



2025-2026 Musical Interludes

Songs About Love

Program Notes

No emotion is more universal, or more difficult to define, than love. Each work on this program offers a distinct perspective: a collection of songs by Amy Beach that are lyrical and emotionally nuanced; César Franck's sonata for violin and piano – a piece that is reflective and restless, as well as joyful and celebratory; and Arnold Schoenberg's single-movement work that follows a narrative of confession, forgiveness, and transformation. This concert, **Songs About Love**, explores the many facets and stages of this complex emotion.

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Amy Beach (1867–1944) was one of the first American composers to achieve international recognition, and the first American woman to compose and publish a symphony. A leading figure of the so-called “Boston School,” she established a career as both pianist and composer at a time when few women were afforded such opportunities. Her ***Three Browning Songs, Op. 44***—written around 1900 for the Boston Browning Society—set poems by Robert Browning that explore love in its varied forms.

“The Year’s at the Spring” captures the exhilaration of renewal, propelled by buoyant rhythms and rising melodic phrases. In contrast, “Ah, Love, but a day!” introduces uncertainty through unsettled rhythms, falling melodic gestures, and shifting harmonies that evoke emotional instability. The final song, “I send my heart up to thee,” is the most harmonically fluid of the three, its modulations and lyrical lines suggesting devotion sustained across distance. Together, the songs trace an emotional progression—from youthful optimism to introspection and enduring commitment.

César Franck (1822–1890) was a central figure in late nineteenth-century French music, known for his rich harmonic language and his distinctive use of cyclical form, in which themes return and transform across movements. Composed in 1886 as a wedding gift for the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, the ***Sonata in A Major*** embodies Franck’s deep commitment to structural cohesiveness and expressive lyricism. Franck tailored the violin writing to Ysaÿe’s singing tone and technical flexibility, shaping lines that unfold individually while remaining closely integrated with the piano.

“One long caress,” wrote violinist Eugène Ysaÿe about César Franck’s Violin Sonata, “a regenerative awakening on a summer’s morning.”

The third movement, *Recitativo–Fantasia*, is the most freely constructed in the sonata. The violin sounds as though it is improvising, unfolding in speech-like phrases over shifting harmonies that create a sense of searching and reflection. In contrast, the fourth movement, *Allegretto poco mosso*, is composed as a canon: violin and piano enter in imitation, following one another as if in conversation. Themes from earlier in the sonata reappear transformed, unfolding in bright, soaring melodies. The movement's sweet opening character grows into a joyful and triumphant conclusion, a subtle acknowledgment of the work's origins as a wedding gift.

Composed by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) in 1899, *Verklärte Nacht* (“Transfigured Night”) is one of the composer's early masterworks, written well before his later move toward atonality. Inspired by a poem by Richard Dehmel, the work unfolds as a single continuous movement that mirrors the poem's emotional progression. Originally scored for string sextet, the music is firmly rooted in the late-Romantic tradition, drawing on the chromatic richness of Wagner while extending harmonic tension to its limits.

Beginning in the key of d minor, the opening is dark and unsettled—shaped by dense chromatic harmony and tightly woven textures that create a sense of unease. Rather than moving quickly toward resolution, Schoenberg allows the tension to expand and intensify, using recurring motives and shifting tonal centers to reflect emotional conflict. Gradually, the harmony stabilizes, the texture opens, and the music turns toward warmth and clarity. The work concludes in a radiant D Major, embodying the poem's transformation through sound—a harmonic journey from shadow into light.

**Transfigured Night (Verklärte Nacht), by Richard Dehmel**

*first published in Weib und Welt (1896)*

Two figures pass through the bare, cold grove;  
the moon accompanies them, they gaze into it.  
The moon races above some tall oaks;  
No trace of a cloud filters the sky's light,  
into which the dark treetops stretch.  
A female voice speaks:

I am carrying a child, and not yours;  
I walk in sin beside you.  
I have deeply sinned against myself.  
I no longer believed in happiness  
And yet was full of longing  
For a life with meaning, for the joy  
And duty of maternity; so I dared  
And, quaking, let my sex  
Be taken by a stranger,  
And was blessed by it.  
Now life has taken its revenge,  
For now I have met you, yes you.

She takes an awkward step.  
She looks up: the moon races alongside her.  
Her dark glance is saturated with light.  
A male voice speaks:

Let the child you have conceived  
Be no trouble to your soul.  
How brilliantly the universe shines!  
It casts a luminosity on everything;  
you float with me upon a cold sea,  
but a peculiar warmth glimmers  
from you to me, and then from me to you.  
Thus is transfigured the child of another man;  
You will bear it for me, as my own;  
You have brought your luminosity to me,  
You have made me a child myself.

He clasps her round her strong hips.  
Their kisses mingle breath in the night air.  
Two humans pass through the high, clear night.

Zwei Menschen gehn durch kahlen, kalten Hain;  
der Mond läuft mit, sie schau'n hinein.  
Der Mond läuft über hohe Eichen;  
kein Wölkchen trübt das Himmelslicht,  
in das die schwarzen Zacken reichen.  
Die Stimme eines Weibes spricht:

Ich trag ein Kind, und nit von Dir,  
ich geh in Sünde neben Dir.  
Ich hab mich schwer an mir vergangen.  
Ich glaubte nicht mehr an ein Glück  
und hatte doch ein schwer Verlangen  
nach Lebensinhalt, nach Mutterglück  
und Pflicht; da hab ich mich erfrecht,  
da ließ ich schaudernd mein Geschlecht  
von einem fremden Mann umfängen,  
und hab mich noch dafür gesegnet.  
Nun hat das Leben sich gerächt:  
nun bin ich Dir, o Dir, begegnet.

Sie geht mit ungelenkem Schritt.  
Sie schaut empor; der Mond läuft mit.  
Ihr dunkler Blick ertrinkt in Licht.  
Die Stimme eines Mannes spricht:

Das Kind, das Du empfangen hast,  
sei Deiner Seele keine Last,  
o sieh, wie klar das Weltall schimmert!  
Es ist ein Glanz um alles her;  
Du treibst mit mir auf kaltem Meer,  
doch eine eigne Wärme flimmert  
von Dir in mich, von mir in Dich.  
Die wird das fremde Kind verklären,  
Du wirst es mir, von mir gebären;  
Du hast den Glanz in mich gebracht,  
Du hast mich selbst zum Kind gemacht.

Er faßt sie um die starken Hüften.  
Ihr Atem küßt sich in den Lüften.  
Zwei Menschen gehn durch hohe, helle Nacht.