

La rose complète

J'ai une telle conscience de ton
être, rose complète,
que mon consentement te confond
avec mon cœur en fête.

Je te respire comme si tu étais,
rose, toute la vie,
et je me sens l'ami parfait
d'une telle amie.

*I have such awareness of your
being, perfect rose,
that my will unites you
with my heart in celebration.*

*I breathe you in, rose, as if you were
all of life,
and I feel the perfect friend
of a perfect friend.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Les Roses*

*English translation by Barbara and
Erica Muhl*

In addition to his vast output of German poetry, Rilke (1875-1926) wrote nearly 400 poems in French. His poems on roses struck me as especially charming, filled with gorgeous lyricism, deftly crafted and elegant in their imagery. These exquisite poems are primarily light, joyous and playful, and the musical settings are designed to enhance these characteristics and capture their delicate beauty and sensuousness. Distinct melodic and harmonic materials recur throughout the cycle, especially between Rilke's poignant *Contre Qui, Rose* (set as a wistful nocturne) and his moving *La Rose Complète*. The final piece, *Dirait-on*, is composed as a tuneful *chanson populaire*, or folksong, that weaves together two melodic ideas first heard in fragmentary form in preceding movements.

Les Chansons des Roses was composed for Portland, Oregon's superb professional chamber chorus, *Choral Cross-Ties*, conducted by Bruce Browne, who gave the premiere on April 23, 1993.

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