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Graduate voice recital abstract

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GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL ABSTRACT

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

MaKayla McDonald

University of Northern Iowa

May 2017

This Study by: MaKayla McDonald

Entitled: Graduate Voice Recital

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

Date _____ Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour Chair, Thesis Committee

Date _____ Dr. Jean McDonald, Thesis Committee Member

Date _____ Dr. John Wiles, Thesis Committee Member

Date _____ Mr. Jeffrey Brich. Additional Committee Member

Date _____ Dr. Kavita R. Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

This Recital by: MaKayla McDonald

Entitled: Graduate Voice Recital

March 28th, 2017

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

Date _____ Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour Chair, Thesis Committee

Date _____ Dr. Jean McDonald, Thesis Committee Member

Date _____ Dr. John Wiles, Thesis Committee Member

Date _____ Mr. Jeffrey Brich. Additional Committee Member

Date _____ Dr. Kavita R. Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

MaKayla McDonald, soprano, presented her graduate voice recital at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday March 28, 2017. This performance took place in Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa. Given in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree, the recital was performed in collaboration with pianist James Jenkins. The program consisted of music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Gabriel Fauré, Lori Laitman, and Gaetano Donizetti. This abstract provides a brief analysis of the music, text, and salient musical characteristics for each piece as it appeared in the recital.

The recital opened with Johann Sebastian Bach's "Zerfliesse mein herze" from *Johannes – Passion*, BWV 245. Premiered on April 7, 1724 at St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, Germany, *Johannes – Passion* tells the story of the passion of Christ or the events leading up to Jesus's crucifixion. "Zerfliesse mein herze" serves as a woeful reaction to the killing of Christ. This lyric solo movement is characterized by coloratura and chromatic passagework, both of which illustrate the lamentation of Christ's death.¹

Bach composed four versions of this work, each with minor changes. In its final version, *Johannes – Passion*, BWV 245 is scored for a small orchestra, organ, four unnamed soloists, two named soloists, and a chorus; "Zerfliesse mein herze" is performed

¹ Jonathan D. Green, *A Conductor's Guide to the Choral-Orchestral Works of Bach* (Maryland, US: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000), 516.

by the unnamed soprano soloist and is scored for flutes and *oboes de caccia*. In the third version of the passion, this aria was removed along with one other text from the Gospel of Matthew and replaced by an instrumental sinfonia. Bach reinserted these texts in version IV. For the purposes of this recital, “Zerfliesse mein herze” was performed with a piano reduction and without organ due to the available recital hall accommodations. This aria is set in ABA¹ form. The accompaniment highlights the mournful quality of the vocal line by offering a counter melody that also provides rhythmic and harmonic interest. Bach’s use of chromaticism and dissonance provide poignant expression of grief.

Gabriel Fauré’s song cycle *La Bonne Chanson* was written during his second period of composition from 1892-94. His compositions during this period are laden with Parnassian and Symbolist texts, thematic development and motivic repetition and variation, and an expansive harmonic language. Despite the complexity of these elements, the overall atmosphere is reserved. The text comes from Parnassian poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1869). The French Parnassian movement served as a response to Romanticism. These texts express and explore different stages of love and happiness, through themes of nature by means of a removed appreciation for exterior life.

For this recital, selections from this cycle were performed with the intention of representing some of the most well-known songs of the cycle. The set began with “La lune blanche luit dans les bois.” This text depicts moonlit scenery juxtaposed with kind words for a lover. A transparent atmosphere is created through sequenced ascending

triplets in the piano, sweeping vocal lines, and meter changes from triple to duple. Three interruptions occur within the larger text that create a miniature poem, which speaks directly to the lover; “Ô bien aimée. Rêvons, c’est l’heure. C’est l’heure exquisite.”²

“J’ai presque peur, en vérité” is the second song in the set. With each stanza of text, increase in emotion suggests that the poet may be experiencing an excess of happiness as he confesses the joy his love brings to his life.³ The first use of the direct, informal, and first-person ‘tu’ happens in this poem. The piano reflects this informal atmosphere through syncopation and abrupt tonal shifts that instigate harmonic resolutions. Even in light of syncopated rhythm and a largely syllabic text setting, the vocal line is grand and sweeping over an exciting accompaniment.

Song number three in this set is “Avant que tu ne t’en ailles.” In this text, Verlaine constructs another layered poem first illustrating the poet’s desire for the stars to bring his image into his lover’s dreams. Set apart by hyphens, the second poem “expresses the successive and joyful impressions of the poet at dawn.”⁴ Textual duality is mirrored in the music. The outer poem is characterized by chromatic tonicization and long legato lines, whereas the interior poem is brisk and light-hearted in rhythm. One might speculate that the outer poem requires a specific level of intimacy and Fauré emphasizes this with harmonic interest, while the interior poem is full of rhythmic agitation which highlights the variance in text.

² Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 134.

³ Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

In “N’est-ce pas?” the poet refers to his own love in the symbolic terms of two nightingales. As described by Pierre Bernac, these two seem to be on their way to their wedding and are accompanied by nuptial-like or processional-like music.⁵ Fauré seems to respond to this formality with stable harmonic language and an intimate *bel canto* vocal line. Fauré preserves the natural declamation in the context of long expansive phrases. When the poet refers to the future, the pedal indication in the piano ceases and the texture thins. The bass line, which has previously been full of arpeggiation, settles in a pattern of strong quarter notes that seem to communicate clarity as the poet envisions the future.

The final song in the recital set and song cycle itself is “L’Hiver a cessé.” Here, the poet enthusiastically declares his anticipation for the rebirth and rejuvenation that come with spring. Fauré incorporates previous accompanimental motives from earlier songs in the piano, culminating in a thematically dense accompaniment. Sixteenth note triplets in the left hand of the accompaniment create a sense of urgency and forward motion, in contrast to grand, sweeping vocal phrases that contain large intervallic leaps and arpeggiation. “L’Hiver a cessé” serves as a joyful climax to *La Bonne Chanson*. These song selections provide insight regarding Fauré’s style in his second compositional period specifically with consideration for his use of thematic and harmonic development in treating textual content, a salient feature of French *mélodie*.

⁵ Ibid., 140-141.

Lori Laitman (b. 1955) is a well-known American composer of vocal literature, who prioritizes melody and the way it expresses the text. The texts for the song cycle *Sunflowers* (1999) comes from a book of poems written by Mary Oliver, entitled *Dream Work* (1986). Divided into two parts, Oliver's collection contains forty-five poems. Out of these, Laitman chose three to complete her cycle. Oliver's work often embodies a feminist perspective, such as in the case of *Sunflowers*. She equates "woman to earth" and gives women power by telling the story from the female perspective. Laitman sets these free verse poems with expansive yet intricate piano gestures, continual meter changes, instances of free tonality, and a vocal line that is operatic in scope. She is specific in her score indications, liberally marking dynamics, tempi, pedal markings, and vocal instructions.

The first song in this cycle is "Sunflowers." The song begins with a dance-like waltz as the poet offers an invitation to view and explore the earth from the singular perspective of a sunflower. By the end of the song, the poet's understanding of the world begins to change. This dramatic shift is illustrated with a homophonic texture and various meter changes. The waltz is sequenced, imitated, and rhythmically augmented throughout the drama, contributing rhythmic variety within the larger context of continuity. Laitman composes with a primarily modal (Mixolydian and Lydian) harmonic language, often with broken chords and does not indicate a specific key signature. The harmonic rhythm is brisk, but arrives at a standstill when the poet's focus begins to turn outward with the

text “Come and let us talk...”⁶ She uses various other twentieth century compositional techniques, including polychords, quintal harmonies, and chromatic sequencing.⁷ The final lines of text are unaccompanied which creates a sense of open-endedness.

“Dreams” is the second song in the cycle and serves as a dramatic and musical transition. The story of the cycle has shifted from day to night as the poet dreams about the world. Her reality becomes skewed as she dreams, and after waking several times she is unable to verbalize what she has experienced. The poet is left with a budding understanding of the world and its people. This song begins with a hazy descending Aeolian passage in 5/8 and various meter changes, which support the uneasiness of the dream. Laitman further supports this atmosphere with the blur of a generously pedaled accompaniment. Similar to “Sunflowers,” “Dreams” does not have a key signature indication but intermingles traditional tonalities with the use of Aeolian and Phrygian modes.

The third and final song of this cycle is “Sunrise.” As the title suggests, the poet has survived a tumultuous night and has finally arrived at daybreak. The poet reveals a deeper understanding of the world and expresses that “...it is happiness...”⁸ that allows us to understand the “universal we.” Laitman’s harmonic language remains largely modal

⁶ Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 88-89.

⁷ Helen Teresa Allen, “The Songs of Lori Laitman: An Analysis of *Sunflowers* and *Early Snow*” (DMA doc., Ohio State University, 2013), 30, accessed January 23, 2017, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=osu1356105865&disposition=inline.

⁸ Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 59-60.

(Lydian, Dorian, and Aeolian), with some extended tertian harmonies.⁹ Meter changes continue to enhance the declamation within the line, but are employed with less frequency. In “Sunrise” changes in the dramatic beat occur simultaneously in the voice and piano, emphasizing the poet’s conviction.

Following the Laitman cycle, the recital concluded with “Quel guardo il cavaliere... So anch’io la virtù magica.” This *cavatina* and *cabaletta* come from Act I, Scene II of Gaetano Donizetti’s (1797-1848) *Don Pasquale*. This three-act *opera buffa* had its premiere at the the Théâtre Italien in Paris 1843 and was composed in the *bel canto* style. Salient compositional features of this style include: legato lines, dynamic accents, rubato, and rhythmic flexibility. Accompaniment in *bel canto* is often sparse, providing opportunity for the singer to indulge in artistic liberties. This aria is sung by Norina, who is a young woman confident in herself and her sexual appeal.

Various characters in *Don Pasquale* are described as Mozartian in characterization and composition.¹⁰ The characters, including Norina, are humanized and experience life authentically; they push past societal stereotypes. This opera explores contemporary issues of the nineteenth century which is significant because many operas of this time were still being set with eighteenth century values. This libretto seeks to “satirize well-established literary notions of romance and heroism.”¹¹ This is especially

⁹ Ibid., 58-60.

¹⁰ William Ashbrook, “Don Pasquale,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003251>.

¹¹ Ibid.

apparent in Norina's opening aria. The scene opens with her reading a chivalric novel about a knight and his romance with a very beautiful woman. After sarcastically laughing, Norina confidently declares that she understands how to control men too. She describes her abilities to give a glance, a smile, or even a sudden fainting spell to really capture someone's heart. Norina sees herself as a combination of both this sexual woman and the powerful knight, almost a "chivalric heroine."¹² Unlike the women in Mozart, Norina doesn't have to wait for love to find her, she believes in her abilities to have it all.

"Quel guardo il cavaliere..." is a *cavatina* in a lilting 6/8, has minimal ornamentation, arpeggiated accompaniment, and serves as a means to provide dramatic information necessary to set up the scene. After a brief interlude that introduces the main thematic material, the *cabaletta* "So anch'io la virtù magica" begins. This aria is in 2/4 with many opportunities for rubato on especially interesting words. There are several grace notes and *cadenza* all which work to enhance the playfulness of Norina. The accompaniment in the *cabaletta* is minimal and functions primarily as a simple rhythmic and harmonic support to the otherwise exuberant *cabaletta*.

¹² Ibid.

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School of Music
University of Northern Iowa

MaKayla M. McDonald Soprano

with

Mr. James Jenkins Piano

“Zerfliesse mein herze” from *Johannes – Passion*, BWV 245

J.S Bach

1685-1750

from *La Bonne Chanson*

Gabriel Fauré

1845-1924

La lune blanche luit dans les bois

J'ai presque peur, en vérité

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles

N'est-ce pas?

INTERMISSION

Sunflowers

Lori Laitman

b. 1955

I. The Sunflowers

II. Dreams

III. Sunrise

“Quel guardo il cavaliere...” from *Don Pasquale*

Gaetano Donizetti

1797-1848