

END OF MY DAYS

Brian Elias
Meet me in the Green Glen

Caroline Shaw
Valencia

R. Vaughan Williams
Along the field

J. Taverner
Akmatova Songs
Dante
Boris Pasternak
Couplet

J. Dowland
Go, Crystal Tears
Flow, my tears

Da Day Dawn arr. Donald Grant

M. Ravel
Kaddisch arr. Manchester Collective

Errollyn Wallen
End of My Days

C. Debussy
Chansons de Bilitis
La flute de Pan
La Chevelure
Le tombeau des Naiades

G. Mahler
Urlicht

Deborah Pritchard
Peace

RUBY HUGHES
MANCHESTER COLLECTIVE

Programme for voice and string quartet
To be release on BIS Records January 2024



INTRODUCTION

RUBY HUGHES

The inspiration for this album came about from my first collaboration with the Manchester Collective in the spring of 2020. The Collective's co founder Rakhi Singh and I were at school together and have been great friends for more than 25 years. She is an extraordinarily gifted musician and collaborator. The way she communicates with her group, bringing so much joy to fellow musicians and audiences alike, is truly ineffable.

Collaborating with her and this group has felt like a fortuitous extension of our friendship. Rakhi and co founder Adam Szabo's passion for enriching the musical landscape through diverse, imaginative and inclusive curation has been a source of ongoing inspiration for so many.

During the first Covid lockdown, we programmed the music which appears on this recording for the purpose of touring the UK, selecting repertoire which we hoped would resonate with, and uplift our audiences. It was a time when we were all being confronted by challenging notions of mortality and isolation in new ways. A sense of vulnerability was palpable within our communities, as people grappled with heightened levels of uncertainty. It felt as if our way of life had been thrown into flux. As artists committed to serving our audiences, we felt compelled to ask ourselves the question, 'what music might attend to the prevailing concerns of this time?'. Our answer came in the form of this offering.

Music always holds the potential to speak to us, to comfort us and help us to feel understood, especially in such challenging times. We identify with the poet who has miraculously found the words to describe the indescribable and the composer who conveys expression into sound.

The title of this album 'End of my Days' comes from Errollyn Wallen's song; a resounding celebration of life. It's full of energy and embraces death without regret or sadness but with great verve and acceptance, much like Ravels Kaddish.

In Tavener's transcendental songs, the poet Anna Akhmatova pays homage to two beloved poets whose voices as published writers were silenced in their respective countries. In two Dowland laments we experience love, loss and separation so directly. The sense of solitude is palpable. In Debussy's songs we are transported back to the discovery of youth and erotic love in all its vulnerability and excitement. Here nature is entwined in the human experience, much like the first two songs on the disc 'meet me in the green glen' and 'Along the Field', which look back at life, possibly even after death, remembering love awakening.

In Mahler's 'Urlicht' we are bathed in primordial light with the message that we will return from where we came from and light shall lift us into eternity. And finally Deborah Pritchard's 'Peace' is a message of hope, welcomingly received as the world emerged out of lockdown in 2021. As with Mahler, luminous tranquility moves us into the light, towards eternity.

REVIEWS

"[Hughes] was on irresistible form whether conveying the Sapphic languor of Debussy's *Trois chansons de Bilitis* or the metaphysical transcendence of Mahler's *Urlicht*. And how effective to have a singer delivering such a varied repertoire straight to camera without any sheet music."

Richard Morrison, *The Times*

"Soprano Ruby Hughes joined the players for songs chosen, seemingly, for the moment. John Dowland's pieces mused on isolation – though the arrangements of his two laments "Flow, My Tears" and "Go Crystal Tears" created so much space around Hughes almost improvisatory solo line that loneliness was replaced by something more reassuring – while Ravel's *Kaddish* provided a keening prayer of intercession. But there was sensuality and hope too from the lazy eroticism of Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* (Hughes at her richest and most persuasive in "La chevelure") and finally Mahler's transcendent *Urlicht* – death reimagined as hope. This was an hour of music holding a whole world within it."

Alexandra Coghlan, *iNews*

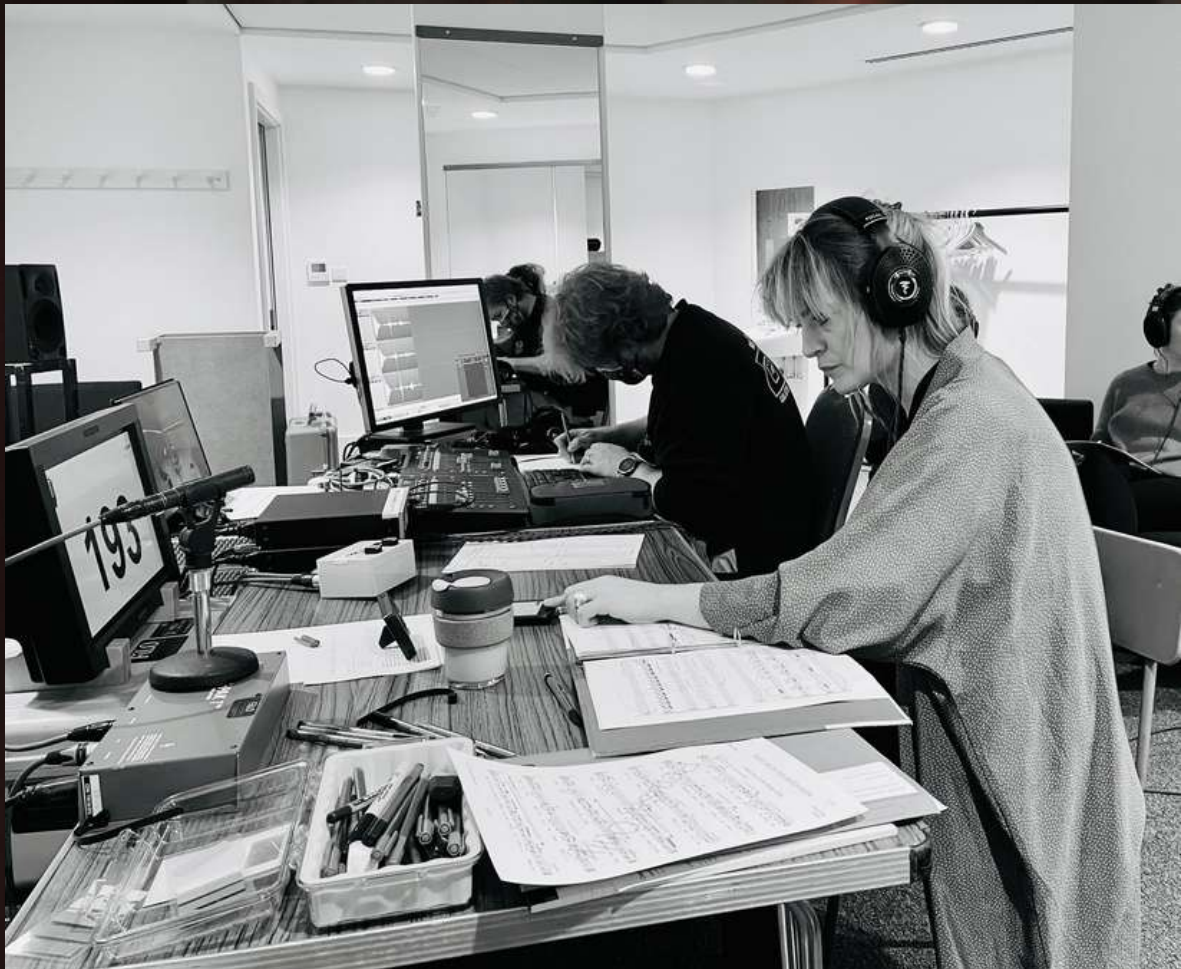
"[...] the lightness and clarity of Hughes' soprano. "Go crystal tears, like to the morning show'rs/ And sweetly weep into thy lady's breast," she uttered, with almost tragic tenderness, the final syllable floating and fading, seeming to vanish, to slip out of time, and then gently re-emerge.

[...] Ravel's *Kaddish*, from the *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques*, continued the lamentation and spiritual journey[...] Hughes' soprano was unwaveringly warm and full, and the vocal phrases expanded with persuasive flexibility; she showed a tremendous and innate appreciation of the rhythms of the French text, and pushed forwards compellingly to the exultation of the final "Amen", which releases the soul into the afterlife.

[...]The performance closed with spiritual transfiguration: 'Urlicht' from Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*. Hughes' solemn song was nevertheless opulent and intense, the simple rising intervals aspiring hopefully, lifting us towards the celestial lights above."

Claire Seymour, *Opera Today*

R U B Y H U G H E S



M A N C H E S T E R C O L L E C T I V E