

2017

# A master's recital in voice

Haley L. Steele  
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A MASTER'S RECITAL IN VOICE

An Abstract of a Recital

Submitted

For Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

Haley L. Steele

University of Northern Iowa

May 2017

This Study by: Haley L. Steele

Entitled: A MASTER'S RECITAL IN VOICE

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

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Julia Bullard, Thesis Committee Member

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Kavita Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

RECITAL APPROVAL FORM

This Recital Performance by: Haley L. Steele

Entitled: A MASTER'S RECITAL IN VOICE

Date of Recital: March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Julia Bullard, Thesis Committee Member

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Kavita Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

## ABSTRACT

Haley Steele presented a graduate voice recital on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in Davis Hall of the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa. The recital was presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Master of Music degree in voice performance. The program included selections by Hugo Wolf, Joaquín Rodrigo, and early songs by Claude Debussy, in addition to a chamber piece for horn and soprano by Otto Nicolai and selections from a contemporary song cycle titled *The Wild Iris* by Forrest Pierce. This recital abstract surveys this repertoire with regard to relevant, historical performance practices, poetic and compositional techniques, and context for the selections within traditional high-voice repertoire.

Composed in 1889 and published among forty-four lieder in *Spanisches Liederbuch*, Hugo Wolf's "Sagt, seid Ihr es, feiner Herr" establishes a mood of coquetry and flirtation through evocative musical language as the speaker addresses a young man she recognizes from a recent, raucous party. The left hand of the accompaniment provides a relentless, tambourine-like pulse below a dancing countermelody. Eric Sams asserts that the voice and accompaniment "intertwine, part, meet again, bow and curtsy in a continuous outpouring of bright duetting melody."<sup>1</sup> Harmonically, the song pivots between G major and B-flat major as the speaker reasons between "Seid Ihr's der..." and "Ja, ihr seid's..." which is punctuated by finger-pointing, accented quarter note outbursts. Finally, the song's prelude features a melodic contour that reappears throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 276.

speaker's indictment of the young partygoer, each time at a higher pitch level, and serves as what Sams refers to as a pasted-up "Wanted poster in sound."<sup>2</sup>

Composed just a month later, Wolf's "Sie blasen zum Abmarsch" begins with the soft, distant military bugle call that is diegetic to the speaker as her beloved is summoned to his ranks. In B-flat Major, she reports the sound to her mother and iterates her impending solitude in a couplet stated twice more in the song ("Mein Liebster muss scheiden / und lässt mich allein!"). The military marches closer as the bugle call is repeated in a piano interlude that increases in volume and concludes with the percussive triplets of military drums. As the speaker narrates her beloved's departure preparations, the accompaniment transforms into a representation of her inner turmoil through the sudden outburst of sobbing half-steps. The middle section slows somewhat as the speaker compares her loneliness to a day without the sun ("Mir ist wie dem Tag, dem die Sonne geschwunden") through ascending escape tones followed by winding, descending half-steps in contrary motion with the accompaniment. As she is lost in thought, the military marches away, and the sobbing half-steps appear again. The speaker repeats the couplet to her mother one final time as the accompaniment returns to the representation of the bugle call as the company marches away in an extended postlude that decrescendos before the final cadence.

"Liebe mir im Busen zündet" provides strong contrast in tempo, style, and tonality to the previous songs. The verses of the poetry are straightforward and adequately portray the tumult of the speaker's heart without seeming overwrought. Each

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<sup>2</sup> Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, 276.

of the three stanzas ends with the same plea: “Wasser, liebe Mutter, / eh das Herz verbrannt!”<sup>3</sup> After a short-fused introduction, the singer bursts into declamation of the first stanza accompanied by chords that expand in range. With the conclusion of the first appearance of the speaker’s plea, the piano fires into a densely chromatic, virtuosic texture that rolls irregularly toward downbeats. The accompaniment’s uneven phrases and patchy musical ideas offset the strength of the vocal melody, which frequently begins on the weaker beats of the measure, as if the speaker were gasping for air through sobs. At the end of each verse, the piano and voice reunite in the same texture as the opening stanza, nearly homophonically declaring the speaker’s repeated plea for water. Tonality is obfuscated by the winding chromatic lines in the vocal melody and accompaniment. At its conclusion, the union of the piano and voice is abbreviated as the accompaniment fizzles and is silent for part of the plea before firmly cadencing in A minor.

Claude Debussy finished *Quatre chansons de jeunesse* between 1881 and 1882 for a young soprano with whom he was enamored.<sup>4</sup> The singer, Marie-Blanche Vasnier, received thirteen songs from the composer in total, and the collection, published in a songbook sharing her name, offers a glimpse of her virtuosity as a high, agile soprano.

The first song, “Pantomime,” presents a nameless narrator observing the pantomimed actions of four different commedia dell’arte characters: Pierrot, Cassandre, Arlequin, and Colombine. Debussy provides a prelude which establishes an atmosphere of deviousness with lengthy trills and clumsy, stumbling grace notes. The first character,

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<sup>3</sup> Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, 282.

<sup>4</sup> Carol Kimball, *Song: a Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2005), 191.



Pierrot, has been drinking. Repeated sixteenth notes, alternating the interval of an augmented second in increasing brevity, transition to the second character, Cassandre, who laments his recently disinherited nephew. The narrator's observation is accompanied by descending chromatic scales, representing Cassandre's tears. Nearby, Arlequin schemes of kidnapping his bride, Colombine, and pirouettes alone in delight of his plan. Debussy establishes a new section through a single, repeated, syncopated B-natural in the piano that turns into sweeping arpeggios, and the narrator observes Colombine dreaming. At the repetition of the phrase "Et d'entendre en son cœur des voix," the melody is more melismatic and chromatically altered to reflect the dreamy, obscure nature of Colombine's thoughts. Following the narrator's survey of the four characters, Debussy directs the singer to *ritenuto* before abruptly jumping back into Tempo I in a vocalize that is punctuated with fragments of accompaniment from each of the four characters.

The second song, "Clair de lune," is introduced by cascading G-sharp minor and diminished chords. This figure repeats throughout the *mélodie*, representing moonlight falling on the earthly scene below. Masqueraders and disguised players enjoy song and dance beneath the moon, and Debussy enhances the rhythm of their revelry by setting the poem in 3/8 and using escape tones that resolve important words on select downbeats. Before the third and final quatrain, Debussy affords a brief interlude that recalls the prelude as the narrator shifts from observing the earthly scene back to the moon itself.

"Pierrot" uses the popular French folk melody "Au clair de la lune," in which a young boy looks for help from his friend Pierrot and encounters Arlequin and Colombine along the way. Debussy uses the tune to establish the importance of the presence of the

moon and Pierrot before the voice says a single word. Additionally, Debussy abbreviates the tune and sets it in a notably faster tempo than the traditional, lullaby-like tempo popular in French culture. In contrast to the original tune, Debussy's Pierrot is out of bed and wandering the Boulevard du Temple in Paris, a street famous for its pantomime theatres,<sup>5</sup> after finishing a performance at the wedding of Arlequin and Colombine. Inevitably sad and distracted, as Colombine typically flirts with and then leaves Pierrot in the commedia dell'arte tradition, Pierrot passes another girl as the jealous moon watches above. Debussy concludes similarly to "Pantomime" with a vocalise that soars nearly four and a half octaves above the final accompaniment resolution.

The final song in *Quatre chansons de jeunesse*, "Apparition," uniquely employs a first-person narrative. The speaker describes a mysterious dream that recalls the day and place of their first kiss. As the air is sad and intoxicating, the speaker wanders away from the spot when his loved one appears so ethereally that he wonders if it is the return of a childhood reverie. Debussy uses abrupt textural changes in the accompaniment to signal important poetic images and to navigate the dream's changing landscape. Subsequent passages strip away harmonic progression to a single, repeated note before inflating to dense, chromatically-colored harmonies. Coupled with a rising vocal melody, these gestures effectively convey the breadth of the speaker's awe and wonder at the image of such a glorious vision.

Joaquín Rodrigo's *Cuatro madrigales amatorios* derives from the traditions of Spanish folk poetry and song of the sixteenth century. Composed in 1947, this collection

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 181.

is most revered for its intimate relation of music and text and diversity of accompaniment.<sup>6</sup> Each of the four poems first appeared in a collection titled *Recopilacion de sonetos y sonatos y villancicos a quatro y a cinco* published in 1560. The curator of this collection, Juan Vasquez, included folk poems such as these with some of his own, original verses.<sup>7</sup> Rodrigo demonstrates two cyclical ideas of tonality throughout the four pieces, which tonicize F minor, A minor, F major, and A major, respectively. Between each piece in the first and second half of the set, Rodrigo arranges a chromatic third relationship (F—A), and between the halves of the work as a whole, Rodrigo takes the listener through parallel keys as an effective tool for unifying diverse poetic expressions.

The first song, “¿Con qué la lavaré?,” grieves through evenly-contoured phrases and accented dissonances between the voice and accompaniment. While not explicitly stated in the poetry, it is clear the speaker is experiencing the loss of some person or status. By comparing herself with the “casadas,” the speaker creates a distinction between her status and theirs. This separation indicates that the speaker may be newly widowed or divorced, and the loss of her husband was an unfortunate circumstance that filled her “con penas y dolores.”

“Vos me matásteis” brims with similar regret. The speaker addresses the “niña en cabello,” expressing that she has killed him. In the tradition of sixteenth-century Spanish poetry, this does not equate the more familiar French expression of “death,” but rather

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<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Rhodes Draayer, *A Singer's Guide to the Songs of Joaquín Rodrigo* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 166.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

implies that the speaker has felt so strongly about seeing this virgin that he suspends his life. Unable to move forward or back, he no longer lives. Musically, Rodrigo illustrates this position by beginning and ending the song with the same text set nearly identically.

“¿De dónde venís, amore?” quickly alters the mood of the collection by beginning with a pattern of secundal harmonies and a melodic motive that reappears throughout the song, evoking the image of someone tapping their toe impatiently. The speaker interrogates the listener about their recent whereabouts, already knowing where they have been. While staccato and rhythmic at first, this questioning comes to a pause halfway through at “fuere yo testigo,” as the speaker halts rhythmic momentum in favor of a slower, more ominous accusation. The numerous repetitions of text indicate that the speaker will not be appeased by an answer. The speaker reignites the rhythmic momentum with explosive, wordless quivers of fury that ascends to C6. The listener is indicted and cannot refute guilt.

In the final piece of the set, Rodrigo employs a light, guitar-like accompanimental texture and an extended prelude that may serve as a momentary respite for the singer following the demanding conclusion of the third song. The speaker of the poem is a young boy accounting for his recent absence to his mother. While not directly related to the previous poem, Rodrigo draws on the similarities of the subject matter to further thematically connect the pieces of this set. The young boy excitedly narrates his journey to see the poplar trees of Seville dance in the wind through extended melismas on the word “aire.” After four sly, but charming, assertions of his innocent whereabouts, a brief episode in the relative minor condemns the boy as he lapses into the memory of his “linda

amiga.” An extended melisma featuring two winding quintuplets on “amiga” demonstrates distinctly Spanish musical influences as well as accidentally confirms the boy’s immodest conquests.

Composed in 2006, Forrest Pierce’s *The Wild Iris* sets six poems by Louise Glück from her larger collection of the same name. The composer prefaces the works, stating “The voice of the gardener, the voice of the gardened, and the two created in each other’s image. What’s enough to make is worth the struggle? When does neglect turn into a culling, and when does a burial become the act of planting?”<sup>8</sup> In his critical essay, “‘Talked to by silence’: apocalyptic yearnings in Louise Glück’s *The Wild Iris*,” American poet William V. Davis asserts the collection is “unashamedly theological,” as Glück demonstrates a “craving for that which is “immutable” caught in the grip of the “earthly, the temporal” by creating a “debate between the poet and God with voices of flowers and plants as the arena.”<sup>9</sup>

Musically, Pierce distills this existential dialogue into excerpts supported by widely varying musical gestures while maintaining the originally published order of the poems. The opening work, “The Wild Iris,” begins with fluttering accompanimental gestures in an F Phrygian modality as the speaker of the poem, an iris, narrates its journey to the garden. Phrygian provides the opportunity for the composer to shift between A-flat major and F minor sonorities without tonicizing any particular pitch for too long, adequately prefacing the conflict between the gardener and God to come. Phrases

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<sup>8</sup> Forrest Pierce, *The Wild Iris* (Lawrence, Kansas: Self-published, 2006), 2.

<sup>9</sup> William V. Davis, “‘Talked to by silence’: apocalyptic yearnings in Louise Glück’s *The Wild Iris*,” *Christianity and Literature* 52, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 47.

symmetrically ascend and then descend in a representation of “the natural cycle of life, death, and resurrection in a garden.” As the flower shifts from depicting its death to its resurrection, Pierce establishes more rhythmic stability and provides momentum through decreasing note values and widening the range of the accompaniment before restating the opening musical gestures in a different range and with a slightly varied contour.

“Witchgrass,” the second song, is indicated as “righteous, relentless” by the composer. A repeated sixteenth-note ostinato figure in the accompaniment underscores a vengeful, “snarling” weed’s assertion that the gardener lacks understanding of their proximity to one another. The plant states “as we both know, / if you worship / one god, you only need / one enemy— / I’m not the enemy.” The middle section of the song uses rapidly changing meters and a piano figure that nods to popular and rock music in a defiant, rebellious attitude as the witchgrass asserts that the gardener’s downfall is not the daily death of one of her plants, but rather her attempt to grow anything in the garden to begin with. As the opening ostinato transforms into a mobile, racing figure that whips through a wide range of the piano, the weed asserts:

I don’t need your praise  
to survive. I was here first,  
before you were here, before  
you ever planted a garden.  
And I’ll be here when only the sun and moon  
are left, and the sea, and the wide field.

I will constitute the field.<sup>10</sup>

The final song excerpted from this collection concludes Glück’s book as well as Pierce’s set. “The White Lilies” begins with two, alternating harmonic perfect fifths.

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<sup>10</sup> Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 22.

Metrical changes between 4/4 and 9/8 with unchanging stress create the illusion of a freely-moving figure that delays the next strong beat while being a precise, calculated effect in reality. Clearly nodding to this poem at the end of his program note, Pierce uses stillness and patterned articulations to assure that not all is lost in the end of a life as “human love in the face of inevitable destruction”<sup>11</sup> is, in his words, “worth the struggle.”

Based on the aria “Ah, non giunge...” from Vincenzo Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*, Otto Nicolai’s *Variazioni concertanti* is a theme and variations for horn and soprano that evokes a bel canto style. The horn introduction does not employ a literal use of theme but establishes style and a glimpse of the virtuosity employed more-fully in the coming movements. The second section features the voice more prominently and establishes the head theme unmistakably, although scattered with additional mid-word rests that seem to signal more of an effect than a stylistic variation from the sourced aria. The first variation features the horn alone in a scalar exercise while the accompaniment references the head theme. The second variation uses chromatic embellishments for the voice with only brief interjections from the horn. The third and most extended variation is a tour-de-force for both instruments that uses trills, chromatic scales, and abbreviated rhythms while exploring a majority of the functional range of each performer.

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<sup>11</sup> Davis, “Talked to by silence,” 47.

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School of Music  
University of Northern Iowa

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Presents

Haley Steele, Soprano

assisted by:

*James Jenkins, piano*

In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the Master of Music degree in Performance  
From the Studio of Dr. Jean McDonald.

from *Spanisches Liederbuch*.....Hugo Wolf  
(1860-1903)

Sagt, seid Ihr es, feiner Herr  
Sie blasen zum Abmarsch  
Liebe mir im Busen

*Quatre chansons de jeunesse*.....Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

I. Pantomime  
II. Clair de lune  
III. Pierrot  
IV. Apparition

*Cuatro madrigales amatorios*.....Joaquín Rodrigo  
(1901-1999)

I. ¿Con qué la lavaré?  
II. Vos me matásteis.  
III. ¿De dónde venís, amore?  
IV. De los álamos vengo, madre.

from *The Wild Iris*.....Forrest Pierce  
(b. 1972)

The Wild Iris  
Witchgrass  
The White Lilies

*Variazioni concertanti su motivi favoriti dell'opera La Sonnambula*.....Otto Nicolai  
(1810-1849)

Casey Chlapek, horn