 2019

When the German mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig sang *Winterreise* in Chicago in 1991, one male critic placated his readers by assuring them that “one doesn’t need a feminist sensibility” to appreciate a woman’s performance of Schubert’s esteemed monodrama. Despite initial concerns over the “appropriateness” of such a performance, the critic became convinced, as the review’s headline surmised, that “Gender [Was] No Issue.” His counterpart at *The New York Times* was more skeptical. He considered Ludwig’s gender a “hazard” and a “serious problem,” given that “one must logically prefer the male voice for which the cycle was composed.” Yet he, too, grudgingly acknowledged that in the end, “Schubert’s music is not gender specific.” Worry not, these critics concurred: no men were harmed in the making of this song cycle!

But what if gender does matter when a woman performs *Winterreise*? What if a “feminist sensibility” is not a liability, but a strength? Joyce DiDonato’s interpretation of the song cycle begins from that very premise. Rather than presupposing the dramatic centrality of the songs’ protagonist, DiDonato focuses her interpretive lens upon the woman who prompts that protagonist’s departure from home and subsequent journey. She asks: “What happens to the winter’s journey when we feel it through the heart of the one who was the impetus of such agony and despair?...The lives that have entwined so closely cannot be separated or disregarded so easily.”

These entwined lives stand at the heart of a work that has long been admired for its ability to create beauty out of austerity, plumbing the nuances of feeling using only a spare set of poetic and musical materials. Based on poetry by Wilhelm Müller, Schubert’s twenty-four songs tell of a young man’s journey through a desolate winter landscape. Both lyrically and musically, this environment emerges via a combination of lucid precision and capacious generalities: somehow, we know both everything and nothing about this person and this place. At the outset, the protagonist—heartbroken after the woman he loves rejects him—trudges through the dark night. Letting nature guide him, he follows a riverbank path toward a village. When he can walk no more, he dreams of springtime and love. The second half of the cycle turns more fantastical and more desperate: the man becomes

convinced that a fluttering leaf holds the key to his fate; stares at a sunset and thinks he sees his lover's eyes; and, in a mysterious finale, encounters an aged organ-grinder—the first person with whom he speaks since the drama began. The encounter seems only to increase the protagonist's anguish: the organ-grinder simply "lets it all go on as it will," resigned to a life utterly devoid of social companionship.

But what if gender does matter when a woman performs *Winterreise*? What if a "feminist sensibility" is not a liability, but a strength? Joyce DiDonato's interpretation of the song cycle begins from that very premise.

While this existential despair is in one sense emblematic of the Romantic aesthetic sensibility that shaped so much of this era's music and poetry, it also invokes the composer's own circumstances. *Winterreise* dates from just before the end of Schubert's all-too-short life. Terminally ill while still in his mid-twenties, he faced his own journey into the unknown. It seems unsurprising that he found himself drawn to Müller's anguished poetry and used it to compose music that he described to a friend as "horrifying" and "cost[ing] me more effort than any of my other songs." While it is risky to assume a perfect correspondence between Schubert's emotional interiority and his musical output (he wrote plenty of joyful music during this same period), Schubert clearly felt a profound connection to *Winterreise*, telling a friend, "I like these songs more than all the rest."

Even as the protagonist of *Winterreise* wanders in apparent isolation, however, there is an implied interlocutor throughout:

the left-behind woman, who DiDonato tellingly describes as the “catalyst” of the protagonist’s journey. While this woman does not speak for herself, she is never far from the protagonist’s thoughts. Her spectral presence pervades *Winterreise*: he longs for a letter from her; he remembers her as he pauses at a linden tree; it is her eyes that are seen in the sunset and her laugh that sparkles in his dream. When we broaden our scope beyond the protagonist’s own perspective, still more interpretive possibilities emerge. DiDonato wonders about the woman’s own emotional state: “Has she mourned his loss? Has she simply gone about her life as is expected of a girl of her stature? How has she moved forward in her life?” Their two paths diverge; their memories and imaginations, Schubert suggests, do not.

Further, despite the protagonist’s professed solitude, his onstage counterpart is never truly alone. Schubert’s music depends upon an intimate partnership between singer and pianist as a means of conveying the complexity of the narrative. The first song of the cycle, “Gute Nacht,” begins with a resolute pattern of eighth-note footsteps in the piano; that sturdy backdrop makes the singer’s downward-plunging melody sound that much more tragic. By the time the protagonist reaches “Der Lindenbaum” (5), the piano ushers in a new natural environment. Gentle triplets evoke the fluttering leaves of the linden tree, reminding the protagonist of happier days. But the moment is fleeting. In “Der Wegweiser” (20), perhaps the cycle’s bleakest song, the protagonist laments his loneliness, wondering why he finds himself on “hidden pathways” so far from any other traveler. The piano doubles the melancholy vocal line: a harsh reminder, as his horizon narrows, that his voice is in conversation with no other. In the cycle’s final song, “Der Leiermann,” the piano becomes a creaky hurdy-gurdy, its open fifths droning under the numb fingers of an old man. The protagonist makes a final attempt at connection, wondering aloud in a high vocal register, “Shall I go with you?” There is no answer. The cycle ends with as much ambiguity as it began, refusing any sort of narrative conclusion.

“I came here a stranger,” *Winterreise* begins, “A stranger I depart.” Yet perhaps that nihilistic claim need not be the last word on the subject. Opening up the piece to new perspectives—in particular, the perspectives of female characters within the work and female singers—introduces different possibilities, enabling audiences to consider that the protagonist is not as alone as he fears; that the woman he loved is still, in some

way, connected to him. What critics once disparaged as a “feminist sensibility” and dismissed as a deviation from *Winterreise*’s logical norms in fact reveals ever-deepening dimensions of its significance: a season that might yet change, a journey that might yet conclude with real human connection.

Lucy Caplan holds a Ph.D. in American Studies and African American Studies from Yale University. The recipient of the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism, she teaches at Harvard College and writes frequently about music, history, and culture.

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For the Future
by Wendell Berry

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we make a place for birds to sing
in time to come. How do we know?
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Winterreise

By Martin Katz, © 2019

“I like these [songs] more than all the rest, and you will too one day.” These are Schubert’s words to a concerned colleague after performing *Winterreise* for him for the first time.

There are no song cycles like *Winterreise*. We have diverse examples of the genre in the vocal repertoire: story cycles with a linear thread from first to last song. Schubert’s other celebrated creation, *Die schöne Müllerin*, written four years earlier, is a perfect example. Boy goes wandering; boy finds a job; boy meets a girl, believes they are meant for one another; boy loses girl to another; boy is destroyed. There are no blank chapters to be filled in by the performer’s imagination, as the sad story is complete. Another type of cycle eschews storytelling altogether, and instead offers the listener various pictures by the same poet and composer, like rooms in an art gallery featuring but one painter. Schumann’s Op. 39 *Liederkreis* and Barber’s *Hermit Songs* are masterpieces of this type. One can discern a thread here or a repeated theme there, but no “once upon a time” experience is to be had with this type of cycle. Beethoven’s offering, *An die ferne Geliebte* (which will be heard later in the season sung by baritone Matthias Goerne), a groundbreaking work with no pause between songs and featuring cyclical musical development, is part story and partially a collection of songs within the story. Vaughan Williams’ *Songs of Travel* is almost a story, but not quite; gaps must be filled by the fantasy of the performer.

Indeed, *Winterreise* stands alone. These two dozen songs, written in the last year of Schubert’s all-too-short life, are searing milestones in the systematic dismantling of the protagonist’s spirit, his very soul perhaps. Yes, the cycle does begin with romantic betrayal—nothing so unusual there—which seems to cause the hero to set off on his journey. But he has no destination, and it is surely the wrong season of the year for such a trip. Is this truly the cause for his decision? “Gute Nacht,” the cycle’s first and longest song tells us: “I came in as a stranger; I depart as one.” Thus the themes of alienation, withdrawal, and loneliness are set, whether love was ever requited or not.

Schubert only chose to set 12 of Müller’s poems to music. The composer knew nothing of a second set of texts; indeed they had not been written

when he began what we now call Part I of the whole cycle (the first 12 songs). Schubert was aware of how mortally ill he was, that his days were numbered, yet 12 songs still seemed possible. Then only three months before his death, having discovered the second dozen poems, he worked feverishly to create what we know today as *Winterreise*.

[A tiny anecdote here: Schubert chose to omit the definite article in the title of the cycle. This departure from traditional German grammar renders the title more arresting, certainly increasing its dramatic effect before one even proceeds to open the book's cover. *The Winter Journey* could be any story; *Winter Journey* is bold and unique, and as lonely without its article as is the cycle's leading man.]

Composers often change a word here or there, and in some cases—Schumann's *Dichterliebe* comes to mind—they may even omit two or three entire poems. They know their craft; they are concerned with public performance after all, and its inherent theatricality as well as the technical necessities of singing and playing the piano, whereas poets may not necessarily anticipate a public reading of their words. Schubert completely re-ordered Müller's texts in Part II of the cycle, beginning with the song "Die Post," and when he discovered that the poet had himself re-ordered the texts in Part I after publishing them, Schubert declined to alter what he had already created. These changes in the order of the poems have no effect on the story, for I would remind you: there is no linear tale told here. Susan Youens, the well-known musicologist devoted to song repertoire, is of the opinion that "Schubert's order is better than the poet's."

Let us remember that as he wrote this cycle, Schubert had 600 songs to his credit already. There was no form he had not explored, and so with *Winterreise* we have strophic songs: pieces which are rondos as well as through-composed examples. There was no accompanimental or pianistic device he had not already created to paint the scene. He had invented Gretchen's spinning wheel and the silent entrance of Death in *Der Tod und das Mädchen*. For this cycle, he serves up the sound of dogs growling, wind howling, the inexorable circling overhead of a crow, and of course, the ultimate example of the hurdy-gurdy in

the cycle's last song.

Schubert had pioneered ways to manipulate shifting modes of major and minor which served as a textbook for future composers. Obviously with *Winterreise*, most of the songs are in minor keys. The subject demands this. But along this terrible path there are waystations which offer our protagonist some relief from the darkness, from the cold, and in the process, wring our hearts as we listen. The celebrated "Der Lindenbaum" (5) and "Frühlingstraum" (11) are excellent examples. Even in the midst of dark minor tonalities, Schubert will give us tender moments which he feels call out for a shift to a major mode. Texts such as "Where might I find a single blade of grass?" or "What have I done that makes me shun others so?"—these are momentary oases of tenderness, warmth, and vulnerability dropped here and there in this 80 minutes of bleak, snowy landscape.

What does our wanderer encounter on this terrible journey? The only living beings are unfriendly dogs and a solitary crow. When he finds the hut of a coal laborer, there is no one inside to welcome him. The sole exception to this bleak loneliness is the hurdy-gurdy man of the cycle's last song. He too has churlish dogs around him, no shoes, and not one coin on his plate despite his musical offering. He might easily be seen as a mirror image of the protagonist of the cycle.

It is also interesting to catalogue the wanderer's discards as he proceeds on his journey. He does not abandon thoughts of the girl he loved until after the 19th song. He gives up hope only in the 16th song, as the last leaf falls from a branch. He discards his desire to see only in the penultimate song with "I would be better off in the dark." The desire to die runs throughout Part II, climaxing in "Das Wirtshaus" (21) with a request to avail himself of a place in the cemetery; this pathetic plea is, of course, denied.

Whenever I have performed *Winterreise*, I have felt I have officiated at the destruction of a psyche. There is inevitably a deafening silence when the cycle ends, and applause seems not only unnecessary but downright inappropriate. I don't think the performers need it or seek it. The work itself is the star, and if applause is to ensue, it must be for Schubert's courage in writing such a masterpiece, particularly so close to his own end.

About the Artists



JOYCE DIDONATO Mezzo-soprano

Multi Grammy Award winner and 2018 Olivier Award winner for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, Kansas-born Joyce DiDonato entrances audiences across the globe, and has been proclaimed “perhaps the most potent female singer of her generation” by *The New Yorker*. With a voice “nothing less than 24-carat gold” according to the *Times*, Joyce has soared to the top of the industry both as a performer and a fierce advocate for the arts, gaining international prominence in operas by Handel and Mozart, as well as through her wide-ranging, acclaimed discography.

Much in demand on the concert and recital circuit she has recently held residencies at Carnegie Hall and at London’s Barbican Centre, toured extensively in the United States, South America, Europe, and Asia and appeared as guest soloist at the BBC’s Last Night of the Proms. Recent concert highlights include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Riccardo Muti, the Berlin Philharmonic under Sir Simon Rattle, Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique under Sir John Eliot Gardiner, the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and

the Accademia Santa Cecilia Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra USA under Sir Antonio Pappano.

In opera, Joyce's recent roles include Didon in *Les Troyens* (Berlioz) at the Vienna State Opera; Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito* (Mozart), *Cendrillon* (Massenet) and Adalgisa in *Norma* (Bellini) at the Metropolitan Opera, Agrippina (Handel) in concert with Il Pomo d'Oro; Sister Helen in *Dead Man Walking* (Jake Heggie) at the Teatro Real Madrid and London's Barbican Centre; *Semiramide* (Rossini) at the Bavarian State Opera and Royal Opera House, and Charlotte in *Werther* (Massenet) at the Royal Opera House.

Joyce's current season sees her staged debut as Agrippina in a new production at the Royal Opera House, returns to the Metropolitan Opera, and performances as Semiramide at the Liceu, Barcelona. She is Carnegie Hall's Perspectives Artist with appearances including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Muti, with Nézet-Séguin in recital performing Schubert's *Winterreise*, a *Joyce & Friends* chamber music concert joined by the Brentano Quartet, a baroque inspired program *My Favorite Things* with Il Pomo d'Oro, as well as live-streamed masterclasses. Also with Il Pomo d'Oro, she will tour her album *In War & Peace* to South America, as well as a European and U.S. tour of *My Favorite Things*. Other highlights include a tour with the Orchestre Métropolitain under Nézet-Séguin; touring her latest album release *Songplay* in Europe (heard at Princeton last season); and recorded concerts of Berlioz *Roméo & Juliette* with John Nelson and the Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg.

An exclusive recording artist with Erato/Warner Classics, Joyce's award-winning discography includes *Les Troyens* which won the Recording (Complete Opera) category at the International Opera Awards in 2018, the Opera Award at the *BBC Music Magazine* Awards and Gramophone's Recording of the Year. An extensive recording artist, other recent albums include *Songplay*, *In War & Peace* which won the 2017 Best Recital Gramophone Award, *Stella di Napoli*, her Grammy-Award-winning *Diva, Diva*, and *Drama Queens*. Other honors include the Gramophone Artist of the Year and Recital of the Year awards, and an induction into the Gramophone Hall of Fame. This is Joyce's fourth appearance on the Princeton University Concerts series.



YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN Piano

Montréal-born Yannick Nézet-Séguin was appointed as Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera, New York in 2018, adding this to his Music Directorship of The Philadelphia Orchestra (where he has served since 2012) and to the Orchestre Métropolitain (Montréal), of which he has been Artistic Director and Principal Conductor since 2000. He joined Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Bernard Haitink to become the third-ever Honorary Member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in 2016–17. The end of his ten-year tenure with Rotterdam Philharmonic coincided with the orchestra's centenary celebrations in its home city and culminated in an acclaimed tour of the European summer festivals in 2018.

Yannick has worked with many leading European ensembles and enjoys close collaborations with the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Bayerischer Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester, and Chamber Orchestra of Europe; between 2008 and 2014 he was also principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He has appeared three times at the BBC Proms and at many festivals in Europe and North America. He made his Salzburg Festival opera debut in 2008 with a new production of *Roméo et Juliette* (Berlioz), and returned in 2010 and 2011 for *Don Giovanni* (Mozart). In the 2009–10 season, he made his Metropolitan Opera debut with a new production of *Carmen* (Bizet), returning every

season thereafter. In his inaugural season (2018/19) as Music Director, Yannick conducted Verdi's *La Traviata*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, as well as conducting the Met Orchestra outside the opera house for the first time in two concerts at Carnegie Hall. This season he will conduct productions of Puccini's *Turandot*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, and Massenet's *Werther*.

A major highlight of this season will be his nine-concert series at Carnegie Hall as one of its Perspectives Artists—this will include the Orchestre Métropolitain's debut appearance at the venue during the orchestra's first United States tour and a Beethoven symphony cycle with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He will also move from the podium to the piano for one of these concerts as he accompanies Joyce DiDonato in their interpretation of *Winterreise*.

Mr. Nézet-Séguin records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon. Recent releases include the first of two albums made with pianist Daniil Trifonov and The Philadelphia Orchestra devoted to the complete Rachmaninov piano concertos. Its companion piece, *Destination Rachmaninov—Arrival*, featuring Concertos Nos. 1 and 3 together with Trifonov's transcription of "Vocalise" and "The Silver Sleigh Bells," was released in October 2019. Following acclaimed live performances, Yannick and The Philadelphia Orchestra recorded Leonard Bernstein's Mass (2018). *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mozart) with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe won the 2017 ECHO Klassik for Best Opera Recording and a GRAMMY nomination. The next disc in the cycle, *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart), was released in August 2019.

Mr. Nézet-Séguin studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec in Montréal and choral conducting at the Westminster Choir College (in Princeton!) before going on to study with renowned conductors, most notably the Italian maestro Carlo Maria Giulini. His honors include Musical America's 2016 Artist of the Year and Echo Klassik's 2014 Conductor of the Year, among others. He holds six honorary doctorates including from The Curtis Institute in Philadelphia (2014) and Westminster Choir College of Rider University (2015). This concert is Yannick Nézet-Séguin's Princeton University Concerts debut.

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