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From composition to performance

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FROM COMPOSITION TO PERFORMANCE

A Project

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the

Presidential Scholars Program

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Dr. Leslie Morgan, Project Advisor

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Date

Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

As partial fulfillment of my senior thesis requirement, I chose to present a senior voice recital. This recital was a culmination of all that I learned as an undergraduate in the field of music. The music that I chose to perform allowed me to grow as a scholar, a musician, and a performer. I have also gained knowledge and strengthened my experience in ways that will be valuable to my career in music education. This presentation of music allowed me to grow in a way beyond that which is possible in the classroom.

I began choosing the music for my recital in the spring of 2005. The pieces are a combination of music that I studied in the past as well as a few new works. My choices were affected by the language of the piece and the musical elements that would allow for my growth as a musician. My choices were approved by my vocal instructor, Dr. Leslie Morgan. She was able to help me choose the repertoire with my voice type and capabilities in mind. As a mezzo-soprano, it was important for me to choose music that was a good fit for my range.

After the music is chosen, it is arranged into sets. I chose to arrange my recital into sets based on the language. I presented four sets of music: Italian, German, French, and English. The music education degree recital requires at least two sets of a foreign language. I chose to present a third in order to challenge my learning in foreign language diction. The music that I performed represented a variety of musical composers and styles. I prepared and presented music from the Baroque, Romantic, and Twentieth-Century eras.

In addition to practicing the music, it was also necessary to do research into the history of the composer and of the piece that was programmed. I used many sources from the library and from my own collection. My research consisted of determining the translations of foreign texts, the phonetic transliteration, and the historical aspects of the piece.

As I prepared for the recital, I wanted to provide the audience with a copy of the foreign text translations to allow the audience members to understand the music on a higher level. I was aware of the discrepancies in some translations and therefore consulted several sources to determine the final translation to include in the program. All of these sources are listed in the bibliography.

I also utilized sources that provided aid and direction for the proper diction of the text. These language dictionaries provide the phonetic pronunciation using a symbolic language known as the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). During my education I took two courses on foreign diction. These classes taught me how to use IPA, and each provided opportunities to practice correct diction. My individual voice lessons were also very beneficial. Dr. Morgan worked with me on the diction as I learned the music.

Another element of study that enhanced my performance was that of historical research. I found it beneficial to learn more about the composer, when he composed the piece, and other interesting facts about the music. This information was helpful in the preparation of a well-rounded recital of music.

The program began with the Italian set which included pieces from Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) and George Frideric Handel (1685-1759). The first piece, "Qual farfalletta Amante," was written by Domenico Scarlatti. Born in Italy on October 6, 1685, Scarlatti was the son of the famous musician Alessandro Scarlatti. His first appointment was at the young age of fifteen. Scarlatti spent time in Venice, while he was still being promoted by his aspiring father. He also spent time serving the king of Portugal as teacher to the Princess Maria Barbara. When

she married Prince Ferdinand of Spain, Scarlatti followed her to the Spanish court in Madrid. He spent most of the rest of his life in Spain where he died on July 23, 1757.¹

Scarlatti is well known for his ability on the harpsichord. Much of the music that he wrote was in fact inspired by sitting down at the instrument and improvising the music. Vocal music of the period was written differently in that the music had followed the demands of the text and some general rules of vocal composition. There is little historical information available for the composition, “Qual farfalletta Amante.”²

The second composer on the program was Domenico Scarlatti’s contemporary. At one of their meetings, Scarlatti and Handel entered into a friendly competition at Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni’s palace.³ It was said that Scarlatti acknowledged his colleague’s superior skills on the organ, but when it came to the harpsichord, the audience was divided.⁴

In the same year as Scarlatti, George Frideric Handel was born to a German family. His father discouraged the study of music in an effort to convince his son to study law. Handel began composing operas in Hamburg, Germany. He traveled to Italy for a time, but most of his life was spent in London. Handel wrote for every major genre of music popular during his lifetime. He composed major vocal and instrumental works.⁵

The Handel piece that was chosen for the Italian set is from the opera *Scarse*. The opera was composed to an Italian libretto by Nicola Minato. The aria “Ombra mai fù” and the accompanying recitative were composed between December 26, 1737 and February 14, 1738. The premiere performance was at the King’s/Queen’s Theater at Haymarket in London,

¹ Roberto Pagano, “Guiseppe Domenico Scarlatti,” *Grove Music Online*.

² Pagano, “Scarlatti,” *Grove Music Online*.

³ Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 407.

⁴ Pagano, “Scarlatti,” *Grove Music Online*.

⁵ Anthony Hicks, “George Frideric Handel,” *Grove Music Online*.

England.⁶ The piece was originally written in F major; however, for my recital I performed the lower arrangement in D major, which is a more accessible key for a young mezzo-soprano.

The second set consisted of two pieces in German: “Verzagen” by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) and “Das irdische Leben,” composed by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911). Brahms was born on May 7, 1833. He began studying music at the age of seven. He traveled with an accomplished violinist before the age of twenty. During his travels, he met Robert and Clara Schumann. Clara was an accomplished pianist, and Brahms fell in love with her. He spent a lot of time helping her through the loss of her husband, yet Brahms never married Clara. Throughout his life, Brahms had other opportunities for marriage, but he chose to remain a bachelor.⁷

Brahms had an evident love for nature. He would often take long walks outdoors. Opus 69 through 72, which includes “Verzagen” Op. 72, No. 4, were conceived in the Prater, Vienna’s popular park.⁸ “Verzagen” translates to mean “dejection.” The text speaks of the waves of the ocean, and Brahms uses the driving rhythms in the piano accompaniment to represent the rolling waves of the text.⁹

Mahler’s music also reflects the text well. The two pieces fit well together due to the nature of the text, the similar driving rhythm of the piano accompaniments, and the large chromatic leaps in the voice. Both composers are of the romantic era, though Mahler came later.

Mahler is well known for his symphonic writing. He wrote most of his music during the summers between seasons as a conductor. In addition to symphonies, Mahler wrote symphonic

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Beaumont Glass, *Brahms’ Complete Song Texts* (Mt. Morris, New York: Leyerle Publications, 1999), p. vii.

⁸ Ibid, p. viii.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 275-276.

lieder.¹⁰ “Das irdische Leben” tells the story of how a hungry child can see the corn in the field, but he is unable to be fed. This irony is portrayed through a very chromatic accompaniment and large melodic leaps representing the dying child’s cries for relief. The text for the work is a German folksong poem. “Das irdische Leben” is from the song cycle *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, which translates as *The Youth’s Magic Horn*. The set of songs is composed for voice and orchestra. Mahler composed the work during the summer of 1893, which he spent at Steinbach on the Altersee in the Austrian Salzkammergut.¹¹ The first performance was given in Vienna on January 14, 1900.¹²

The third set in the program consists of three French pieces from three different composers. All three composers are from the late Romantic era and composed in the French *mélodie* style. A *mélodie* is a French art song of the 19th or 20th century which can be thought of as the French version of the German lied.¹³ Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was considered a master of the French art song. The other French composers represented in the recital are Ernest Chausson (1855-1899) and Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947).

Ernest Chausson was born in 1855 to a cultured French family and never had to worry much about money. Chausson received his musical training as a pupil of Massenet at the Conservatoire, also attending the classes of César Franck. He collected the art of Renoir and Degas. He was a careful composer, and very self-critical. His life was cut short by a tragic bicycle accident in 1899.¹⁴

¹⁰ Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, pp. 632-638.

¹¹ *Gustav Mahler: Lieder eines fahrenden ges Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, (SONY Classical, 1990), pp. 3-5.

¹² Peter Franklin. “Gustav Mahler.” *Grove Music Online*.

¹³ Don Michael Randel, ed., *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. 4th ed, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 498.

¹⁴ Graham Johnson, *A French Song Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 78.

Chausson composed “Le charme” in 1879. It is set to the text of Armand Silvestre, and is Number 2 of Opus 2.¹⁵ Johnson writes that the piece seems touched by Fauré’s influence. It is believed that “Le charme” was written under the influence of Massenet.¹⁶

Gabriel Fauré was born in France in 1845. Though being born to a family of the minor aristocracy, he worked hard during the year and did most of his composing during the summers. He composed “Rêve d’amour” on May 5, 1864. It is based on a text by Victor Hugo, a popular source for French song.¹⁷ Graham Johnson speaks of the melody of “Rêve d’amour” in his notes on Fauré’s music. He explains, “The melody of ‘Rêve d’amour’ wilts in a shy descent of the staff, a feminine cadence which we come to love in this composer as one of his trademarks.”¹⁸ As Fauré continued composing, he achieved more fame later in life. He suffered from hearing loss towards the end of his life, though it did not seem to affect Fauré’s output. He died in France in 1924.¹⁹

The third French piece was composed by Reynaldo Hahn. Hahn was born in 1875 to a Venezuelan Catholic mother and a German Jewish father and spent his first three years in Latin America. The family then moved to Paris where Hahn studied in the Paris Conservatoire beginning at the age of ten. As an adult, he was well accomplished at composing, conducting, and writing about music and musicians. He also recorded himself performing some of his compositions.

“L’heure exquise” is from a song cycle for solo voice and piano based on texts by Paul Verlaine. The song cycle is called *Chansons grises* and was composed between 1887 and

¹⁵ Jean Gallois, “Ernest Chausson.” *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁶ Johnson, *A French Song Companion*, p. 79.

¹⁷ Jean-Michel Nextaux, “Gabriel Fauré,” *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁸ Johnson, *A French Song Companion*, p. 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 161.

1890.²⁰ Graham Johnson explains how this cycle demonstrates Hahn's ability "to use time and space (rather than melody and harmony alone) as essential ingredients in the creation of magic." It is said that the poet was present at a performance of the work and the beauty of it moved him to tears.²¹

To end the recital I performed two pieces in English: "Silent Noon" by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) and "How Lovely is the Hand of God" by Raymond Loughborough (c. 1900-1967). Vaughan Williams was a well-known 20th Century composer from England. His early music training included violin, piano, and organ. Through his early years of study, he found himself constantly drawn to the art of composition. He has written works for the stage, orchestra, band, choir, and voice. Ralph Vaughan Williams is most known for his compositions for solo voice and piano. "Silent Noon" is from his cycle called *The House of Life*, composed from texts by D.G. Rossetti. This work was composed in 1903.²²

The final piece of the program, "How Lovely is the Hand of God," was written by Raymond Loughborough. This composer is not well-known, and it was very difficult to find any information about his life. The British Library Catalog lists the year of his death as 1967. It is estimated that most of his works were composed in the 1930's and 40's.

Each piece on my program was chosen due to the learnable elements the musical gratification that it provided. I enjoyed each set of music for different reasons. The Italian set featured music from the Baroque era. This is one of my favorite eras of music. For me, it is enjoyable due to the abundant use of the harpsichord. Both pieces in the Italian set were composed by accomplished harpsichord musicians.

²⁰ Patrick O'Connor, "Reynaldo Hahn," *Grove Music Online*.

²¹ Johnson, *A French Song Companion*, pp. 236-236.

²² Hugh Ottaway, "Ralph Vaughan Williams," *Grove Music Online*.

The German pieces were the most difficult to learn. I am grateful for the challenge that they presented. I spent a lot of time studying the accompaniment part as well as the vocal line in order to see how the two elements fit together. “Das irdische Leben” was my favorite piece on the program. I enjoyed singing it because it was a challenge to learn and it allowed me to connect to the emotions of the text.

The French pieces fit together based on the style of writing. French is a difficult language to sing, and this aspect of the learning process allowed great growth in my diction skills. It was interesting to perform music from three different composers. I was able to experience the subtle nuances in style that made each composer unique.

The English pieces are two of my favorite works of English solo literature. I have worked on “Silent Noon” in the past. I decided long ago that I would like to perform it in my senior recital. I chose the Loughborough piece from the library. I found it as I was looking for an English piece with which to end the recital. This piece quickly became one of my favorites to perform. The text has a personal meaning for me, and it was a privilege for me to share it on my program.

The recital was a valuable experience that allowed me to grow as a performer. It was an opportunity for me to create a performance that was a culmination of all that I have learned. In addition, it allowed me to expand my knowledge through detailed research and study of the music, translations, and composers. From the process of learning about the compositions to the performance of the music, I felt that I grew as a performer and music scholar. Above all else, I had the opportunity to present myself as a true musician.

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