



THE PROMS LISTENING SERVICE

Radio 3's Tom Service proposes onward sonic explorations inspired by the music of tonight's Prom

What other stories have sustained the Western musical imagination with the same longevity and intensity as the Passion? Well, there is something older and even more fundamental in our musical culture, a different kind of passion but something just as powerful when it comes to inspiring music and storytelling: love. Love is the igniting passion for the oldest music ever recorded and the latest songs and pieces and symphonies being written right now. So a very, very short history in the form of a lovestruck listening list now follows, with a few aeon-crossing numbers and moments from the history of the love song!

Enheduanna was a Sumerian priestess who lived around 2300BC. She is the first known named author in the history of the world and among her texts are love poems, texts that were designed to be sung (according to the historian Ted Gioia, author of a wonderful book, *Love Songs*, to which this tincture of a love-song treatise is indebted), which means that, at this dawning of the age of literary subjectivity, it's a love song that the world sings, thanks to Enheduanna. Fast forward a few thousand years to the time when love songs could be written down in musical notation and it's the male troubadours and female trobairises of the European courts who make the first recorded love songs in word and melody in the West, from the Duke of Aquitaine to the Comtessa de Dia. In turn, their songs of love requited and frustrated, won and lost, reach back in time to the Arabic musicians of Moorish Spain, whose love songs came to Europe via the traditions of the *qiyān*, the singing female slaves of early Islamic culture. The troubadour repertoires are kept alive on record thanks to ensembles such as the Dufay Collective and their recordings and

reimaginings of this millennia-old secular music, yet the troubadours also have a different kind of resonance in recent music: the Finnish composer **Kaija Saariaho's** opera *L'amour de loin* ('Love from afar') is a medieval romance of troubadour love which she turns into one of the most sensually beautiful of all recent operatic experiences.

The centuries are shooting by ... and it's in the lovelorn hearts of the composers of the Austro-German Romantic tradition that the immediacy of the popular love song and the ideals of art music meet, collide and fuse into one of the most important song genres of all: Lieder, the songs of Beethoven, Zelter, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler and many others. Individual songs might sing of the pain and ecstasy of love but it's in their song-cycles that Schubert and Schumann turned love into a multi-dimensional compositional catalyst. Music such as **Schumann's** *Dichterliebe* or **Schubert's** *Die schöne Müllerin* are the acmes of early 19th-century love music, a mantle that Mahler's love music – not only love for a best beloved but love songs for the whole world, for nature, for the agonies and joys of being alive – takes up at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in his song-cycles and song-symphonies, from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* to *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Where is the love song now? Everywhere. No need to make recommendations: turn on the radio and you will almost certainly hear 'songs of tainted love – and love is strange', as the Pet Shop Boys put it in 'I Want to Wake Up' from their 30-year-old album *Actually*, music that makes up about 50% of the earworms in my brain. But that's just me: everyone has their own passionate playlists, which we make and remake in the image of

our loves and our losses, singing songs that tell us how love feels and console us when it ends.



Join Tom Service on his musical odyssey in *The Listening Service* on BBC Radio 3, Sundays at 5.00pm, from 3 September. Go to *The Listening Service* on the Radio 3 website to hear clips, watch animations, download previous episodes and listen to the Proms Listening Service playlist.

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