

## End of My Days album review - soprano's eclectic set moves through vulnerability to strength



**T**his is an intriguing, eclectic programme from the soprano Ruby Hughes and a string quartet from the Manchester Collective, led by her childhood friend Rakhi Singh. Music of quiet stillness, often nodding to folk or spiritual traditions, dominates early on, with Hughes's voice closely captured. There is, however, a sudden burst of instrumental energy from Caroline Shaw's Valencia, which captures the exuberant potential of the tiny capsules of juice in an orange segment.

Overall, the music takes us from uncertainty to a kind of acceptance. Vaughan Williams's Along the Field hangs in the air like a spider's web, at once impossibly vulnerable and strongly sustained. Between three of John Tavener's Akhmatova Songs and Ravel's Kaddisch come David Bruce's imaginative arrangements of two Dowland songs, Hughes's delivery taking an emphatic turn. There's a kind of culmination in the title track, a 1994 song by Errollyn Wallen that hits an exultant if fleeting climax.

Then the harmonic complexities of Debussy's Trois Chansons de Bilitis, seamlessly arranged by Jake Heggie, make a refreshing bridge to the final two songs. It's not easy for any composer to follow Mahler's Urlicht, performed here with careful intensity, but Deborah Pritchard's specially commissioned song Peace makes an effective valediction in the context.

**Erica Jeal, *The Guardian***

