



Nico de Villiers

Photo: Sebastian Charlesworth

Do Not Go My Love

‘a very well-crafted song’

- Roger Vignoles

This year marks the centenary of the publication of Richard Hageman’s 1917 setting of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Do not go, my love, without asking my leave' from his 1913 collection, *The Gardener*.

In a series of interviews, pianist Nico de Villiers — Richard Hageman scholar and director of the Richard Hageman Society — explores various performers’ impressions of Hageman’s most famous art song. British pianist **Roger Vignoles** talks about Hageman’s song and gives a glimpse into this his wealth of knowledge as a coach and pianist.

NICO DE VILLIERS: Can you recall your first introduction to Richard Hageman’s song, “Do Not Go, My Love”?

ROGER VIGNOLES: It's funny because Do Not Go, My Love is actually one of those songs that I feel I've always known, which probably means it must've come across my music stand as it were, probably when I was at college or soon after. And certainly it was one of the pieces that Dame Kiri and I used to enjoy doing when she went into the English parts of her programme.

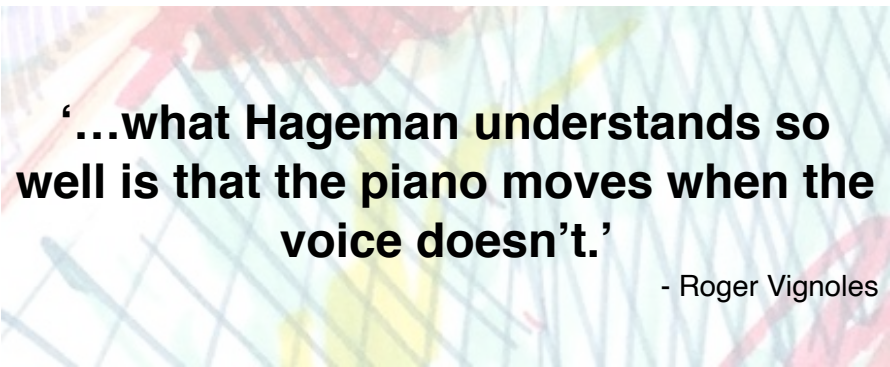
NdV: What were your first impressions of Hageman’s song?

RV: I suppose what my first impressions are, of a very well-crafted song, very much in the same period or the same kind of character as say Frank Bridge.



Photo: Ben Ealovega

Roger Vignoles



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NdV: What other influences would you say does this song portray?

RV: For me it's as much like a Tchaikovsky song. I could very well imagine the whole thing in

Russian. From the very start this classic syncopated accompany her figure, which is so brilliant because it sets up a pulse, but it leaves the singer free because the singer sings when the piano isn't playing. Except of course, on those heavy *appoggiatura* down beats, do not go my love, I have watched all night, which are of course so critical to the character in the song.

NdV: You mentioned this song as being “well-crafted”. Would you care to elaborate?

RV: I think when I say well-crafted, what Hageman understands so well is that the piano moves when the voice doesn't. There could be an interplay between the voice and the counter melody or the answering melody from the piano.

NdV: It' also in shape.... Hageman really projects Tagore's poem in such a way that this refrain “do not go my love” sort of sets up or lays the groundwork for the well-structured song as a whole.

RV: Exactly, where you have your A section, then you have a developing drama and your B section, and then you've got a really fantastic new section, new texture, a bit about, could I but entangle your feet or whatever it is, where you've actually... There's no base that's left the ground, you're absolutely in your head somewhere.

NdV: The tempo indication for “Do Not Go, My Love” is *adagio*. How do you interpret this?

RV: I think I conceived this song more as a slow *andante* or if it's an *adagio*, it's almost *adagio-in-one*. If one's just counting three, *adagio*, you're going to be [*conducting*] one, two, three, one, two, three but then to go one, [sings] do, not go...funeral march!

NdV: Exactly, we're never going to get to the end of that.

RV: You never going to get to the end of the phrase and you're never going to stop the person [you are singing about] going. And I think as I implied talking about the accompanying figure, its whole purpose actually is to allow the music to move forward.

And you have very much the sense that the down beat, [*sings*] “do not go my love, ta dee ta dee ta dee...”, so it has to be a flowing three with one strong impulse to the bar.

NdV: If you were to prepare a performance of “Do Not Go, My Love” now, what would your process be? Would you be lead by the text or the music?

RV: Well, I know we're all supposed to say, I read the poem first so I know what it's going to be about and to see what the composers made of it. I'm afraid to say much more often, I just sit down for about a while and I say, where's this going? What've we got here? I mean, obviously if it's a language I can't read off, I don't understand as I go, then I have to settle down and do some homework. But I have to say, I'm always more interested in the indications I get from the music than the ones I get from the text, which is not to say that the text isn't important since it is the number one element, because after all it's where the composer started. But on the other hand, you can sometimes get trapped and I find this sometimes particularly with singers, you can get trapped by the reading and interpretation of the poem, into it or out of it, which actually has not been picked up by the composer. And then what do you do? You start trying to enact that reading rather than living the musical version of it, which is not true, which then becomes a conflict.

NdV: How relevant would you say is it to know the context of the song text whenever it is from a collections of poems?

RV: I think it's actually helpful to keep the options open because that probably creates a more mixed colour to the song, therefore, a more interesting interpretation.

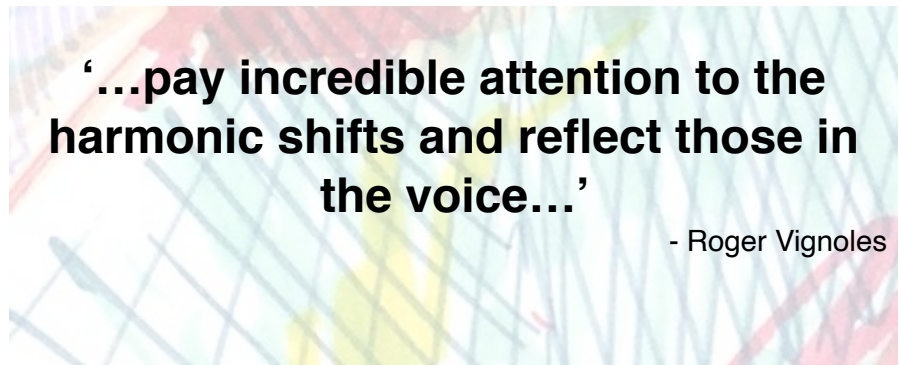
NdV: What would you say are the technical challenges to singer and pianist in this song?

RV: I would say for the singer, it's unfolding these legato lines and at the same time pronouncing the words, articulating the words clearly and with feeling, which sounds like a separate thing, but actually doing so, so this is completely organic. I would also say, I mean, if I was coaching the song, it's the kind of song where I would encourage the singer to pay incredible attention to the harmonic shifts and to reflect those in the voice, which frankly you should do all the time, but some music it's more important than others. Even right at the beginning in [*sings*] “do not go my love”, feel the deep harmony of the piano dragging the deeper overtones out of the bottom of the voice as it were or that moment... “I start up”, how does it go? “I start up and stretch my hands to touch you”, being aware of that, the harmonic change and the change of colour, change of placing in the voice. And of course actually, “is it a dream?”: not typically straightforward. And there really are lots of different ways of thinking of that actually, all of which would be part of the processes.

NdV: And pianistically?

RV: Pianistically, I would say the main thing is creating a flowing web of sound, providing the singer with an organic and moving pulse that still allows flexibility, that

never drives the singer, never nails them down, never puts them in a straight jacket, which is implied right from the start by the syncopation. And obviously, where it gets more dramatic, there are purely technical issues, you have to play octaves but make them sound lyrical or more dramatical. Questions of colour, imaginary orchestration, all of that has to be taken into account.



NdV: “Do Not Go, My Love” being a 100 years old, how would you say it fits into the 21st century?

RV: Well it's relevant for studying of Hageman as being probably the song by which he is known to anybody who knows the name. I actually think it's one of the wonderful things about the song repertoire, that there are these wonderful one-offs, which aren't one-offs, but are single...actually masterpieces in their sphere, they are masterpieces, they are songs that anybody would want to keep on their show and it may be the one thing by which a composer knows, but he's known by it. And that's terrific.

NdV: So that itself is a legacy. The one song.

RV: Exactly and there are gems like that throughout the repertoire. I suppose you could say, if it sits there and it encourages people to say, well, who is this person, Hageman? What else did he write? And explore it and come across something. And I think that this song expresses a very universal and recognisable sentiment. As you said, it's a very, very fine poem. And it's distilled through the music in an unforgettable way. I really can't imagine anybody composing it differently. One could say that that is as much of a compliment as anything else. ■

Roger Vignoles is one of the most distinguished piano accompanists of our time. In a career spanning five decades he has become recognized throughout the world as a leading exponent of the art of song. He has appeared at all the world's principal venues and festivals, from the Concertgebouw to Carnegie Hall, and with many of the world's foremost artists, such as Sir Thomas Allen, Barbara Bonney, Christine Brewer, Florian Boesch, Bernarda Fink, Elina Garanca, Susan Graham, Dame Kiri te Kanawa, Angelika Kirchschrager, Dame Felicity Lott, Mark Padmore, Christoph Prégardien and Sarah Walker.