

## PROGRAMME NOTE

### **In the same space - nine poems of Constantin Cavafy (1976)    Jeremy Dale Roberts**

I first came across the poetry of Cavafy as a very young man, browsing through the shelves of Rustem's dingy bookshop in Metaxas Square in Nicosia. I was electrified by its beauty, candour and sensuality; and although it never occurred to me for a moment to set those lines to music - I would not have been competent - Cavafy 'hung around' in the lumber-room of my imagination for the next twenty years or so - waiting.

Having not written for the voice for a long time, I was casting around for a suitable text. I was looking for something personal, authentic: 'taken from life'. Not lyrical, but prosaic, low-key. I looked at diaries, letters - for instance, Ivor Gurney's wonderful letters and scraps from the Front in the Great War. All at once I realized that Cavafy's poems were exactly what I required: a kind of veracity - where the 'song' is in the head, and the music of everyday speech (demotic) is given value. Also - in my mid-forties - I was at last 'in synch' with Cavafy, looking back at his youth from a rather sad middle-age.

The work is about memory - also about timelessness - also intoxication: a half-life. Most of the poems I chose are brief - actually all facets of the same poem - and form an intermittently broken chain: a true cycle, in so far as the songs are bound together thematically, and the conclusion takes us back to the beginning. Memory is most obviously expressed in the form: in the repetition or 'recollection' of musical ideas, usually of a harmonic or textural nature. Indeed, the whole work is impregnated with a consistent harmonic tonality, or 'aroma': it is inescapable, obsessive - that is the point.

Memory is also resonance, vibration - for which the piano, with its three pedals, is the ideal medium. Often the texture is saturated with pedal: only the *action* of the words, often rapidly delivered as in speech, and the occasional injection of irony galvanizes the prevailing sense of reverie.

1.     In the same space
2.     To call up the shades
3.     Voices
4.     Days of 1903
5.     When they are roused
6.     Morning Sea
7.     Gray
8.     Afternoon sun
9.     In the evening

J.D.R.