



Bard College Conservatory of Music

20 Years of Music, Vision, and Excellence

Faculty Spotlight Series

Tyler Duncan, *baritone*
Erika Switzer, *piano*

Saturday, September 6, 2025 at 4:00 pm
László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building, Performance Space

Die schöne Müllerin, Op. 25, D. 795

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Das Wandern

Wohin?

Halt!

Danksagung an den Bach

Am Feierabend

Der Neugierige

Ungeduld

Morgengruß

Des Müllers Blumen

Tränenregen

Mein!

Pause

Mit dem grünen Lautenbande

Der Jäger

Eifersucht und Stolz

Die liebe Farbe

Die böse Farbe

Trockne Blumen

Der Müller und der Bach

Des Baches Wiegenlied

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

With a voice described as “honey-coloured and warm, yet robust and commanding” (The Globe and Mail), baritone **Tyler Duncan** has performed worldwide to great acclaim in both opera and concert repertoire. Throughout his varied career, he has performed with several of the world’s leading orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tafelmusik, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Kansas City Symphony.

Mr. Duncan has performed numerous roles at The Metropolitan Opera including Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Moralès in *Carmen*, Prince Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*, and the Journalist in *Lulu*. At the Spoleto Festival USA, he debuted as Mr. Friendly in the 18th-century ballad opera *Flora*, returning the next season as Sprecher in *Die Zauberflöte*. Other notable appearances have included Raymondo in Handel’s *Almira*, Dandini in *La Cenerentola* with Pacific Opera Victoria and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Princeton Festival. In the realm of new opera, he recently performed the role of Raymond in Nic Gotham’s *Nigredo Hotel* with City Opera Vancouver and sang the world premiere of Jonathan Berger’s *Leonardo* at the 92stY in NYC.

Frequently paired with pianist Erika Switzer, Mr. Duncan has given acclaimed recitals in New York, Boston, Chicago, Paris, and throughout Canada, Germany, Sweden, France, and South Africa. Together they have premiered many new works written for them by composers. Alongside their debut album *English Songs à la française* for Bridge Records, they have released *A Left Coast* on the same label featuring songs from Canada's west coast.

As a current faculty member for the Vocal Arts Program at Bard College, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and as director of voice for the historical performance program at Case Western Reserve University, he finds joy in helping the next generation of singers find their true voice.

Erika Switzer is an accomplished pianist who collaborates regularly in major concert settings around the world, including at New York’s Weill Hall (Carnegie), Geffen Hall, Frick Collection, and Bargemusic, at the Kennedy Center, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Spoleto Festival (Charleston, SC). Her performances have been called “precise and lucid” by the New York Times, and Renaud Machart of *Le Monde* described her as “one of the best collaborative pianists I have ever heard; her sound is deep, her interpretation intelligent, refined, and captivating.”

From 2000-2007, Switzer performed and studied in Germany, an experience that profoundly inspired and shaped her work. During that time, she appeared at Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and in the Munich Winners & Masters series and won numerous awards, including best pianist prizes at the Robert Schumann, Hugo Wolf, and Wigmore Hall International Song Competitions.

Switzer has long been a leader in envisioning and promoting the future of art song performance. In 2009, in collaboration with soprano Martha Guth, she founded the organization Sparks & Wiry Cries, which curates opportunities for song creators and performers, commissions new works, presents the songSLAM festival in New York City, and publishes *The Art Song Magazine*. She is also devoted to new music, and has recently premiered new compositions in the 5 Boroughs Music Festival Songbook II; at the Brooklyn Art Song Society; and at Vancouver’s Music on Main.

Switzer collaborates with a range of top singers and instrumentalists. A frequent collaborator is baritone Tyler Duncan, and as a duo, Switzer and Duncan have performed in major concert halls and music festivals around the world. She is also an active teacher, serving on the music faculty at Bard College and the Bard Conservatory of Music. Switzer holds a doctorate from The Juilliard School, and lives in New York’s Hudson Valley.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin*

Little is known about any personal contact between Beethoven and Schubert, although in August 1823 Karl van Beethoven wrote in a conversation book he used to communicate with his deaf uncle: "They greatly praise Schubert, but it is said that he hides himself." The reason that Schubert had disappeared was because of a health crisis, almost certainly from contracting syphilis. Yet despite the illness, depression (what he called "melancholy"), and depleted energy, Schubert continued to produce a limited number of works. One of the largest and most important was the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* (The Beautiful Miller Maid), part of which he apparently composed during an extended stay in Vienna's General Hospital.

A few months after completing the work in the fall of 1823, Schubert wrote these anguished words to a close friend: "I feel myself the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair over this ever makes things worse and worse, instead of better; imagine a man, I say, whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the happiness of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain, at best, whose enthusiasm (at least of the stimulating kind) for all things beautiful threatens to disappear, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being?"

At this point in his career, Schubert was writing fewer Lieder and concentrating on instrumental compositions. He had composed hundreds of songs as a teenager, sometimes three or four in a single day, and his achievement proved crucial in elevating the artistic status of the Lied. Schubert fundamentally changed the way composers and critics viewed this once lowly genre. Although Beethoven wrote nearly 100 songs altogether, many were fairly trivial fare; that he tended not to give them opus numbers is an indication of their relative place in his esteem. In 1816, he composed his most important contribution to the genre, the cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op. 98, which showed that individual songs could be joined to create a larger and more substantive statement.

Schubert's two cycles, *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823) and *Winterreise* (1827), set words by Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827), a young contemporary from northern Germany. (It is unlikely that the composer and poet met, even though Müller traveled to Vienna in 1817.) While Schubert largely failed when it came to writing operas, in the two Müller cycles he brilliantly achieved a large-scale narrative that later inspired Schumann, Brahms, Mahler, and other composers.

During the nineteenth century, and indeed for much of the twentieth, *Die schöne Müllerin* attracted greater public attention and affection than did *Winterreise*. Its mood corresponded more easily, perhaps, to the dominant popular image of Schubert. Carefree songs mix with ones telling of frustrated love and, ultimately, of early death. The poet Johann Mayrhofer remarked on the changes in musical style he perceived in his friend's cycles: *Die schöne Müllerin* "opens with a joyous song of roaming, the mill songs depict love in its awakening, its deceptions and hopes, its delights and sorrows. . . Not so with *Winterreise*, the very choice of which shows how much more serious the composer had become. He had been long and seriously ill, had gone through shattering experiences, and life for him had shed its rosy color; winter had come for him."

Yet *Die schöne Müllerin* as a whole is hardly carefree and, although somewhat simpler musically than *Winterreise*, it also explores dark realms. There is always a danger of simplistically relating an artist's life at a given moment with the art created at the time—Schubert composed some of his most joyous compositions in moments of despair. And the period in which he wrote *Die schöne Müllerin* was indeed grim. The musicologist Susan Youens has explored the connection between sexuality and death in the cycle—how the sexual passion of the protagonist leads to his premature death by suicide—and has extended this connection to Schubert's own life when a sexually transmitted disease threatened his future.

Müller's poems for the cycle first appeared in a volume titled *Seventy-seven Poems from the Posthumous Papers of a Wandering Horn Player* (1821), which evolved from his experiences participating in a Berlin reading circle held at the home of a local statesman. It was there that Müller encountered Luise Hensel (whose brother would later marry Felix Mendelssohn's sister). Most of the men in this group, it appears, were in love with her, including the composer Ludwig Berger, who set ten of the poems to music. Some of the romantic intrigues of the reading circle resonated in the *Liederspiel* (song play) that Müller wrote, framed by a prologue and epilogue, and eventually containing 23 poems in between. Schubert omitted the framing poems as well as three others in his cycle.

The prologue promises a “brand new entertainment” about a “young, blond miller lad.” The first three songs, beginning with “Wandering,” tell of the lad strolling by a brook where he spies a lovely young girl, the daughter of a miller, and promptly falls in love with her (songs 4-13). Müller's poems leave fairly ambiguous the exact nature of their relationship—is the love reciprocated? Does he make love to her? Is this all a delusion? A rival—a macho hunter—appears in song 14 and seems to succeed with the maid. The disillusioned songs that follow (15-20) show the lad's anger and despair that lead to his suicide. The final song is a haunting lullaby “sung” by the brook, a simple five-verse strophic setting in which the lover is entreated to “sleep away your joy, sleep away your sorrow!”

Christopher H. Gibbs, James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music