

2017

Graduate voice recital: Rachel Storlie, soprano & Robin Guy, piano

Rachel Storlie
University of Northern Iowa

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GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL
RACHEL STORLIE, SOPRANO & ROBIN GUY, PIANO

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

Rachel Storlie

University of Northern Iowa

May 2017

This Study by: Rachel Storlie

Entitled: Graduate Voice Recital – Rachel Storlie, Soprano & Robin Guy, Piano

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music in Vocal Performance

Date Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Katherine Osborne, Additional Thesis Committee Member

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

This Recital Performance by: Rachel Storlie

Entitled: Graduate Voice Recital – Rachel Storlie, Soprano & Robin Guy, Piano

April 14, 2017

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music in Vocal Performance

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Date	Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee
_____	_____
Date	Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member
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Date	Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour, Thesis Committee Member
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Date	Dr. Katherine Osborne, Additional Thesis Committee Member
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Date	Dr. Kavita R. Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

At 6:00 p.m. on April 14, 2017, soprano Rachel Storlie and pianist Dr. Robin Guy presented a recital of song literature in Davis Hall at the University of Northern Iowa, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Voice Performance degree. Selections performed included songs from Grieg's *Haugtussa*, Berg's *Sieben frühe Lieder*, selections from Pâque's *Sept mélodies pour Chant et Piano*, and Rorem's *Ariel* with faculty artist/clarinetist Dr. Amanda McCandless. This document serves as a guide for the recital program through: exploration of poetic meaning and text setting style, observation of musical texture and melody, and illumination of cultural and biographical information relating to each composer.

The program opened with three pieces from Opus 67, *Haugtussa*, written in 1895 by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907). The cycle is based upon eight poems culled from a staggering seventy total, which comprise Arne Garborg's epic poetry cycle of the same name. The storyline is rife with imagery from traditional rural life, the beauty of nature, Norwegian folklore, sensual awakening, hauntings and supernatural visions, and themes of love. Although these Romantic themes are abundant throughout the work, many categorize the work as Neo-Romantic or Symbolist.

Most of Grieg's selections from *Haugtussa* are strophic settings suited to a "folkish form of the poetry, a fact for which Grieg is often criticized."¹ Unfortunately, such musicological elitism (when combined with the fact that the cycle is written in minority Nynorsk² dialect) leaves *Haugtussa* on the fringes of programming, as it is not frequently known or performed outside of Norway. Nonetheless, according to Dr. Bradley Ellingboe, *Haugtussa* is Grieg's most important vocal composition, through which he builds an engaging and memorable story arc with the text of only eight poems. The majority of texts are pulled from the poetry cycle's sub-set entitled "Sumar i Fjellet" (Summer in the Mountains).

¹ Bradley Ellingboe, *Forty-Five Songs of Edvard Grieg* (Mt. Morris, NY: Leyerle Publications, 1988), 103.

² The Nynorsk dialect is commonly understood as the antithesis of Norway's more prominent "Bokmål" language that is heavily mixed with Danish. The turbulent political history of Norway leading up to her Independence Day of 1814 created a folk-based nationalist surge to reclaim a true Norwegian language with ties to both the Old and Middle Norse languages. Purists exist on either side of the debate, one of whom was the author of *Haugtussa*, Arne Garborg (1851-1924). See Harald S. Næss's book "A History of Norwegian Literature" for more information.

The first selection presented was “Killingdans” (Little Goat’s Dance), a vigorous and sprightly folk-dance depicting an idyllic day that Veslemøy shares with her goat herd in the Norwegian mountains. Listeners are ushered into the sunny summer mountains with a staccato descending figure enhanced by a sharpened fourth grace note that lightly descends like a pebble off a cliff overlooking the Norwegian fjord. The goat maiden “hips and hops, tips and tops” along with her little cloven-footed friends, supported by an ostinato arpeggio figure in the piano’s middle register. The sun “shimmers” and “glimmers” on the hill, heard in the right hand of the piano’s accompaniment through a joyous repeated triplet figure that quickly reiterates through three ascending octaves. A quasi-recitative melody, when combined with open, flatted seventh chords, harmonically illustrates the interconnectedness of nature and beauty with each goat’s name. Each strophe ends with an ascending herder’s call anchored by Grieg’s signature chord:³ the dominant thirteenth. Veslemøy and her goats gaily trip off into the sunset as the song closes, repeating the traditional *Halling*⁴ dance motive of the interludes.

Grieg indicates that the second selection, “Elsk” (Love), is to be performed *I Stev tone at Allegretto con moto*. Older Norwegians recognize the *Stev* genre of folk tune as “a simple and ancient form of ballad, usually dealing with love.”⁵ The through-composed form aptly reinforces the bewitched frenzy of Veslemøy’s emotional reaction to falling in love for the first time with a young man named Jon. A contemplative, dotted octave figure introduces us to her psychic realm, repeating and ascending until arrival at the highest note of the melodic line on the word “guten” (boy). The shifting moods and tonal centers portray obsessive longing as Veslemøy exclaims how she could “charm and hex” him in order to possess him. An interlude of sweeping treble chord inversions and deeply-grounded bass pedals that bubble up through ascending arpeggiations follows the vocal climax of the song before a return to the dotted octave motive. However, this time the climactic note (now set with the word “dovnar,” dwindles) foreshadows heartbreak.

³ Beryl Foster, *The Songs of Edvard Grieg* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1990), 193.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ellingboe, 103.

The final song of the set, “Ved Gjøtlet-Bekken” (At the Brook-Side), is an exploration on the theme of betrayal. As Foster muses, “Finally, like the young man in *Die schöne Müllerin*, it is to the stream that Veslemøy goes for comfort in her pain.”⁶ Grieg sets the poem in a modified strophic form in which each verse of poetry ends with the same phrase, “Oh here I will...rest/dream/remember/forget/sleep,” and underscores Veslemøy’s deep emotional state through frequent modulations that also serve to highlight the meandering nature of the brook.

Alban Berg’s (1885-1935) *Sieben frühe Lieder* (Seven Early Songs) was written between 1905-1908, a period of time during which Berg studied under Arnold Schoenberg. It was dedicated, like much of his music, to Helene Nahowski, an aspiring opera singer and, later, Berg’s wife. As Gable and Morgan write: “In a word, Berg, unlike Schoenberg and (especially) Webern, was fundamentally a *traditionalist*, committed to preserving the intensely personal character and unabashed emotional expressivity of the music of late romanticism on which he was nurtured.”⁷ *Sieben frühe Lieder* is a clear example of Berg’s affinity for late Romantic compositional practice blended with the forward-looking influence of his teacher Schoenberg.

The first song of this set, “Nacht” (Night) is an exploration of unveiled mystery and awakened emotion, with themes common to the Symbolist and Expressionist movements of the era. Recurrent melodic motives are traded frequently between voice and piano in a texture of whole-tone ambiguity. The overall effect is unsettled and dream-like, and the poem ends with an ominous warning of “O gib acht!” (Oh beware!).

Nikolaus Lenau’s poem “Schilflied” (Song Amongst the Reeds) depicts a character who sings of lost love during a visit to the reedy banks of a waterway. Tempo changes, rhythmic motives, and ostinati reinforce the nostalgic mood of this poem in Berg’s 1908 setting. The song overtly features what

⁶ Foster, 194.

⁷ David Gable and Robert P. Morgan, *Alban Berg: Historical and Analytical Perspectives*, (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 1991), 2.

musicologist Mark DeVoto describes as Berg's hallmark: "creeping chromaticism."⁸ These "creeping" chord progressions move by semitone or common tone to reflect the hidden nocturnal secrets of Lenau's poem.

In 1907, Berg wrote "Die Nachtigall" (The Nightingale), turning to poet Theodor Storm for inspiration. The subject matter is an homage to past times, evoking traditional lyricism reminiscent of high Romantic-era art song. In her doctoral dissertation, Lisa Lynch posits that "Die Nachtigall" is "clearly influenced by the Lieder of Brahms and Schumann...Nevertheless, the seeds of Berg's distinctive style are also present."⁹ The aforementioned "creeping" harmonic motion, when coupled with sweeping melodic lyricism, distinguish this as one of Berg's most frequently performed and beloved songs.

The central song of Berg's set is "Traumgekrönt" (A Crown of Dreams), a 1907 setting of Rainer Maria Rilke's vulnerable love poem. The central placement of "Traumgekrönt" in *Sieben frühe Lieder* reinforces Berg's sentimentality and romanticism as affected by his new muse, Ms. Nahowski. The technical aspects of this song reach a new level of finesse as Berg manipulates his motives through variations of transposition, registral change, diminution, intervallic alteration, and fragmentation.

"Im Zimmer" (In the Room), a light-hearted song about love and ecstasy, was written in 1905. Berg's musical setting of the Johannes Schlaf poem is comparatively straightforward melodically and harmonically, employing short, alternating motivic seeds to highlight joy, a crackling fire, and satiety.

"Liebesode" (Love's Ode), written in 1906 on a freeform poem by Otto Erich Hartleben about love's bliss, reveals a high degree of Wagnerian influence. The song's melody unfolds expansively in sweeping dramatic lines that contain broad intervallic leaps, depicting the wind, breath, and ecstatic dreams of Hartleben's poem. Berg expounds upon the opening four measure theme throughout the song, continuing to build momentum through shifting tonal centers and sequential plagal and imperfect cadences that lend an improvisatory feel to the composition.

⁸ Mark DeVoto, "Alban Berg and Creeping Chromaticism," in *Alban Berg: Historical and Analytical Perspectives*, eds. David Gable, Robert P. Morgan (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 1991), 63.

⁹ Lisa Lynch, *Alban Berg's Sieben frühe Lieder: An Analysis of Musical Structures and Selected Performances*. (DMA Dissertation: University of Connecticut Graduate School, 2014), 47.

Berg's final song from *Sieben frühe Lieder*, "Sommertage" (Summer Days), was born in 1908 from a Paul Hohenberg text that describes fleeting time, wandering, and nocturnal summer pleasures. In the context of the cycle, this song is characterized by a welcome *Schwungvoll* energy. Similar to "Nacht," this song marries piano and voice with seamless motivic interconnectedness, an influence of Schoenberg's tutelage. In this culminating piece, Berg strays further from tonality and "foreshadows the large-scale operatic sound of *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*."¹⁰

After a brief intermission, Storlie and Guy presented the American premiere¹¹ of four songs written by a successful but largely unknown Wallonian¹² composer named Marie Joseph Léon Désiré Pâque, who wrote 144 opuses between 1890 and 1939. Opus 48: *Sept Mélodies pour Chant et Piano* (1903-05) was composed during Pâque's early period while he was testing his unique compositional technique called *l'adjonction constante*,¹³ in which "the themes are repeated, transposed, augmented and diminished without ever being distorted or mutilated by fragmentation. They remain intact, just as they were at their first appearance or exposition. What varies is what accompanies them."¹⁴ Pâque firmly believed that he was deliberately fighting against the current of Romanticism and the echoes of the Classical period, yet in many regards these early songs do not differ much from his contemporaries. Pâque chose to supply his own poems for this cycle, creating songs that are not so much as subservient to the text as to the compositional practice he honed.

"Le Matin" (Morning), begins as the sun rises over a hopeful landscape in which "Tout respire la joie d'être!" (Everything breathes the joy of being!). Quietly reverent, long vocal lines are tethered by slowly shifting chords in a descending chromatic pattern that later optimistically ascends over swiftly

¹⁰ Lynch, 113.

¹¹ In her research, Storlie only found evidence for one performance of this song cycle, as performed in Brussels. No known recording exists, and Philippe Gilson, librarian at the Conservatoire Royale de Liège, surmises that the work was never again performed.

¹² Wallonia is the French-speaking, southern region of Belgium.

¹³ This compositional technique is described in "Mon esthétique musicale personnelle," Pâque's personal treaty--a summary of his philosophy and system for composition. Storlie was fortunate to sift through the handwritten pages of this and other notebooks, scores, and journal article submissions in 2016 at the Conservatoire Royale de Liège, Belgium which houses Pâque's permanent musical collection.

¹⁴ Désiré Pâque, "Notre esthétique," *La Revue musicale* 11, no. 101 (1930): 119-131.

rippling thirty-second note arpeggiations, culminating in the title phrase “C’est le matin!”

Pâque’s “Joie calme” (Peaceful Joys) captures a snapshot of an intimately tranquil moment shared between lovers who have chosen to escape to their “mignonne chambrette” (cute little room). A sudden shift from *Moderato Tranquillo* to tempo *Animato* catches the listener off guard as the singer quizzically ponders the “dualité bénie” (blessed duality) of art and love. These abrupt changes are example of Pâque’s *l’adjonction constante* technique.

“Espérance” (Hope) explores both the fleeting and comforting nature of hope and its various effects on the psyche through its constantly modulating tonal center. As the title suggests, the song’s mood is optimistic, brimming with horn calls and strong tonic/dominant relationships that elevate and exhilarate the listener through Pâque’s hopeful message.

The set’s final song, “Amour nocturne” (Love’s Nocturne) concerns a ghostly apparition who visits the narrator on a dreary, windy, and rainy night. The gloomy atmosphere is introduced through a one-measure musical motive in the minor mode that depicts the ennui of the scene. Text painting, grand interludes, ascending modulations, mode shifts, and alternating gestures of vocal lyricism and declamation swell and blossom toward a final moment of suspended glory as the character sings “Amour! Gloire à toi!” (Love! Glory to you!).

The evening culminated with Ned Rorem’s *Ariel*, a 1971 chamber work for piano, voice, and clarinet, featuring five songs based on the poems of Sylvia Plath. Rorem is revered for his precision in text setting, and has stated “All singers should forget about their voice 99% and think about the words 99%.”¹⁵ Cole Gagne stated in interviews that there were difficulties and controversy from the outset when Rorem chose Plath’s *Ariel* as subject matter, such as her widowed husband’s reticence to grant Rorem the rights to

¹⁵ Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, NJ, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 275.

the poetry and resistance from Rorem's friends.¹⁶ Rorem recalls, "1971 was the beginning of the women's movement. [Feminist activist] Robin Morgan...told me, 'Keep your hands off Plath, she belongs to our sisters.'"¹⁷ Nevertheless, Rorem ultimately chose to posthumously re-awaken Plath through the difficult poetry and music of *Ariel*.

"Words" is built from a four note pitch set (D, ↓Eb, ↑C, ↓A), providing the framework of the song for voice and clarinet. Plath's text addresses the weight of words which, like axes, have the power to hurt ("Axes, after whose stroke the wood rings"). Rorem mirrors this poetic meaning in the first violent downbeat, and intensifies the mood through numerous permutations of an angular sequence. The singer serves as character and the clarinet as alter-ego, a mainstay of the cycle. At times the alter-ego speaks where the voice cannot or will not, such as during the solo clarinet interlude between the song's A and B section. The poem and music take a turn towards healing and quiescence in the latter as the narrator gives up power to the fate of "fixed stars [that] Govern a life." Rorem's collaboration winds slowly down as all voices shift higher and higher and finally float away.

"Poppies in July" also assigns distinct pitch sets to both voice and clarinet, resulting in dissonant tensions that interpret the psyche of the narrator. Sick of being hurt and numbed by life, she is eager to escape. It is a known fact that, at this time, Plath was seeking relief from the painful reality of clinical depression coupled with news that her husband had been unfaithful. The poem is likely a reference to Plath's own well-documented struggle with depression and marital discord. Rorem set the poem with characteristic economy and conservative phrasing, carefully weighing the balance between the narrator (voice and piano) and the protagonist (clarinet). As the climactic tension mounts ("If I could bleed, or sleep! If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!"), the voice must fight against the highest register of strident and brassy clarinet playing, ultimately resulting in fatigue and surrender: "Dulling and stilling. But colorless. Colorless," set as a monotone drone.

¹⁶ Ibid, 277. It was surmised that Hughes was an abusive husband and, as executor of her will and estate, held up the publishing process of her final collection of poems entitled *Ariel*, written in the year leading up to Plath's suicide.

¹⁷ Brian McCurdy, *The Technical and Expressive Aspects of the Clarinet in the Chamber Music of Ned Rorem* (DMA Dissertation, George Mason University, 2013), 24.

“The Hanging Man,” is a frantic psychological depiction of powerlessness. The poem is short yet complex: three couplets with a rhyme scheme of AB CB AC, which Rorem cleverly treats with a melodic palindrome from the poem’s halfway point. The clarinet serves as a tyrannical entity, driving the action while the pianist’s jarring chord clusters and tremoli further illustrate poetic references such as “I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet.” Rorem ends the song with an introspective clarinet solo that revisits musical material relating to the “fixed stars” introduced earlier in the cycle at the end of “Words.”

“Poppies in October” conveys the subject of a bleeding woman, symbolized by the poppy flower, who is saved by an ambulance team. Elegant legato lines weave through the ensemble from beginning to end while seamless melodic handoffs are offset by a syncopated ostinato and unresolved jazz chords, as if to give voice to a character feeling out of place (“O my God, what am I that these late mouths should cry open in a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers.”). The song fades ethereally with a seven measure sustained F in the voice, supported by the shimmering complement of the clarinet and a delicately inverting piano ostinato.

“Lady Lazarus” is a controversial poem on the subject of life and death. Again, Plath’s poetry is made more poignant through exploration of her own experience, this time her problematic history of attempted suicide. The biblical reference is clear, referring to Lazarus for whom Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”¹⁸ Rorem attacks this subject material with an intense declamatory style that defies expectations of meter and melodic tradition. Short chromatic sequences initiate the contour of melody for both clarinet and voice, while the piano provides both stability in the form of a ground bass, as well as intricate figures that serve as emotional commentary. The song’s triumphant ending is a warning by Lady Lazarus: “Out of the ash I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air.” By now, the clarinet (alter-ego) has finally been silenced, leaving Plath the necessary aural space to assert her dominance in this powerful finale.

¹⁸ "John 11:25," *Biblehub.Com*, last modified 2017, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/john/11-25.htm>.

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Program

From *Op.67: Haugtussa*.....Edvard Grieg
 Elsk (1843-1907)
 Killingdans
 Ved Gjøtøle-Bekken

Sieben frühe Lieder.....Alban Berg
 (1885-1935)
 Nacht
 Schilflied
 Die Nachtigall
 Traumgekrönt
 Im Zimmer
 Liebesode
 Sommertage

INTERMISSION

From *Opus 48: Sept Mélodies pour Chant et Piano*.....Désiré Pâque
 (1867-1939)
 Le Matin
 Joie Calme
 Espérance
 Amour Nocturne

Ariel.....Ned Rorem
 (b. October 23, 1923)
 Words
 Poppies in July
 The Hanging Man
 Poppies in October
 Lady Lazarus

Featuring Dr. Amanda McCandless, Clarinet