

Cleveland Chamber Music Society to present Baritone Holger Falk and pianist Julius Drake

by Mike Telin



If you don't know the artistry of [Holger Falk](#), you need to. On Tuesday, October 23 at 7:30 pm at Forest Hills Presbyterian Church, the Cleveland Chamber Music Society will present the German baritone and pianist [Julius Drake](#). Their program will include songs by Schubert, Eisler, Poulenc and Satie. A pre-concert lecture by Eric Charnofsky will begin at 6:30 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

Equally at home with repertoire of the Baroque masters as with the music of the 21st century, Holger Falk has been described by *Opernwelt* magazine as “one of the most intellectually and vocally flexible singers on German stages.” He

was honored with the German Record Critics Award in 2017 for his recording *Hanns Eisler Lieder Vol. 1*, the first of a four-album collection of songs by Eisler. In 2016 he received the *ECHO Klassik* Award for his recording of Erik Satie: *Intégrale des Mélodies et Chansons*.

Highlights of Falk's 2018-19 season will include his debut as Jean-Charles in Hans Werner Henze's *Das Floß der Medusa* at the Ruhr Triennale, and the world premiere of Michael Wertmüller's *Diodati. Unendlich* at Theater Basel. In addition to the recital in Cleveland, Falk will bring his program to The Frick Collection and The Phillips Collection as well as to Heidelberger Frühling, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, Rathauskonzerte Regensburg and Megaron Athens.

At the beginning of our scheduled telephone conversation with Falk in Germany and me in Ohio, we experienced the perfect storm of technical problems. Luckily we were able to instant message on Skype and exchange email addresses. The following are his responses to my questions.

Mike Telin: You have a wonderful program. Please say a few words about each of the works.

Holger Falk: The four parts of the concert with four composers and their poets are connected through one guiding line, which is longing for coming home.

Franz Schubert (*Der Wanderer an den Mond*): The Seidl texts are typical, so-called Biedermeiertexts. After the Napoleonic wars political liberalism was heavily suppressed and the people tried to find fulfillment in their private lives. Seidl's texts express that you can find your home through the love you feel towards your beloved partner. And as we know, Schubert's longing for a partner stayed unfulfilled and was a big driving force for his music.

Hanns Eisler (*Fünf Hollywood-Elegien* and *Hollywooder Liederbuch*): the Hollywood Songbook was composed during the loneliest period of Eisler's life, in the first years of his exile in Hollywood. Brecht and Eisler were very successful and important socialist artists in Germany during the Weimar Republic and being in exile meant losing not only their homeland, but also losing their culture and audience.

These songs express a deep loneliness, a longing for their culture, and a frustration with the superficial Hollywood film industry, where they felt like prostitutes.

Poulenc (*Caligrammes* and *Banalitiés*): Poulenc lived at the same time as Eisler — he was born three months later and died six months later than Eisler. But both of the men could not have been more different.

Poulenc was a rich heir and never had to earn money. He lived in a liberal society being openly gay and surrounded by the most illustrious group of artists you can imagine. So his life circumstances were extremely fulfilling.

The longing you hear in Poulenc's music is of a spiritual nature. The two Apollinaire cycles in this program deal with letting go, enjoying the present moment, and death in the face of a rich life. The death that Apollinaire and Poulenc met through the war was through the early passing away of friends.

In Poulenc's music we can experience the immense beauty of letting go of a life that you love.

Satie (*Ludions*): The small cycle represents a kind of longing for the simplicity and innocent beauty of childhood. Satie experienced a very poor and lonely existence, almost

without recognition. Being single all his life, and an alcoholic, he found release in creating all kinds of humorous pieces. He loved playing with expectations and destroying romantic illusions. We love him for the inner child that is revealed in his pieces.

MT: How did you first discover the music of Hanns Eisler?

HF: At conservatory. I found a score with his complete works and thought, this is really interesting. His choice of texts is very powerful when connected to the simplicity and clarity of Eisler's musical ideas. He simply has something important to say. Then I encountered them again later through my collaboration with the pianist Steffen Schleiermacher, who is an expert on Eisler. We recorded a four-CD collection of Eisler's songs.

MT: Have you worked with Julius Drake before?

HF: Yes. We did a full program of Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook* in Ireland and we performed this Cleveland program in Frankfurt, Germany. We will also be professor colleagues starting in March at the University for the Arts in Graz, where we will be teaching Lied Interpretation.

MT: How is preparing for an art song recital different from preparing for an opera role? For example the role of Jean-Charles in Hans Werner Henze's Das Floß der Medusa?

HF: The preparation is not so different. First you need to learn the role or the program and you do that for a longer time, because you need to know it by heart. Also *Lieder* repertoire is theatrical, just in a more subtle way than on the opera stage.

In both cases you try to get to the bottom of the emotional character of the figure that sings.

In the case of the opera, especially in contemporary *Musiktheater*, you deal with the role like an actor: you prepare very carefully the figure you are embodying through emotional rolework. And then you have three to six weeks of rehearsals with the scene director and the other singers.

At a recital, everything about the person you are representing on stage is inside the music. You need to be able to read and express that character through very personal colors.

MT: You have a beautiful voice — I have enjoyed listening to the recordings that you have on your website very much. What led you to become a singer?

HF: I was always singing. Already as a five-year-old I sang for the family, and I saw them being moved and crying. So singing was a natural way to touch people and to express myself. When I was ten, I became a member of a famous boychoir and I knew very early, already at fifteen, that it was my dream to become a singer for the rest of my life. Of course, in an artist's life there are a lot of steps to take/ and difficulties to face, to make that dream come true, and I worked a lot on myself to be able to communicate on stage as a singer the way I do today.

MT: Have you performed in the States before?

HF: Yes, the first time with the Regensburg boys choir as a twelve-year-old boy. Then I sang Ottone in Monteverdi's *Poppea* at the Boston Early Music Festival in 2009. But this will be my first recital tour.

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Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 19, 2018.

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