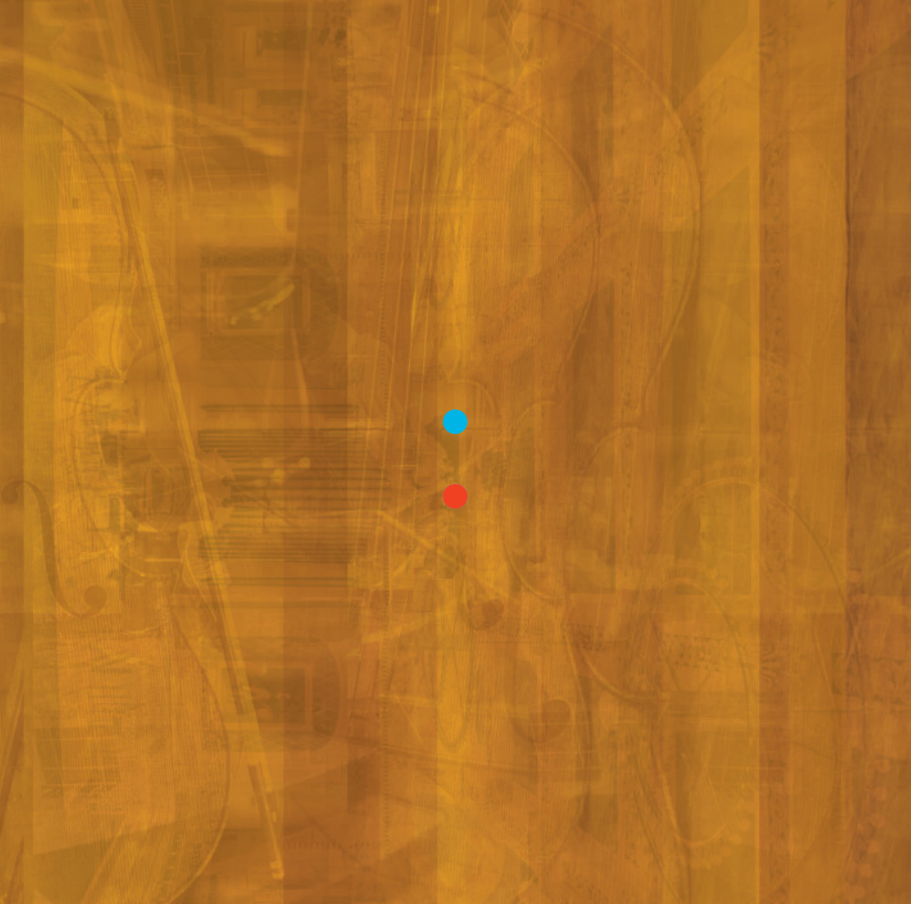




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YO-YO MA
SONGS FROM THE ARC OF LIFE
KATHRYN STOTT



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) /

Charles Gounod (1818–1893)

1. **Ave Maria** 2:43

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

2. **Lullaby, Op. 49, No. 4** 1:50

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

3. **Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op. 55, No. 4**
(from *Gypsy Songs*) 1:57

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

4. **Papillon** (Butterfly), **Op. 77** 2:49

Jacob Gade (1879–1963)

5. **Tango Jalousie** 3:42

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

6. **I. Vanitas vanitatum** (from *Five Pieces in the Popular Style*, Op. 102) 3:03

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

7. **Was It a Dream? Op. 37, No. 4** 2:17

Gabriel Fauré

8. **Après un rêve** (After a Dream), **Op. 7, No. 1** 2:40

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

9. **Salut d'amour** (Love's Greetings), **Op. 12** 2:45

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

10. **Prelude No. 1** (from *Three Preludes*) 1:51

- Frederick Delius (1862–1934)
11. **Romance for Cello and Piano** 6:25
- Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962)
12. **La Gitana** (The Gypsy) 3:33
- Giovanni Sollima (b. 1962)
13. **Il bell'Antonio, Tema III** 7:35
- Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)
14. **The Swan** (from *Carnival of the Animals*) 2:54
- Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)
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(from *Elegiac Melodies*) 2:30
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16. **Valse sentimentale, Op. 51, No. 6** 2:17
- Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)
17. **Louange à l'éternité de Jésus**
(Praise to the Eternity of Jesus)
(from *Quartet for the End of Time*) 10:18
- Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
18. **Beau Soir** (Beautiful Evening) 2:31
- Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
19. **Ave Maria, Op. 52, No. 6** 4:15

Yo-Yo Ma, cello
Kathryn Stott, piano



Songs from the Arc of Life

Remarkably, Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott's first meeting occurred completely by chance. In the summer of 1978, Yo-Yo and his wife Jill thought they were subletting a London flat – but they soon discovered that no one had informed flatmate Kathryn Stott, who came home one day and found Yo-Yo practicing! Thankfully, everything worked out and what could have been a complete disaster turned into a lasting friendship. Six years later, they began to collaborate as recital partners and have been playing together ever since.

Over decades of conversation and collaboration, they have often quizzed each other about favorite pieces. “For years, Kathy and I have talked about making an album of pieces that we absolutely love, pieces that express the context of a life, of our lives. Childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle

age and old age – What do they sound like? *Songs from the Arc of Life* is our invitation to our audience to join us as we imagine the soundtrack of life.”

“I love this title,” Stott adds, “the *Arc of Life*, because it is one big arc. Once we arrived at the idea, we began to see a beautiful story – a journey through life's experiences. It has taken us a long time and much discussion, back and forth, to discover what that journey might be, because everyone's journey is slightly different.”

“What do we experience in life?” Ma asks. “What do we cherish? What do we want to remember? What do we want to forget? How do we express longing? Regret? Young love? Mature love? How do we express the effort of trying to recall something that is just beyond our memory ... and then it comes back to us, as though it was just yesterday?”

“Nothing evokes memory quite like music,” Stott adds. “For myself, I know that I can hear certain chords, or even a voice, and I'm immediately transported. We can all hear a piece of music and remember where we were, when that was, who we were with.”

Ma adds, “This year has been especially important to me, because Kathy and I recently celebrated 30 years of playing together – a history of performing, conversation and experiences that we want to share. It is also important because I am fast approaching one of those milestone birthdays. Turning 60 has me wondering what my future may hold and reflecting on what has passed.”

For Ma, the idea of music expressing the arc of life has long been in his thoughts. “I have played Bach at weddings and at memorial services, and I’ve often wondered how it could be appropriate at both. How could joy and sorrow fit so well together? It’s because music has the capacity to be infinitely empathetic to the human condition. What Kathy and I have put together here may not exactly reflect your life or mine, but describes the kind of arc that all of our lives follow. That’s why we made this album.”



Bach / Gounod: Ave Maria

Kathryn Stott: We chose the Bach “Ave Maria,” arranged by Gounod, because we were looking for a very special piece to begin *Songs from the Arc of Life*. Bach’s music seems so pure. To me, he is kind of the “Holy Father” of music. This piece is the first of his fantastic cycle of the 48 preludes and fugues, and Gounod’s arrangement takes nothing away. It’s a perfect beginning.

Yo-Yo Ma: This is one of the first pieces of music I ever played, almost fifty-four years ago. It is a wonderfully layered collaboration, with Bach’s original composition inspiring Gounod’s creativity. The result is a piece that suggests purity, devotion and love: a good beginning for life.

Brahms: Lullaby

KS: The other day, you asked, “When did you first hear the Brahms ‘Lullaby?’” I almost can’t remember, because it’s a piece I’ve heard all my life. It evokes memories of infants and cradles, mothers rocking their children to sleep, the peaceful quiet of evening. And just being very gentle – the beginning of life.

YYM: Yes. The melody is especially familiar to young parents, whose children fix their gazes on a mobile gently floating above the crib. There’s that oh-so-familiar song playing – and here it is.

Dvořák: Songs My Mother Taught Me

KS: This is quite a short song, but it conveys such a deep sentiment. In the first part, a daughter recalls the songs she learned from her mother, melodies that her mother learned when she was just a child. As she sings, the mother tries to hold back tears of memory. In the second half of the song, the daughter, now grown and a mother herself, is passing those same songs on to her own children, again, with tears in her eyes.

YYM: That emotion is so characteristic of Gypsy song, Roma song. Everything is coded into their music. It’s the way they transfer the family’s history, and the history of their culture.

KS: Yes. It’s knowledge and experience and nurturing, all at the same time.

Songs My Mother Taught Me

Songs my mother taught me, in the days long vanished;

Seldom from her eyelids were the teardrops banished.

Now I teach my children, each melodious measure.

Oft the tears are flowing, oft they flow from my memory’s treasure.

Translation of the original poem by Adolf Heyduk

Fauré: Papillon

KS: *Papillon* (Butterfly). We have each known this piece for a very long time, but we’ve never played it together. It’s joyful and exuberant, and captures the perpetual motion of youth. When you’re a child, you’re never in the same place for two seconds.

YYM: The piece seems to flash by nearly as quickly as childhood itself. It also reflects a time when you had time to chase butterflies, and when there were butterflies to be chased!

Gade: Tango Jalousie

KS: Jealousy is a very strong and passionate emotion, one that most of us have experienced at some point in our lives. We felt this song represented that emotion very, very strongly.

YYM: And we have chosen here to play with the different voices. Instead of having it all as one voice, we are pretending, or literally acting out, different vocal ranges. You can imagine a scene from a Shakespearean stage, where overlapping voices flirt, competing for attention, negotiating their way through relationships – and perhaps even changing their ideas and feelings about each other.

KS: It’s very powerful, but it’s a very beautiful piece. And it’s very seductive at the end, so there’s a complex, intertwined double emotion of seduction and jealousy.

YYM: And, at the end, we just go – “It’s over!”

Schumann: I. Vanitas vanitatum

KS: We wanted to include this piece because it is the first in a set of folk songs Schumann wrote. We’ve actually performed it a lot, and we wanted to include it here because it’s all about vanity.

YYM: The two words in Latin, “Vanitas vanitatum,” are actually written on the music. We both love that. Sometimes it’s all about the ego, and about how you envision yourself. Should you be at the front and center? Are you a priority? Part of navigating the arc of life is becoming aware of a broader perspective in a situation, or in a phase of your life.

Sibelius: Was It a Dream?

KS: We have fallen in love with this piece. It was originally written for voice, but it works so well with the cello and the piano, we couldn’t resist playing it. The story it tells is the memory of a lost love, and of not knowing, “Were we really in love, or did I imagine it?” The first part concludes with the question: “Was it a dream?” The answer, discovered within the song, is

finally revealed: “Hide this memory in your heart. It was your best dream!” It’s the most passionate, beautiful song – I love it!

YYM: The song begins in a very Nordic manner – passion withheld – but then the emotion comes in full force. Kathy introduced me to this song. It’s so incredibly passionate, and you feel that incredible tug of emotion, with that affirmation at the end – “It was a dream.”

Was It a Dream?

Was it a dream that once I was thy heart’s most welcome guest?
‘Tis like a silenc’d melody, that in the mind doth rest.
There was a thorn rose pluck’d by thee, thine eye with love did gleam;
A tear at parting glisten’d bright, was all, was all a dream?
The lily lives its little hour, in meadows green and gay,
Its snow white fairness soon is spent, the dream, too, fades away,
The livelong night I hear a voice, while salt tears bitter stream,
Hide deep its mem’ry in thy heart, it was thy sweetest dream!

Translation: William Wallace

Fauré: *Après un rêve*

KS: “Après un rêve” (After a Dream) is one of Fauré’s best-known songs. It’s about a dreamer’s romantic flight into the night, into the dream of a perfect love. But the dreamer awakens and realizes that it was only a dream. It’s quite touching and sad.

YYM: And toward the end, you have those words – “Reviens, Reviens” (Return, Return) – repeated three times. Kathy, you have always loved Fauré. Why was a young northern British lady so enamored of Fauré?

KS: I had teachers who knew him. Nadia Boulanger for instance – she was even his assistant for a while. I played, I think, a Fauré barcarolle for her when I was ten. And all my teachers in the early part of my life focused on Fauré, so his music has been an important part of my life for a very long time. I just think it’s very beautiful, very precious music. Everyone knows the Fauré “Requiem,” but there are also these wonderful gems. The songs are absolutely gorgeous.

YYM: My mother was a mezzo-soprano, and she used to sing this song. She was the one who first told me about those words: “Reviens, Reviens.” So you and I both have long personal associations with Fauré’s music.

After a Dream

In a slumber enchanted by your image
I dreamt of happiness, passionate mirage,
Your eyes were softer, your voice pure and resonant,
You shone like a sky lit up by the dawn;
You called me and I left the earth
To run away with you towards the light,
The skies opened their clouds for us,
Unknown splendors, divine flashes glimpsed,
Alas! Alas! Sad awakening from dreams
I call you, O night, give me back your lies,
Return, return radiant,
Return, O mysterious night!
French poem by Romain Bussine,
Translation: © David K. Smythe

Elgar: *Salut d’amour*

YYM: We have played *Salut d’amour* forever.

KS: It’s lovely to do an English piece here, and such an unbelievably beautiful one. It was Elgar’s wedding gift to his wife. I’ve always felt it was about fresh, beautiful, innocent love. It’s filled with possibility, energy and hope. This is one of the pieces that we knew we wanted to include – not simply because it is beautiful, but because it’s such a lovely expression of the beginning of life’s journey together.

Gershwin: *Prelude No. 1*

KS: Gershwin is so young and vibrant. This Prelude reminds us of travel, adventure, experiencing different cultures. At the time Gershwin wrote it, in the 1920s, it was quite revolutionary, really fresh and really new. To me, it’s about striding out in life, but with a happy, confident, youthful energy.

YYM: I love to tease Kathy about this piece, because its flashy syncopated rhythms and virtuoso techniques are all about American brashness. We often will play it as an encore, an American response to the English *Salut d’amour*.

Delius: Romance for Cello and Piano

KS: The Delius Romance is a new discovery, suggested by the Executive Producer of this album, Ruth DeSarno. I'd just never heard it before, and I don't think Yo-Yo had either.

YYM: In contrast with *Salut d'amour*, which is young love, this is a more mature love, adult love. There's a lot of remembering, a lot of reflection in it – longing, reaching out. The harmonies are so beautiful.

KS: It's quite intense and even complicated. We've tried to think of the whole piece as one big expression.

YYM: Yes. The harmonies are so ... we were thinking Wagner, Strauss. Here's this British composer who was very much influenced by the currents in continental Europe. He was raised in Yorkshire, the son of a prosperous businessman, but was far more interested in music than in the wool business. Every time his father sent him someplace, he would leave and go hear music.

KS: He was a strong character. People who love Delius' music are passionate about it. It is the sort of music that often divides listeners. This Romance is not played as often as it should be, and I'm really happy we included it.

Kreisler: La Gitana

YYM: Gitanes, when I was young, were French cigarettes. A blue carton, with the image of a Roma woman, a Gypsy woman.

KS: It's a Gypsy piece, and at the same time has the flavor of a tango. Kreisler was not only a composer, but also an amazing violinist and really important musician. And he played with this unbelievably expressive sound. You can find recordings of him playing this piece, one with orchestra. We liked the version with piano. It's really tight.

YYM: *La Gitana* (The Gypsy) is all about pride – the Spanish pride – flirtation, desire and the eroticism of the tango. It's so interesting that the roots of the flamenco, an entirely unique musical tradition, arose centuries ago in Andalucia. It was shortly after the gypsies arrived in that Arab-ruled region, that Christian monarchs began to take power and, with the Inquisition, persecute minority cultures. Bands of gypsies, Moors and Jews took refuge in the secluded mountainous areas, where they lived together in harmony for years. The unique intercultural mix heard in this piece is rooted in Roma and Arab traditions.

Sollima: Il bell'Antonio

YYM: You introduced me to Sollima.

KS: Yes, I remember it distinctly. We were stuck in an airport in a snowdrift, not able to go anywhere, and I thought, "Okay, I have a recording of a wonderful cellist called Giovanni Sollima that I think Yo-Yo might be interested to hear." But it wasn't so much about his playing, which is absolutely fabulous, but that he is an astonishing composer. Since then we have both performed with him. Sollima wrote this piece, which is called *Il bell'Antonio*, for a remake of the 1960 film of the same title.

YYM: Giovanni is a great, great person. He is so proud of his Sicilian heritage, because Sicily has so many layers of history and culture – you see it in the architecture, you hear it in the music, you taste it in the food. When you hear the name Sollima, what does it sound like? It sounds like Solomon. And it sounds like Suleiman. Then you look at him: *he* could be all those cultures blended into one person.

KS: The story of *Il bell'Antonio* is really about unfulfilled love. It tells of a man who was a famous lover but, actually, the reality about him was quite different. I think Sollima has captured that – there's a lot of hidden tension in this music. It's a completely different flavor in the arc, in the whole story, than what we've had before.

Saint-Saëns: The Swan

KS: I think this is the piece we've played most frequently. For me, a concert is almost not complete if we don't. I just love it. When we were young, we always wanted to end a concert on a really high-energy piece. Then one day we programmed "The Swan" right at the end, just as an encore.

YYM: It was good.

KS: And it felt so wonderful. Drawing everyone in, into a space of calm, serenity. I never tire of it. I always say we have to play "The Swan." It's just really beautiful.

YYM: Yes. It's incredibly touching. If there's something that can be so beautiful it can make you tear up, which sometimes you do.

KS: It's true, I do, because it's so peaceful. And, in the life story, that's what we're looking for, that moment of tranquility.

YYM: You envision this magnificent creature, gliding across the water, and you're just smitten by its beauty and its form. It is simple elegance.

Grieg: The Wounded Heart

KS: “Wounded Heart.” That’s quite a powerful title, isn’t it?

YYM: There’s something folksy, in the rhythmic quality of “Wounded Heart.”

KS: That little cadence, that little ending to something ... but it’s slightly off. It’s just not what you might expect in a piece where everything seems perhaps a bit regular. But it’s very dark.

YYM: It *is* dark. And it gets darker. And stronger.

KS: And so the title is very much present. It is about being wounded – and perhaps not necessarily by love, but by loss. That’s how I read it. The word elegy is in the original title.

YYM: It’s not “wounded” by an event. It’s a wound that goes through time. You know, we play that theme three times, and each time the notes get a little longer. There’s a progression, as though rather than healing, the wound gets a little deeper each time. We’ve probably all experienced this kind of yearning, where feelings of loss grow more intense as you think about it more.

Tchaikovsky: Valse sentimentale

YYM: Ahhh!

KS: The other day, when we were playing this piece, you actually couldn’t stop. You just love this melody so much, don’t you? It takes you somewhere and you almost don’t want to return.

YYM: It’s like those films, like Fassbinder. A cabaret in the 1920s, a kind of smoky room.

KS: Kind of morose.

YYM: Morose, degenerate, everything’s sort of downtrodden. It’s like one of those voices with seventeen layers of experience to it.

KS: There’s a moment in the middle of the piece where we hear a little ray of hope. Maybe. But you always come back to this sentimental feeling. Tchaikovsky wasn’t particularly happy, I think, when he wrote it. Someone was in love with him, but he didn’t share that same feeling. Still, he wrote a kind of sentimental piece, dedicated to her, that conveys the sad story.

Messiaen: Louange à l’éternité de Jésus

YYM: The *Quartet for the End of Time* was written when Messiaen was interned at a prison camp during World War II, in Silesia. The prisoners also included a violinist, a clarinetist, a cellist – and didn’t Messiaen play the piano?

KS: It was written in the most extraordinary circumstances, simply unimaginable. You mentioned the word “transcendent” to describe how Messiaen was able to see beyond those most unbelievably traumatic circumstances, to be creative within that space. To see that there is something eternal, something that cannot be stopped. You hear that in the music. The relentlessness in this piano part: it just cannot be stopped. And the striving, there’s always this falling in the cello part, but at the same time –

YYM: – rising at the same time –

KS: – rising and striving. To me, this is about the power of human nature. This one movement sums it up unbelievably.

YYM: That somehow the human spirit can transcend every kind of reality. Each of your chords –

KS: There’s a whole life in them.

YYM: It’s written to be just so incredibly, inexorably slow. There could be a thousand years between each chord – and then you have this melody that is ...

KS: Like the force of nature.

YYM: Within the human realm, it takes you to the farthest reaches of time, actually to a cosmic time, but then, from there, he starts to code divine love, to describe divine love in sound. Messiaen was a devout Catholic. He was fascinated with the transcendent love of God. He had his methodology, and his methodology was somehow in those chords.

KS: In the falling thirds.

YYM: Yes, the falling thirds, which could be ... could be the Trinity. But he, miraculously, is able to code those sentiments in sound.

Debussy: Beau Soir

KS: In the making of this album, we considered all kinds of pieces, and this one kind of crept in. It has its own unique space. I don’t think you were familiar with it.

YYM: I’d never heard it before.

KS: It’s a song about staying in the moment. The words describe the warm glow of the evening, the beautiful river, rosy in the setting sun. But like the river, we are all flowing on toward journey’s end, we will all eventually go to our graves. The song calls us to think again – what about the beauty of the moment, what about the joy of being alive?

YYM: You pointed out something really wonderful, when we were looking at the words. So the river will get to the ocean, and actually there's quite a long moment before he says, "...and we to the grave." It's not a pause, but an elegant, extended phrase that traverses the distance between those words. I just think it's an incredible moment.

KS: In life, we're always hurrying along, and there are so many things going on. There's always something to do, somewhere to go. The idea of being in the moment, which I think is captured beautifully in this piece, is so essential. Make the most of today, enjoy what is around you. For me, that is such an important part of the story of life.

Beautiful Evening

When streams turn pink in the setting sun,
And a slight shudder rushes through the wheat fields,
A plea for happiness seems to rise out of all things
And it climbs up towards the troubled heart.
A plea to relish the charm of life
While there is youth and the evening is fair,
For we pass away, as the wave passes:
The wave to the sea, we to the grave.

Translation: Bernac, Pierre (1970). *The Interpretation of French Song*
New York: W. W. Norton & Company. p. 156. ISBN 0393008789

Schubert: Ave Maria

KS: To conclude *Songs from the Arc of Life*, we thought again about how this whole journey started. It seemed a lovely idea to come back to "Ave Maria," but in a slightly different form, in this wonderful song by Schubert. In a way, it has the same purity I feel the Bach has at the beginning. But here, at the end of life – a life that has been filled with adventure, with family, with jealousy, loss and love – there is this beautiful, ethereal release.

YYM: Yes. It is life, come full circle.

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Heartfelt thanks to my family,
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brought the greatest meaning to the
arc of my life. – Yo-Yo Ma



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