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CONCERT  
SEASON

# RACHEL FENLON

## SOPRANO & PIANO

Saturday, September 7

Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechelt



This concert sponsored by Crowe MacKay

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### Artist Bio

Rachel Fenlon is a soprano and pianist with a unique voice on the classical music stages of the world. Drawing from a singer-songwriter approach, Rachel performs song recitals as both singer and pianist accompanying herself. Praised for her "unusually shaped recitals in keeping with her extraordinary talent" (Place des Arts/Festival de Lanaudière), Rachel was born in the UK, raised on the west coast of Canada and is now based in Berlin.

The 2024/25 season sees Rachel make self-accompanied recital debuts at the Konzerthaus Berlin, the Bechstein Hall, Salle Bourgie in Montreal, with the Vancouver Recital Society, the Virtuosi Festival in Brazil, the Algarve Music Series, Domaine Forget, ArtSpring, SweetWater Music Festival and Music Toronto. She'll also release her debut solo album of Schubert's *Winterreise* on Orchid Classics in autumn 2024.

This year Rachel collaborates with Manufaktur für aktuelle Musik (MAM) and SWR Radio singing and playing synthesizer in a new work composed by Mart'n Schuettler and will perform new works by Samy Moussa and Viktor Orri Arnason. Rachel sings and produces Schoenberg's *Pierrot*

*Lunaire* in a co-production between Vancouver Opera, Opéra de Quebec and Opéra-Théâtre de Metz.

Performing and commissioning new music is a core part of Rachel's artistic practice. Her most recent new creation is an audiovisual song cycle titled *Sing Nature Alive from My Insides*, featuring Rachel accompanying herself on piano, along with live electronics and video projections.

Rachel began her career as an opera singer and continues to perform roles at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Vancouver Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria and Ensemble Nylandia. In concert, Rachel has performed with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Victoria Symphony, Sophienkirche Berlin and Ensemble Nylandia Finland.

In addition to her work as a performer, Rachel writes poetry and will release her debut collection in the coming year.

Rachel Fenlon's long-awaited debut album [Winterreise](#) is out October 11, 2024 on [Orchid Classics Label](#). Rachel sings and accompanies herself in Schubert's masterpiece, the first ever to interpret the work as both singer and pianist on recording.



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# The program

## FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born in Vienna, January 31, 1797; died in Vienna, November 19, 1828

### WINTERREISE

1. Gute Nacht
2. Die Wetterfahne
3. Gefrorne Tränen
4. Erstarrung
5. Der Lindenbaum
6. Wasserflut
7. Auf dem Flusse
8. Rückblick
9. Irrlicht
10. Rast
11. Frühlingstraum
12. Einsamkeit
13. Die Post
14. Der greise Kopf
15. Die Krähe
16. Letzte Hoffnung
17. Im Dorfe
18. Der stürmische Morgen
19. Täuschung
20. Der Wegweiser
21. Das Wirtshaus
22. Mut
23. Die Nebensonnen
24. Der Leiermann

Franz Schubert devoted his creative efforts to the art song (Lied) more than any other composer before him. In over six hundred songs, you'll hear his extraordinarily sensitive response to the poetic import of texts, often through the exploitation of a musical metaphor such as burbling brooks, spinning wheels, plodding feet, etc.

In 1827, four years after composing *Die schöne Müllerin*, Schubert embarked on another cycle using texts by Wilhelm Müller. Müller (1794-1827), a poet from Dessau, was one of the leaders of the Romantic movement in German literature and counted among his friends the composers Mendelssohn and Weber and the poets

Goethe, Tieck and Rückert. In 1823 and 1824 Müller published twenty-four poems under the title *Die Winterreise*. (Müller used the article "Die"; Schubert did not.) Schubert came across Müller's first installment of twelve poems early in 1827 and immediately set them to music. When Schubert found the remaining twelve poems later in the year, he set them as well. Although composed in two groups, the songs are seamlessly connected. The first twelve songs were published in January, 1828. Schubert's final endeavor, as he lay on his deathbed ten months later, was to correct the printer's proofs of the second part of *Winterreise*. Müller never met Schubert and probably never even knew of Schubert's setting, but he surely had someone of Schubert's achievement in mind when he wondered if "there may be found a sympathetically tuned soul who will discover the melodies in my words and give them back to me."

*Winterreise* is not a mere collection of songs; it is a true cycle, one of the first of its kind, and—in the opinion of many—the greatest ever written. Although not a chronological narrative like *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise* is nevertheless a series of interrelated songs, "episodes in a psychological soliloquy," as biographer Brian Newbould calls them. Few of the twenty-four numbers are sung on their own and none makes nearly as strong an impact when divorced from the cycle.

*Winterreise* relates the travels of a poet as he wanders through the bleak countryside in winter, musing on his past happiness, sick with despair over his lost love, resigned to a hopeless future. He is the quintessential Romantic anti-hero, filled with a sense of *Weltschmerz*, beset with unrequited love, alienated from society, filled with self-doubt, remorse and melancholia. Peace in the grave would constitute a welcome release, but even this is denied him. By the end of the cycle, he is resigned to accepting the perpetual lot of the outcast.

Two aspects in particular command attention in *Winterreise*: the sheer emotional intensity of expression and the pervasive, nearly unrelieved atmosphere of gloom and misery. "*Winterreise* symbolizes the intensity, empathy and maturity of technique of all Schubert's later works," writes baritone Fischer-Dieskau. "His descriptions of spiritual and natural landscapes are more intense and more demonic than those of any of his contemporaries."

Most of the songs are in minor keys and those in major nevertheless tend to convey sadness, disappointment or a sense of "smiling through the tears."

*Winterreise* was recognized almost immediately for the masterpiece that it is. When the first half of Schubert's cycle appeared in print, a review in the *Theaterzeitung* stated: "Schubert has displayed his genius in his interpretation of the poet. He has truly appreciated the emotions expressed in these poems and reproduced them in music which none can sing or hear without being deeply moved."

# The program

Schubert's spirit soars so boldly that he carries along all who approach him and we are borne through the immeasurable depths of the human heart into worlds beyond."

The winter journey begins with "Gute Nacht" (Good Night), our poet's parting words to the lover who has jilted him. The weary but resolute tread of the wanderer (every bar of the piano part, without exception, is set to four even eighth notes) is the first of many varieties of *gehende Bewegung* (as Schubert himself called it—literally, "going motion") that you'll find throughout the score. It recurs in various speeds and moods, its cumulative force generating a unifying motif of the cycle. The lament takes on a bittersweet quality in the final stanza when the minor mode turns to major—one of almost countless expressive touches found throughout the cycle.

One hour later, we come to "Der Leiermann" (The Hurdy-gurdy Man), "the emotional nadir of the cycle ... the last station on the

journey of sorrow," (Fischer-Dieskau), a song austere in the extreme, yet graphically pictorial and utterly devastating. The wanderer meets a fellow creature as wretched as himself—a hurdy-gurdy (barrel organ) man numb with cold, pitifully ignored and rejected by society. No one listens to him, no one drops a coin in his box, no one cares. This, then, not death, is to be the eternal fate of our winter traveler as well, as he and his new companion shuffle off into the cold, grey mists.

**NOTE:** Professional-level classical singers who accompany themselves are a rarity today, but in earlier times this was common practice. Readers interested in pursuing this field are referred to Robin Terrill Bier's 400-page historical overview of the subject, published in 2023 as *The Ideal Orpheus* (available online).

Program notes: Robert Markow

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