

2014

A graduate recital in voice

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A GRADUATE RECITAL IN VOICE

A Recital Abstract
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

Brent M. Smith
University of Northern Iowa
May 2014

THIS RECITAL ABSTRACT BY: Brent M. Smith

ENTITLED: A Graduate Recital in Voice

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

Date

Dr. John Hines, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date

Dr. Jean McDonald, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Korey Barrett, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Michael J. Licari, Dean, Graduate College

THIS RECITAL BY: Brent M. Smith

ENTITLED: A Graduate Recital in Voice

DATE OF RECITAL: March 3, 2014

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for the
Degree of Master of Music

Date

Dr. John Hines, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date

Dr. Jean McDonald, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Korey Barrett, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Michael J. Licari, Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

Brent Smith presented his graduate recital on March 3, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. in Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The program consisted of four sets of music, in collaboration with pianist Jessica Schick, by the composers Theron Kirk, Robert Schumann, Francis Poulenc and Tom Lehrer. This abstract discusses musical and historical features of the recital pieces in the order of the program.

Theron Kirk (1919-1999)'s *Prayers from the Ark* sets the poetry of Carmen Bernos de Gasztold, a French poet who lived from 1919-1995. Rumer Godden translated the original French text to the English text that appears in Kirk's work. The original poetry by Bernos de Gasztold includes prayers by the animals of the ark, including, but not limited to the ox, the cock, the donkey, the elephant and the giraffe. Each animal represents unique human feelings and foibles. In this way, the text is a commentary on the human condition's weaknesses and strengths.

In "The Prayer of the Elephant," Kirk depicts the plodding and awkward nature of the giant beast. The elephant reveals to God his awareness of his giant physicality and how, as a consequence of His creation, he might be destructive to his environment. As a result, he prays for the maintenance of wisdom and care as he plods across the ground with his big feet. Ultimately, he rejoices in his oddity on the condition that God grants him the ability to handle it.

The elephant's pensive disposition and his loud and destructive steps are aptly represented by particular compositional devices. In the opening, an upward arpeggiation

that outlines a perfect fifth creates a quiet atmosphere, in which there is some uncertainty in the elephant. The ensuing *sforzando* articulation on a chord followed by a similarly articulated chord represents the enormity of the elephant. A use perfect fifth and of plodding chords throughout the piece depict the movement of the elephant.

By contrast, “The Prayer of the Giraffe” is faster and has an air of egotism. The giraffe, a slender and tall creature, expresses his feelings of superiority as compared to the other lowly creatures of the earth—most notably the apes. The giraffe casually converses with God as if both were on a level plane. The giraffe maintains a superior posture that he believes embodies the true nature of heaven. Kirk opens the piece with a regal, brass-like fanfare that introduces the pompous giraffe. The giraffe confidently calls upon the Lord with accented articulations. Kirk illustrates the height of the giraffe by having him sing in high parts of his register. Three tempo changes occur in the piece, highlighting the changes in thought.

Liederkreis, Op. 39, by Robert Schumann (1810-1856), sets the text of Joseph von Eichendorff. Schumann saw Eichendorff as a poet who was the soul of the world in the way that he captured the meaning of life in his poetry.¹ According to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, in his book *Robert Schumann: Words and Music*, the propensities in Eichendorff’s style resonated with Schumann. As Fischer Dieskau explains,

Eichendorff’s natural and direct style appealed to similar propensities in Schumann’s artistic nature, though Schumann did not hesitate to maintain his creative independence by freely altering Eichendorff’s texts. Images of one’s homeland; the legend-filled past; the magic of twilight and night; the mystical sense of faith in life and God—all are enhanced by the new light in which

¹ Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Robert Schumann: Words and Music: The Vocal Compositions*. Trans. By Reinhard G. Pauly (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1988), 71.

Schumann casts them. Thus, *Liederkreis, Opus 39*, is unusually animated because of the novel and unprecedented ideas dealt within this cycle. Every song in it is marked with a profusion of new musical invention. Never before in the history of the Lied has the poet influenced the composer more than in this collection of songs.²

In this way, the key relationships and textual similarities are all the more impressive.

Furthermore, this set of songs is a unique artistic creation that develops unprecedented ideas within this cycle.

Liederkreis, Op.39 was not conceived as a unified cycle as was *Dichterliebe, Op. 42* but instead it was formed into a group of songs as it was being composed.³ A solitary wanderer is a prominent figure in most, but not all, of the poems. Songs numbered one through six are emotionally darker songs, while songs numbered seven through twelve are less-melancholy songs. The performer must work to create unity between the individual pieces without expressing an explicit narrative connection between them. However, similar poetic themes and/or melodic material help to add unity among certain songs. For example, songs five and six are related to each other. Similarly, songs seven and eight are also related to one another. These relationships are via poetic themes including one's homeland, the legend-filled past, the twilight and the night, and the mystical sense of faith in life and God.⁴

In der Fremde (In a Foreign Land) expresses the world-weariness, or *Weltschmerz*, of a solitary wanderer—a common theme in much Romantic music and poetry during Schumann's time. This man has been wandering for a long time and has

² Fischer-Dieskau, 71.

³ Ibid., 72.

⁴ Ibid., 71.

finally returned home. Sadly, he discovers that his father and mother are long dead and no one knows him any longer. He longs for a peaceful resting place among nature, so as to forget his sorrow and loneliness. Schumann employs a harp-like accompaniment that represents the instability and uncertainty of life's duration and events as well as creates an atmosphere of solitude.⁵

Intermezzo (Interlude), as the title suggests, is a transition from the sorrow and loneliness of *In der Fremde* to the pomposity and deceit of the legend-filled *Waldesgespräch*. The lover expresses his desire for his beloved as he dwells on her image in his heart. His heart then quietly sings a beautiful song to her. Schumann sets this text to a joyful melody and syncopated accompaniment, creating a feeling of love and yearning. In addition, he modifies the original structure of the poetry by repeating the first verse. In this way, he composes an ABA form that reflects the lover's return to the image of his beloved in his heart.

Waldesgespräch (Dialogue in the Forest) is a narrative containing two contrasting figures: a lost hunter and the legendary Lorelei. Schumann uses two differing accompanimental patterns to highlight which character is speaking—horn-call, perfect fourths for the lost hunter and upward-moving, harp-like arpeggios for the Lorelei. The text is a dialogue between the two characters, with the ignorant hunter entranced by the beauty of the Lorelei, and the Lorelei taking advantage of his weakness. He finally realizes that she is the deadly water sprite of folklore and recoils in fear and amazement.

⁵ Beaumont Glass, *Schumann's Complete Song Texts*, (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 2002), 51, 73.

Alas, it is too late for him, as the Lorelei has already captured his soul, preventing him from ever leaving the forest again. Schumann employs two keys, beginning with D major for the hunter's entrance and modulating to B-Flat major as the Lorelei begins to speak. He then returns to D major for the hunter and remains in that key, representing the Lorelei's strident and malicious victory over him; the key highlights her ability to mock and eventually capture the identity of not only the hunter but of all men.

Die Stille (Stillness) features a woman's perspective as she flirts with the idea of sharing her feelings of love. The light staccato piano chords and the pervading piano dynamic express the playful and secretive nature of the text. In addition, the accelerando at the point where she reveals her desire to be a bird flying over the water illustrates her increased heartbeat and excitement. The song is in ABA form.

Mondnacht (Moonlit Night) is possibly Schumann's most celebrated song.⁶ It displays a union of text and music as it creates musical impressions of night and the ethereal qualities it possesses. The peaceful, descending arpeggiation at the opening and its several repetitions thereafter represent the rays of the moon shining down into the depths of the dark forest. Repeated seconds in the right hand illustrate the shimmer of the moonlight as it kisses the earth. Wind gently blows through the corn. The poetic voice, as if in complete nirvana, spreads its wings and flies to its home in the sky. Dominant-tonic resolution does not occur until the end of the vocal line, signifying the soul's arrival in its heavenly home.

⁶ Fischer-Dieskau, 73.

Schöne Fremde (A Beautiful, Foreign Land) relates to *Mondnacht* in its evocation of night as well as its tonal ambiguity. The text deals with the forest, dreams, night and the gods. In this way, it incorporates all of the poetic themes in this cycle. The accompaniment rustles with alternating chords distributed between the hands representing both the wind in the treetops as well as the babbling of the brook. The vocal line sweeps upwards embodying this wind-like quality. The tonal center is not established until its end.⁷

Auf einer Burg (In a Castle) is a juxtaposition of an old castle in the Alps looking down on a young, lively wedding party floating on the river. This song demonstrates both timelessness and lifelessness. Schumann articulates these themes by suggesting an old musical style, not unlike Baroque counterpoint. The slow tempo creates a feeling of stasis while repeated melodic gestures develop this timeless feeling.

In der Fremde (In a Foreign Land, or Far from Home) is dissimilar from the first song of the cycle with the same title in its sparser accompaniment, repetitious vocal line and new text. Sixteenth-note patterns in the accompaniment represent the rushing of the brook and the mysterious forest lights.⁸ The vocal line is identical in the antecedent phrase of each verse to those of *Auf einer Burg*. This is a continuation of the timelessness of the old castle. In addition, its text involves feelings of constraint, of searching and of hopelessness.⁹ Jon F. Finson, in his book on the songs of Robert Schumann, reveals the loss of the Eichendorff family's castle and how Eichendorff would forever live far away

⁷ Fischer-Dieskau, 76.

⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁹ Ibid., 78.

from that former home. He reveals, “It is touching to realize that Eichendorff’s family had lost their romantic old castle, with its rose garden, and that he was destined to live far away from the place where he had spent a happy youth.”¹⁰

Wehmut (Melancholy) is a bittersweet song that contains a lilting melody and a sorrowful text. As a result, this song can be misconstrued as being sweet and tender when it is in fact an introspective moment of sorrow. Schumann composes a melody that seems repetitive. However, upon closer inspection one can see how he varies the lines’ beginnings upon iteration. Consequently, there is a feeling of the voice focusing on its grief while at the same time expressing it in what it thinks is a different way each time. Of all of the songs in this cycle, this one contains the most apparent use of *rubato*. This is logical given its subject matter.

While similar in tempo to *Wehmut*, *Zwielicht* (Twilight) could not be more different in its subject matter. Schumann creates a stark contrast that takes our wanderer to his darkest thoughts and feelings. The voice is some supernatural figure, warning both the wanderer and the listener of the malice of twilight. The accompaniment and voice interweave with one another in their repetitive upward and downward motions, alluding to the surreptitious and deceptive nature of nocturnal elements in the woods. The climax of the piece occurs as the voice asks its audience if it has a friend and warns it to not trust that friend and his of her beguiling ways. At this point in the music, the accompaniment transforms from slender, contrapuntal lines to heartbeat-like chords that represent the

¹⁰ Jon F. Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 58.

foreboding warning of the voice. The song ends with a breathless and ominous warning to keep awake and lively. The texture of the music thins considerably, emphasizing this warning, which is immediately punctuated by staccato chords in the accompaniment.

Im Walde (In the Forest) juxtaposes the feelings of loneliness with those of communion with nature.¹¹ Schumann opens the piece with a light, galloping chordal accompaniment that evokes horn calls. *Ritardandi* function as question marks between the regularly, 6/8 metered “external” impressions of the forest by interrupting the forward motion of the galloping horses. Furthermore, dynamic contrast from *piano* to *forte* illustrates events happening close to and far away from the singer. The *piano* dynamic coupled with the lack of postlude represent the dying away of the forest’s sounds and events.

The final song of *Liederkreis, Frühlingsnacht* (Spring Night), is a breathless, ecstatic and joyful song. It revels in the sounds, sights and smells of the spring night. Like *Schöne Fremde*, *Frühlingsnacht* deals with many of the cycle’s poetic themes. For example, it references the forest, the night and love. An embellished seventh chord forms the basis of the melodic line, representing the soaring of the wanderer’s exuberant spirit as he realizes that his love is finally his. The accompaniment is the most challenging of the cycle for the pianist, juxtaposing three over four.¹²

¹¹ Fischer-Dieskau, 80.

¹² Franz Liszt made a famous piano transcription of this song along with Schumann’s *Widmung*.

Le bestiaire (The Bestiary) by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) was his first vocal cycle, composed during his conscription in World War I between 1918-21.¹³ This cycle is a setting of six poems by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) from his first poetic work, *Le bestiaire ou le Cortège d'Orphée*. It is a twentieth-century adaptation of the medieval bestiaries—books in which actual or mythical animals are the characters in a story with moral or religious purpose.¹⁴ According to Roger Nichols, this cycle is a unique and intelligent work that represents Poulenc's affinity for less-than-transparent words. He says,

In the *Rhapsodie nègre* Poulenc showed a marked affinity with words which were less than explicit, but his setting of six poems from Apollinaire's *Le bestiaire* (1918-19) is an extraordinarily individual and competent piece of work for a young man of 20, in which he captured the mood of the tiny, elusive poems, often by simple yet surprising means such as abnormal word setting (as with *mélancolie*, the last word of all). The scoring is at once economical and faintly 'impressionist'....¹⁵

As Nichols illustrates, Poulenc succeeds in his simple setting of these poems by his eccentric use of musical color and variation of mood.

Le dromadaire (The Camel) is about the fictional Don Pedro d'Alfaroubeira, who travelled the world with his four dromedaries. The narrator states that he would have done the same thing if he had four camels. With its plodding and repetitive quintuplet-notes in the bass and its dactylic rhythm of long-short-short, the accompaniment represents the blowing or falling sand on the hills of the desert as well as the continual

¹³ Myriam Chimènes and Roger Nichols. "Poulenc, Francis." Oxford Music Online. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22202> (accessed January 23, 2014).

¹⁴ Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes, *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, (Brookfield, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1999), 178.

¹⁵ Chimènes and Nichols.

trudging along of the four camels and Don Pedro. The song ends with a quirky and ironic postlude that reflects the child-like admiration of the poet.¹⁶

Le chèvre du Thibet (The Fleece of Tibet) describes the narrator's love for the hair of a woman that makes the golden fleece of Jason of the Argonauts worth nothing in comparison. The texture is light and almost ethereal, illustrating the sensuality in the text. There is a marked change of timbre and dynamic in the middle of the piece, possibly reflecting the hard labor of Jason.

La sauterelle (The Grasshopper) possesses an aphoristic tone as it describes a fine grasshopper. Described as good nourishment for Saint John, the narrator hopes that his verse may be a similarly hearty treat for the best of people. The vocal line is smooth and delicate, somewhat reflecting the delicate nature of the grasshopper. In the final two bars, the voice caresses the words in its upper tessitura, emphasizing a hope for similarly nourishing poetic verse.

Le dauphin (The Dolphin), the more exuberant piece in the cycle, depicts the playful dolphins jumping in the sea in contrast to the bitterness of the waves. The narrator's joy breaks through his sorrow amidst his life's return to cruelty. The doubling of the vocal line in the accompaniment illustrates that it is participating in the dolphins' romp in the waves.

The text of *L'écrevisse* (The Crayfish) is symbolic of the delight in uncertainty and of how people move forward in life by moving backwards (as does the crayfish). Musically, Poulenc demonstrates this in the prelude, which contains an upward-moving

¹⁶ Benjamin Ivy, *Francis Poulenc*, (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1996), 30.

motif followed by repeated sixteenth notes that represent the crawling of the crayfish. Chromatic thirds winding in the bass represent the uncertainty to which the narrator alludes. The piece ends with a slide vocal slide doubled by the piano, further highlighting the backward movement of both the crayfish and the poet. Furthermore, this slide is an inversion of the piano's opening motif, further depicting the movement of the crayfish, only now backwards.

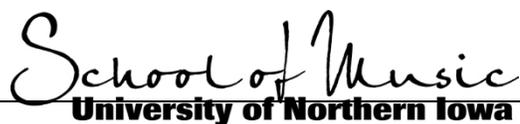
The final piece, *La carpe* (The Carp), is the most impressionistic of the cycle, incorporating both the soft pedal and the sostenuto pedal, thereby creating the image of the murky-water of the ponds and pools of the carp. The slow tempo combined with this opaque, sonic imagery reflects a sense of melancholy that is mentioned at the conclusion of the cycle.

The recital concluded with two cabaret pieces by the American composer Tom Lehrer. The first of the two, "I Hold Your Hand in Mine," is a gruesome love song set to a lilting waltz. The humorous text deceptively begins as a simple love song, then evolves into the singer's obsession with his lover's severed hand. He reveals that, after killing her, he continues to covet her dexterous digits.

The final piece, "Masochism Tango," as its title so clearly suggests, is about the sado-masochistic love of a man for the many beguiling choreographic techniques of his dance partner. Using a sultry tango as the musical backdrop, the text humorously describes the pleasure the man derives from the pain-inflicting actions of his lover.

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Presents

Brent Smith, Bass

Jessica Schick, piano

Davis Hall,

Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center

March 3, 2014

6:00 p.m.

Program

Prayers from the Ark.....Theron Kirk
(1919-99)

- II. The Prayer of the Elephant
- IV. The Prayer of the Giraffe

Liederkreis, Op. 39.....Robert Schumann
(1810-56)

- I. In der Fremde
- II. Intermezzo
- III. Waldesgespräch
- IV. Die Stille
- V. Mondnacht
- VI. Schöne Fremde
- VII. Auf einer Burg
- VIII. In der Fremde
- IX. Wehmut
- X. Zwielficht
- XI. Im Walde
- XII. Frühlingsnacht

INTERMISSION

Le bestiaire..... Francis Poulenc
(1899-1963)

- I. Le dromadaire
- II. Le chèvre du Thibet
- III. La sauterelle
- IV. Le dauphin
- V. L'écresse
- VI. La carpe

"I Hold Your Hand in Mine"Tom Lehrer
(1928)

"Masochism Tango"

*This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.M. Vocal Performance degree at
The University of Northern Iowa School of Music. Brent Smith is a voice student of Dr. John Hines.*