

## Songs for New Life and Love

(1<sup>st</sup> performance: Wigmore Hall 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018; recorded for BIS Records for release August 2021)

Ruby Hughes (soprano) | Joseph Middleton (piano)

### Mahler

*Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen*

### Ives

*Songs my mother taught me*

*The Housatonic at Stockbridge*

*Mists*

*Serenity*

*The children's Hour*

### H. Grime

*Bright Travellers* (commissioned by Wigmore Hall)

### Mahler

*Kindertotenlieder*

Suo gân welsh lullaby (arranged by Huw Watkins)

\*Alternative repertoire:

**Schumann** *Prelude from Jugend lieder segwaying into*

**Schumann** *Frauenliebe und leben*

**Britten** *Charm of Lullabies*

### Introduction by Ruby Hughes:

In 2020 I was invited by Helen Grime to perform a concert for which she had been commissioned to write a song cycle, a set of five extraordinary poems by Fiona Benson charting the interior and exterior worlds of pregnancy and motherhood. At the time of the invitation, I was myself five months pregnant, and once the concert came around it was very moving to perform this music, drawing from my own experiences as a mother of a newborn baby.

I soon set about planning a programme which would converge atmospherically with Grime's music. I wanted the listener to reflect on the themes of 'new life and love' in all its aspects. Gustav Mahler and Charles Ives came to mind immediately. I had always felt they were musical kindred spirits: in the way they imagined their natural surroundings and culture, synthesising the popular music around them with their own unique style.

For the Ives set I chose a selection of love songs, prayers and lullabies. With Mahler's songs I wanted to explore love, grief, loss and reconciliation through two different lenses. In the first cycle we experience Mahler as solitary wayfarer: we hear of unrequited love in all its aspects. In the second cycle, *Kindertotenlieder*, Friedrich Rückert pours out his grief as a father bereft in songs about the beauty and innocence of children. There is an astonishing immediacy and emotional honesty in these two cycles which is prevalent too in Grime's *Bright Travellers*, and which makes the songs timeless and universal in the themes they confront. The last track on this album is dedicated to my little boy Djang. This lullaby has always been one of his most beloved.

