

## Mark Padmore to join Uchida for Lieder recital in Reinberger

by Daniel Hathaway



British tenor Mark Padmore was getting ready for a Cleveland concert in 2020 — his first visit since 1985 — when the novel coronavirus showed up with other plans. His recital of works by Beethoven and Schubert with pianist Mitsuko Uchida, part of a North American tour, got put on ice and will finally take place in Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Music Center on Sunday, March 6 at 3:00 pm.

Born in London and educated at King's College, Cambridge, Padmore has developed an international career in opera, concert, and recital repertoire. Among the highlights are his performances as Evangelist in J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew* and *St. John Passions* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and Simon Rattle, staged by Peter Sellars.

I spoke to Padmore by telephone last week in New York soon after he arrived from London.

*Daniel Hathaway: How does it feel to be traveling again after a two-year hiatus?*

Mark Padmore: It's been a long time getting the tour rescheduled. But it's lovely. I've got some great friends in the U.S. so to see them again has been very special.

*DH: What were you able to do professionally during the pandemic?*

MP: I've done bits and pieces online. I think in the last two years most musicians' work has been reduced to about 10% of what they normally would have done. It's been pretty tough, and I think most musicians have had to look elsewhere to get

income. I've been reasonably fortunate that there was some demand for online performances that paid something, but it's been a tough time.

*DH: I ask everybody this: how did you keep your sanity during that period — assuming that you did?*

MP: I was fortunate in that we have a little cottage that we go to in the countryside outside of London, down towards Glyndebourne in Sussex. We were there with our daughters, who were 19 when the pandemic kicked in and had just left home. Rather than go to university, they came home and we had another six months of being parents, which was lovely. And it was spring and we were able to get out and walk in the woods and observe nature taking its time over the change. And we cook at home always, anyway. Sanity was maintained for the most part. It's the world that went a bit mad.

My wife is a theater designer, so she was doing a lot of campaigning for freelancers, particularly in the making part of the business — set builders, costume and wig makers, who were really hit terribly. They had no work from one day to the next. I was just able to take a back seat. I sort of enjoyed being the cook and bottle washer.

*DH: Talk a bit about your role as a British tenor in a post-Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears era.*

MP: There's actually a generation in between Peter Pears and myself, which saw some very great tenors, Philip Langridge and Anthony Rolf Johnson being foremost among them. They were my direct influences. I really loved listening to both of them. I'm quite fortunate in not having just a single source of understanding of Britten's music. I'm an English tenor, and various things go with that. For some people who prefer an operatic style, it's just not their cup of tea.

I've done a lot of Baroque music, particularly Bach and Handel, and a lot of Lieder, and then there's the great heritage of Benjamin Britten's music. But I also do a lot of contemporary stuff — Harrison Birtwistle and Thomas Larcher — and I'm very grateful for a career that is diverse and not concentrated in one particular area. I think if I were singing Don Ottavio for the rest of my life, I would probably go a little bit mad. Variety has been a great pleasure for me.

*DH: Which Britten opera roles have you sung? I know you played Aschenbach in Death in Venice.*

MP: One that I love doing is Captain Vere in *Billy Budd*, which we brought to BAM in Brooklyn — in I think 2014. That was a really great experience. I've done *Peter Grimes* in semi-staged concert performances, and I've done *Turn of the Screw* in a Katie Mitchell filmed version for the BBC. And I sang *Paul Bunyan*, his early Broadway piece, for Covent Garden a long time ago. I keep touching on Britten in various ways, but I love being on stage, and in the Bach Passions we've staged with Peter Sellars and Simon Rattle. Acting has always been a big part of it for me.



*Padmore in Bach's St. John Passion, 2000. Photo: Tristram Kenton for The Guardian*

*DH: You're conducting Bach's St. John soon.*

MP: Well, conducting is kind of a strange term. I think it's an anachronism in Bach. I don't think Bach conducted his music, I think he would have directed it. He would have given some instructions, and I try to do that in my work with the Orchestra of the Enlightenment. It's all done through rehearsal and understanding it as chamber music, with us listening to one another and putting together a performance that coheres and has real proper drama, but doesn't require a guy — and it's usually a guy — standing in front waving his arms.

I do think that the maestro approach to Bach has probably had its day. I will be singing Evangelist in those performances, and singing in the chorus as well. Bach's original forces were pretty small and there wasn't this idea of an international soloist coming in to sing a couple of arias. It's a democratic, inclusive sort of thing.

*DH: Which version of the St. John will you be performing?*

MP: Bach performed it on four occasions, each time doing a different version, so there are various choices to be made. The Bärenreiter score is actually a mishmash of various versions, including the fair copy he started to write out, but stopped because the authorities said he couldn't perform it that year. That fair copy does have some fantastic changes in the first ten numbers. Whenever he wrote his music out, he was really composing it as he went along. The version we do now is not one that Bach ever heard performed. So there isn't one version of the St. John that's right for all time. I think it's really a contemporary piece to us now, and the story it tells is as relevant as ever.

*DH: Let's talk about your Cleveland recital program.*

MP: The program features two quite different song cycles. Different, but at least related in theme. I think the word that connects *An die ferne Geliebte* and *Schwanengesang* is "*Sehnsucht*" — longing — and it features wonderfully in both pieces. It obsessed the poets and musicians of that particular period in the 19th century. I'll quote a marvelous passage:

*Und du singst, was ich gesungen,  
Was mir aus der vollen Brust  
Ohne Kunstgepräg erklingen,  
Nur der Sehnsucht sich bewußt*

"And you will sing what I sang and what has come out of my heart without any sort of artifice, it's only *Sehnsucht* that has motivated it." So we get the explanation, in a way, of what longing can do.

We get a very similar thing in "Die Taubenpost," the final song of *Schwanengesang*. "What is it called, this pigeon that you're sending?" And the answer is "longing." I like that very much, and it also justifies why "Die Taubenpost" is very much part of the cycle, which is sometimes debated. It's in G Major, which is exactly the same key that starts off the cycle, and you have a sense of completion.

Also, I think that to send the audience away after "Die Doppelgänger" is really not a kind thing to do. And somehow I always think that in "Die Taubenpost," Schubert almost reaches us from beyond the grave. We know it was his last song, and it speaks to us very, very personally.

*DH: How long have you been performing with Mitsuko Uchida?*

We've known each other for a number of years. We started out really just making music for the pleasure of it. We didn't have particular plans to perform together, but we decided it would be lovely just to meet up and go through some of the repertoire, which we did. She's got a studio in London, and I would go and we would sing through *Winterreise*, or some Schumann or Beethoven really for our own pleasure and to continue a conversation that we'd had. Then bit by bit, we decided we'd do some performances.

The nice thing about working with someone like Mitsuko is that her agenda is very, very full, and she does the jobs she wants to do. The nice thing about this particular project is that we're doing quite a number of performances, including at the Vienna Musikverein and the Wigmore Hall, and we'll record the program as well. We've thought about it and rehearsed quite a lot, and it just feels like a project that's got its own particular place and reason — it's not just a run-of-the-mill thing that I might perhaps experience elsewhere.

Uchida is a wonderful Lieder pianist. Of course, she is German-speaking, which makes a great difference. She studied and lived a long time in Vienna. She knows the poetry and the repertoire very well, and that makes her a great collaborator. And I do believe that good Lieder is a collaborative genre of equal partners. The days when it was a vehicle for showing off the vocal qualities of the protagonist are gone.

*DH: What are the other stops on this tour?*

MP: We're performing in Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall on Sunday the 13th. Before that, we do the Cleveland concert, then we go to Philadelphia and Princeton. I'll be in New York to sing a *Winterreise* at the People's Symphony Series at Town Hall for Frank Sullivan — that's with Ethan Iverson, a jazz pianist and friend of mine. He's a wonderful all-around musician.

Then we're doing a program with an ecological engagement that we're taking to San Francisco called "Songs of the Earth," using song and poetry to get people to think about what we're doing to our world and our environment. This season, I'm one of the artists in residence at the Wigmore Hall, which is always lovely. It's a great hall to sing in and it's been a big part of my life for the last 20 years.

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