

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

7 April 2013 – 3.30pm

Recital by

KATHRYN RUDGE (mezzo-soprano) and **JAMES BAILLIEU** (piano)

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

What is a Mezzo Soprano?

Classical singers are always categorised. Every singer is identified in concert and opera programmes by a label used to identify their voice type. Whilst the four basic voice types are soprano, alto, tenor and bass, there are so many variations, and extra categories.

“Mezzo Soprano” is Italian, loosely translating as half-soprano or semi-soprano. It could be said to be half way between soprano and alto or contralto, but that would be no more than a rough guide. Mezzo-sopranos generally have a heavier, darker tone than sopranos. The mezzo-soprano voice resonates in a higher range than that of a contralto. In current operatic practice, female singers with very low tessituras are often included among mezzo-sopranos, because singers in both ranges are able to cover the other, and true operatic contraltos are very rare. Any singer will use the labels to promote themselves, as the type of voice dictates the roles and works they can tackle. In Germany the system requires even more detailed categorisation. Mezzo sopranos themselves are divided into three sub groups – the lyric, dramatic and coloratura mezzo, and each defines the roles which the singer is expected to be able to tackle. The labels however can be no more than guides. Carmen is perhaps the most prominent mezzo soprano role in 19th century opera, but any opera director who had told Maria Callas that she could not tackle the role because she was a soprano probably would not have lasted long!

While mezzo-sopranos typically sing secondary roles in operas, notable exceptions include the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, Angelina (*Cinderella*) in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, and Rosina in Rossini's *Barber of Seville* (all of which are also sung by sopranos). Many 19th-century French-language operas gave the leading female role to mezzos, including *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *La damnation de Faust*, *Don Quichotte*, *La favorite*, *Mignon*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Les Troyens*, and *Werther*, as well as *Carmen*.

Typical roles for mezzo-sopranos include the triad associated with contraltos of "witches, bitches, and

britches": witches, nurses, and wise women, such as Azucena in Verdi's *Il trovatore*; villains and seductresses such as Amneris in Verdi's *Aida*; and "breeches roles" (male characters played by female singers) such as Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. Mezzo-sopranos are also well represented in baroque music, early music, and baroque opera. Some roles designated for lighter soubrette sopranos are sung by mezzo sopranos, who often provide a fuller, more dramatic quality. Such roles include Despina in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Zerlina in his *Don Giovanni*. Mezzos also sometimes play dramatic soprano roles such as Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth*, and Kundry in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

A coloratura mezzo-soprano has a warm lower register and an agile high register. The roles they sing often demand not only the use of the lower register but also leaps into the upper tessitura with highly ornamented, rapid passages. What distinguishes these voices from being called sopranos is their extension into the lower register and warmer vocal quality. Although coloratura mezzo-sopranos have impressive and at times thrilling high notes, they are most comfortable singing in the middle of their range, rather than the top.

Many of the hero roles in the operas of Handel and Monteverdi, originally sung by male castrati, can be successfully sung today by coloratura mezzo-sopranos. Rossini (who was married to one of the century's most famous mezzos, Isabel Colbran) demanded similar qualities for his comic heroines, and Vivaldi wrote roles frequently for this voice as well. Coloratura mezzo-sopranos also often sing lyric-mezzo soprano roles or soubrette roles.

The lyric mezzo-soprano has a very smooth, sensitive and at times lachrymose quality. Lyric mezzo-sopranos do not have the vocal agility of the coloratura mezzo-soprano or the size of the dramatic mezzo-soprano but are ideal for most trouser roles.

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Finally, a dramatic mezzo-soprano has a strong medium register, a warm high register and a voice that is broader and more powerful than the lyric and coloratura mezzo-sopranos. This voice has less vocal facility than the coloratura mezzo-soprano. The dramatic mezzo-soprano can sing over an orchestra and chorus with ease and was often used in the 19th century opera, to portray older women, mothers,

witches and evil characters. Verdi wrote many roles for this voice in the Italian repertoire and there are also a few good roles in French Literature. The majority of these roles, however, are within the German Romantic repertoire of composers like Wagner and Richard Strauss.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Mezzo Soprano: Kathryn Rudge
Piano: James Baillieu

Mezzo-soprano Kathryn Rudge was featured as the new face of classical music in 'The Times Rising Stars of 2012'. She made her much praised professional opera debut in 2012 as an ENO Young Artist at the London Coliseum in the role of Cherubino in Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro'. She was also 'Debutante of the Month' in the International Opera Now Magazine. In 2012 she made her debut with Opera North in the role of Sesto in Handel's 'Giulio Cesare' to critical acclaim. In the autumn of 2012 she made her debut with Glyndebourne Touring Opera revisiting the role of Cherubino in their new production of Mozart's 'Le Nozze di Figaro'. In 2013 she will perform the role of Annio in Opera North's production of Mozart's 'La Clemenza di Tito' Kathryn is currently represented by the Young Classical Artists' Trust.

Described by The Daily Telegraph as 'in a class of his own', pianist James Baillieu has been the prize-winner of the Wigmore Hall Song Competition, Das Lied International Song Competition (in both 2009 & 2011), Kathleen Ferrier and Richard Tauber Competitions. Over the last year he has recorded for BBC Radio 3 with the Elias Quartet and Allan Clayton while giving solo and chamber recitals throughout Europe and further afield, collaborating with singers Jared Holt, Gerard Collett, Sir Thomas Allen, Katherine Broderick, Martene Grimson, Jacques Imbrailo, Sarah-Jane Brandon and Kishani Jayasinghe. Festivals and venues have included Wigmore Hall, Festpillene i Bergen, the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Aix-en-Provence, Derry and Norfolk & Norwich Festivals. He was selected for representation by Young Concert Artists' Trust (YCAT) in 2010.

PROGRAMME

Mozart 'Le Nozze di Figaro'
Non so piu
Voi Che Sapete

Schubert 4 Songs
Frühlingsglaube
An die Laute
Nachtstück
Im Abendrot

Tosti
Aprile
L'alba separa dalla luce l'ombra

Bizet 'Carmen'
Seguidilla

~~~ Interval ~~~

**Quilter** 7 Elizabethan Lyrics  
Weep you no more  
My Life's Delight  
Damask Roses  
The Faithless Shepherdess  
Brown is my Love  
By a Fountainside  
Fair House of Joy

**Bridge**  
Thy hand in mine  
Where she lies asleep  
Love went a riding

**Wood**  
Roses of Picardy

**Novello**  
We'll gather Lilacs

**Our next concert is the Heath quartet, on 5 May 2013 at 3:30pm.**

For more information on the artists and on future concerts, please visit [www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk](http://www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk)