

# A Song's Centenary

BY NICO DE VILLIERS

Take a moment to learn more about the man and meaning behind the beloved art song "Do Not Go, My Love."

**"D***o not go, my love, without asking my leave. I have watched all night, and now my eyes are heavy with sleep."*

These are the opening lines of Richard Hageman's most famous song, "Do Not Go, My Love," which also happens to be the first one he ever wrote. It has become one of the classics of the American art song genre. The Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore's text is timeless in its sentiment, and Hageman's music—rich in its post-Romantic style—remains fresh after every hearing.

The song has proven a favorite with various performers across the decades. Singers such as Lotte Lehmann and Lauritz Melchior regularly performed it in recital. Many artists recorded it—the earliest in 1924 by the English contralto Marguerite d'Alvarez and pianist Lyell Barber. Other recordings followed by artists such as Rose Bampton, Maggie Teyte, Zinka Milanov, and Theodor Uppman.

More recent recordings include artists Thomas Hampson, Roberta Alexander, and Kiri Te Kanawa.

But where does the song come from? Who is the beloved in the poem, and who spoke these words? This year marks a centenary since the publication of "Do Not Go, My Love," and by delving deeper into its history and celebrating it with

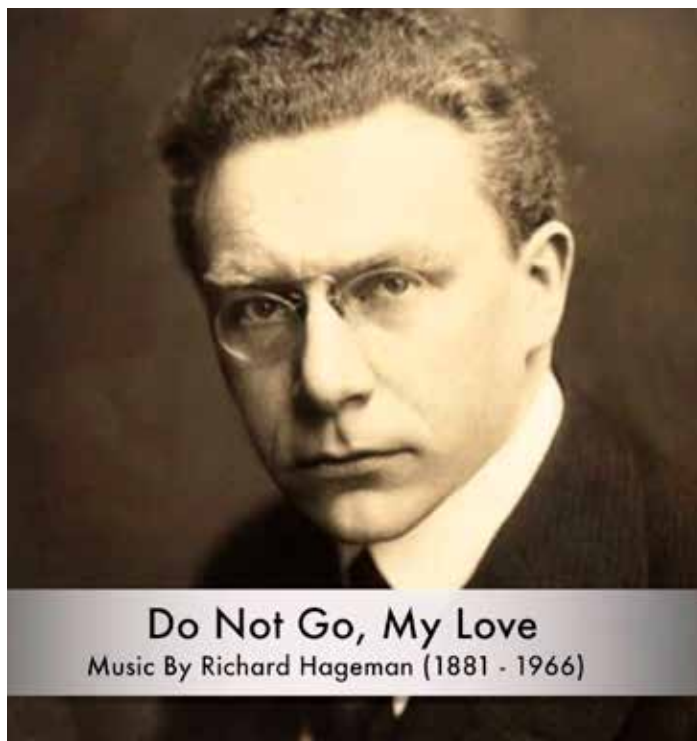
various performances and lectures, the Richard Hageman Society celebrates the song, the man, and the legacy.

## The Man and His Music

Hageman was born in 1881 to a family of musicians in the Friesian capital of Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. He received his musical education at the conservatories in Amsterdam and Brussels.

Around 1900 Hageman made his debut as conductor when he had to stand in for Kees van der Linden to conduct the Netherlands Opera at the last minute.

"It was a happy accident that made me a conductor," Hageman was fond of saying. Van der Linden had missed his train to Rotterdam, and "nobody dared to step into his shoes," Hageman would recall, more than 30 years later. "But as a 17-year-old, you are afraid of nothing. We borrowed the tailcoats from a waiter who worked on the other side of the street, and that night it went very well."



Hageman, being very tall, added that the tailcoats were too snug for him, but he put them on anyway. Throughout his life he had a knack of finding himself in the right place at the right time—and coupled with talent and ability, this stood him in good stead every time.

Another such moment of serendipity happened when Hageman was living in Paris. In 1903 he moved from Amsterdam to Paris to be a répétiteur in the studio of Madame Mathilde Marchesi. While at dinner with the celebrated Yvette Guilbert, it transpired that she needed a pianist to accompany her on an extended tour through the U.S. as her usual pianist was old and did not feel up to making the journey—and so naturally Hageman stepped in.

Following the Guilbert tour, Hageman travelled extensively across the U.S. with the American virtuoso violinist Francis MacMillen. The program was varied with MacMillen and Hageman's wife, the soprano Rosina van Dyck alternately performing in these concerts. Soon after, Hageman settled in the States and started his sojourn as coach and conductor at the Metropolitan Opera in 1908, just overlapping with Gustav Mahler. In 1909 he stood in for Toscanini to conduct the Metropolitan Opera in Gounod's *Faust* when the company was on tour to Philadelphia, and he remained associated with the Met through 1922.

During this time he is best remembered for his association with the Sunday Concerts; these varied programs of symphonic, instrumental, and vocal music at reduced ticket prices drew in a broader audience. When the Met season was over, Hageman remained active during the summer months with an extended schedule of teaching and performances. In the late 1910s and the 1920s, Hageman was involved as coach at Ravinia and the Chicago Music College during

the summer months. He was in charge of French repertoire at the Chicago Civic Opera and from 1925–1929 he was a coach and chorus master at the then newly founded Curtis Institute of Music.

Following a very public divorce from Rosina van Dyck in 1915—she allegedly threatened Hageman with a revolver!—Hageman married Renée Thornton, another soprano, a previous student as well as a dedicatee for three of Hageman's art songs in the 1920s. Thornton ended up divorcing Hageman to marry Count Carafa d'Andria and launched an exclusive line of cosmetics in her name.

When Hageman started composing his only opera, *Caponsacchi*, in the mid-1920s, he had been writing only art songs that had become popular across the U.S. *Caponsacchi* is based on an Arthur Goodrich eponymous play which, in turn, is based on Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. *Caponsacchi*—dedicated to his third wife, Eleanor, who funded the translation, publication, and promotion—was the first American-composed opera to be staged in a German-speaking country. Hageman conducted its world premiere (in German) at the Stadttheater Freiburg in February 1932 until the run of performances were cut short due to an alleged Nazi ban. When *Caponsacchi* was performed at the Met in 1937, Hageman conducted the two performances with Mario Chamlee in the title role, supported by Helen Jepson as the heroine Pompilia and Lawrence Tibbett as the antagonist Guido.

In the 1930s Hollywood was eager to employ classically trained

concert musicians and composers. Hageman was the first Metropolitan Opera conductor to be employed by Hollywood when the mezzo-soprano and film star Gladys Swarthout demanded that Hageman be the conductor and coach for Paramount's *The Yellow Nightingale*. Before long, his career flourished in Hollywood: he was nominated six times for an Oscar, winning it once for his part in creating the score for John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939).

In addition to composing a total of 18 film scores, Hageman wrote a large amount of stock music and sometimes took on the role as actor in films, including *The Great Caruso* and *The Toast of New Orleans* (both starring Mario Lanza), *New Orleans* (starring Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday), and *Rhapsody* (starring Elizabeth Taylor). In addition to his work for film studios in Hollywood, Hageman conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl and the San Francisco Symphony at the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1940 as well as maintaining his private studio for coaching singers

and pianists. In 1954 he retired from Hollywood but continued writing art songs and chamber music until 1961. He died of a heart attack in Los Angeles in 1966.

### The Song and Its Meaning

Hageman composed "Do Not Go, My Love" in 1917, dedicating it to the tenor George Hamlin. The song's text is from a cycle of 85 poems by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) entitled *The Gardener* (published in 1913). When Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his cycle *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), published in 1912, the Nobel Foundation announced that it was "... his profoundly sensitive, fresh, and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West" that had won him the prize. Hageman's music in "Do Not Go, My Love" can be described in similar ways with its lyrical melody that sensitively projects the delicacy of Tagore's text. The understated accompaniment with its subtle harmonic shifts creates a profound cosmos within which the voice can project the sentiment of the poem.

But what is the sentiment of the poem? It is often assumed that it is someone keeping vigil at the deathbed

of a loved one, perhaps even a child. Either of these interpretations are valid. Some details, however, in the poem itself make one curious as to Tagore's choice of words. Looking closer at Tagore's complete cycle of *The Gardener* helps to clarify the conundrum nonetheless.

The cycle loosely tells the story of the beginning, the blossoming, and the breakdown of a love affair. By the time we read "Do Not Go, My Love," it becomes clear that the two characters involved are a Bengali queen and her gardener who, despite their different statuses and classes, had fallen in love. "Do Not Go, My Love" shows the queen at her most vulnerable. She implores her lover not to leave her and tries to assert her power by reminding him that *she* is the one that ought to grant him leave first before he could go:

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.  
I have watched all night, and now  
my eyes are heavy with sleep;  
I fear lest I lose you when I'm sleeping.  
Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

I start up and stretch my hands to  
touch you. I ask myself, "Is it a dream?"

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Could I but entangle your feet with  
my heart and hold them fast to my breast!  
Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

After all of her pleading, her dreaming, and her passion, it seems that it was all in vain. We never hear the gardener speak, but Hageman fills in the gaps with the song’s disappearing ascending postlude, which suggests that the gardener has indeed gone.

Two lines in the poem that have had performers and listeners puzzled for the past hundred years are “Could I but entangle your feet with / my heart and hold them fast to my breast!” Various performers admit to generally having glossed over this particular moment since—at least to a Western reader—it is confusing and unclear.

*Musical America* reports that at a 1917 performance by Sybil Vane and Hageman himself at Aeolian Hall in New York, a man in the last row shouted out, “Some feat!” at the moment of hearing the line in question. The explanation, though, is that in Hindu culture the touching of feet is traditionally a sign of respect which, in turn, is usually reciprocated by a blessing. Therefore, the queen shows complete respect and resignation to the gardener, while at the same time anticipating a blessing in return. The lovers’ status roles are therefore completely reversed.

#### Recent Research

Since its composition, “Do Not Go, My Love” has been performed at Carnegie Hall, the Proms at the

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Royal Albert Hall in London, and as far afield as Sydney and Melbourne in Australia with some frequency. But it is only in recent years that intense research into Hageman's songs has been undertaken. The Richard Hageman Society was founded in 2013 to give a platform for ongoing scholarship regarding Hageman as well as to create an archive for his memorabilia.

In 2014 Hageman's birth town Leeuwarden acknowledged him with an aqueduct, which the Richard Hageman Society inaugurated performing a concert of his music. In addition to various lectures given by the Richard Hageman Society's director—I, Nico de Villiers—in the U.K. and the Netherlands, the celebrated film music scholar Kathryn Kalinak (Rhode Island College) presented a keynote address on Hageman's film music at the 2015 Northern Film Festival in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. At this film festival, my coauthor Asing Walthaus and I launched the first ever biographical pamphlet solely dedicated to the life of Hageman, entitled *Making the Tailcoats Fit*. And in collaboration with the Leeuwarden Historical Centre and the Leeuwarden Monuments Society, the Richard Hageman Society unveiled a memorial plaque outside Hageman's birth house in 2016.

As part of the centenary celebrations of "Do Not Go, My Love," the Richard Hageman Society invites performers to submit informal videos of alternative performances of the song—the instrumentation and style of arrangement are left to performers' discretion. These videos will be featured on the society's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/RichardHagemanSociety](http://www.facebook.com/RichardHagemanSociety)). The Richard Hageman Society is undertaking lecture recitals and workshops involving Hageman's songs internationally, and details will be posted on the society's Facebook page.

*South African-born pianist Nico de Villiers is based in London and in demand as soloist, accompanist, and coach in the U.K. as well as abroad. In addition to his professional commitments he is undertaking his doctoral research at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, focusing on the songs of Dutch-born American composer Richard Hageman. Read more at [www.nicodevilliers.com](http://www.nicodevilliers.com).* ©

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