

Musical Escapes

Harold **Arlen** (1905–86, *American composer*), Ludwig van **Beethoven** (1770–1827, *German composer*), Hans **Bethge** (1876–1946, *German poet*), Cesária **Évora** (1941–2011, *Cape Verdean singer-songwriter*), Federico **Fellini** (1920–93, *Italian filmmaker*), Roger **Fernay** (Roger Bertrand, 1905–83, *French writer*), Henryk **Gorecki** (1933–2010, *Polish composer*), Edvard **Grieg** (1843–1907, *Norwegian composer*), Yip **Harburg** (1896–1981, *American lyricist*), Henrik **Ibsen** (1828–1906, *Norwegian playwright*), Gustav **Mahler** (1860–1911, *Austrian composer*), Henry **Mancini** (1924–94, *Italian-American composer*), Johnny **Mercer** (1909–76, *American singer-songwriter*), Tim **Minchin** (1975–, *Australian musician & comedian*), Crystal **Pite** (1970–, *Canadian choreographer*), Richard **Wagner** (1813–83, *German composer*), John William **Waterhouse** (1749–1917, *English painter*), Kurt **Weill** (1900–50, *German composer*)

Thank you for being part of this course!

As always, the website is www.brunyate.com/MusicalEscapes

I will always respond to mail at rogerbrunyate@gmail.com



6. Over the Rainbow

December 9, 2025

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“SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW” IS OF COURSE THE TITLE of the iconic song of yearning sung by Judy Garland at the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz*. But there are many kinds of rainbows, many kinds of yearning: for an absent friend, for a beloved place left behind, for the promise of a new place where one can begin again, even though you half know it may be an illusion. The seven songs in the first hour, taken mostly from the popular repertoire, take us on a tour of unfulfilled desire.

“Over the rainbow” can also be a metaphor for death. The three longer classical works in the second hour show their composers—Beethoven, Wagner, and Mahler—not only accepting the prospect of death, but embracing or even transcending it. *rb*.

A. Yearning

Seven songs and a ballet from a wide variety of contexts, each having to do with yearning for something that lies beyond the realities of the immediate present.

Minchin: “The Absence of You,” single-shot video filmed at the Rechabite in Perth, Western Australia, 2020.

Grieg: *Peer Gynt*, incidental music to Ibsen’s play: Solveig’s Song (Sissel Kyrkjebø, concert for coronation of King Harald, 1991)

Évora: *Sodade* (official video, 2014)

Arlen & Harburg: “Somewhere over the rainbow” (Judy Garland, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 1939)

Arlen: “Somewhere over the rainbow” (Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott, 2021)

Mancini & Mercer: “Moon River” (Audrey Hepburn, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, 1961)

Weill & Fernay: *Youkali* (Teresa Stratas, with clips from the 1983 **Federico Fellini** film *And the Ship Sailed On*)

Pite: *Flight Pattern*, excerpt (Royal Ballet, 2017, set to *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* by **Henryk Gorecki**; Francesca Chiejina, *sop.*)

B. Acceptance

Three German-speaking composers dealing in various ways with death. **Beethoven**, in the final movement of his final quartet, defiantly whistles a cheerful tune. **Wagner** writes a four-and-a-half-hour opera whose protagonists seek death as a welcome release. And **Gustav Mahler**, facing a terminal diagnosis of his own heart condition, turns to Chinese poetry to achieve a transcendence that answers tragedy with beauty.

Beethoven: *String Quartet #16 in F major*, final movement, “The Difficult Resolution” (Ariel Quartet, Cincinnati)

Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*, piano transcription of Prelude, opening

Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*, final scene, Isolde’s *Liebestod* (La Scala 2007; Waltraud Meier, *Isolde*; Patrice Chéreau, *director*; Daniel Barenboim, *conductor*)

Jason Starr: *Everywhere and Forever* (2014 documentary on *Das Lied von der Erde*), opening of last movement, with baritone Thomas Hampson and others

Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*, closing moments (Carolyn Watkinson, *mezzo-soprano*; Kurt Sanderling, *conductor*)