

Carlisle Music Society
St Cuthbert's Church 25th January 2018
Christopher Underwood, baritone Michael Hancock, piano

Four years ago, Christopher Underwood and Michael Hancock gave a stunning performance of *Winterreise*, and it was wonderful to be offered another chance to hear them again.

After two Purcell songs, the first half was *Dichterliebe*, a song cycle by Schumann. Christopher Underwood deliberately did not give the audience a direct translation of the songs, but summed up the meaning for us to encourage us to watch. Even those with imperfect German could understand that this helped us engage in the emotional journey of the cycle. There were some wonderful interpretations – for example, perhaps the most famous song, *Ich Grolle Nicht*, is often sung angrily, the performance is often quite aggressive. Christopher Underwood sang this song with a melancholy that was most moving. There were some beautiful pianissimo moments and the piano postlude at the end of the cycle was delicately and sensitively played by Michael Hancock.

After the interval, we heard *Le Bestiaire* by Poulenc, settings of seven tiny, quirky poems by Apollinaire, followed by two songs from Ravel's *Histoire Naturelle*, the Peacock and the Kingfisher. These are not so much descriptive as humorous, and both pianist and singer demonstrated each character's piquant personality with great charm.

The final song cycle was Gerald Finzi's Shakespeare songs. These are a lovely, accessible group, performed with wonderful clarity – and with wonderful introductions – who knew, for example, that 'Who is Sylvia?' is actually a love song addressed to Sylvia herself? The concert finished with the hilarious and melancholy Flanders and Swan *Armadillo*.

Mary Hitch