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A master's recital in voice

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A MASTERS RECITAL IN VOICE

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

Lara Elizabeth Wasserman

University of Northern Iowa

May, 2018

This Abstract by: Lara Wasserman

Entitled: A Masters Recital in Voice

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

Date Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Recital Committee

Date Dr. Korey Barrett, Recital Committee Member

Date Dr. John Wiles, Recital Committee Member

Date Dr. Patrick Pease, Interim Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Performance by: Lara Wasserman

Entitled: A Masters Recital in Voice

Date of Recital: November 15, 2013

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

Date Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Recital Committee

Date Dr. Korey Barrett, Recital Committee Member

Date Dr. John Wiles, Recital Committee Member

Date Dr. Patrick Pease, Interim Dean, Graduate College

ABSTRACT

On November 15, 2013, Lara Wasserman, soprano, presented her graduate voice recital. In collaboration with Polina Khatsko on harpsichord and piano, and Megan Grey on cello, she performed works by Georg Frideric Handel, Richard Strauss, Claude Debussy, and Jake Heggie. The 53-minute program took place in Davis Hall in the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center. This abstract discusses musical and historical aspects of each selection in the order in which they were performed.

Handel, one of the world's best-known composers, is most famous for his large-scale works, including the oratorios *Theodora* and *Messiah* and his many operas, including *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, *Semele*, and *Alcina*. Although Handel is best known for these large-scale works, he composed in myriad genres in English, Latin, German, and Italian, including canticles, sonatas, hymns, Italian songs, cantatas, and more.

The recital opened with Handel's *O Numi eterni*, an Italian, secular concert cantata, first performed in Florence in 1706. Written for soprano and continuo, this cantata depicts the story of the rape of Lucretia. In the story from 509 BC, Tarquin's son, Sextus Tarquinius, raped Collatinus's wife Lucretia. As a result,

Lucretia kills herself. The cantata begins at the point in the story following Lucretia's rape. She begs the gods to avenge the crime and seek justice against Tarquin and all of Rome. Believing she has shamed her family, her community, and herself, she laments her circumstances and ultimately decides her own fate.

O Numi Eterni is appropriately sung by either soprano or mezzo-soprano and is accompanied by continuo: harpsichord and cello. The piece takes place in eight movements. Opening with a recitative in f-minor, Lucretia prays to the gods that they strike down Sextus Tarquinius. The recitative lays the foundation for the first *da capo* aria in which Lucretia laments her lost honor and her disloyalty. Movement three is another recitative; in contrast to the first, Lucretia plans her revenge in the afterlife. Characterized by its melismatic treatment, the following aria in g-minor portrays the angst and anger Lucretia is feeling. Movement five has an interesting musical form; it begins as a recitative, then moves to a section marked *Furioso*, ends in an *Adagio*, then continues attacca into an arioso that is movement six. Across these two movements, Lucretia decides that, because the gods will not punish her, she must punish herself. Movement seven, another recitative, is slow and steady, with musical rests in the vocal line that mirror Lucretia's own brokenness. She begs for forgiveness before beginning the eighth and final movement, an arioso. This

arioso starts with a melancholy, slow line filled with dissonances and leaps. Lucretia has a knife in her hand as she prepares to fulfill her fate. The mood changes drastically as she nears the end of her life. After a florid *Furioso* section, the knife completes its cruel task and the cantata ends with Lucretia's death.

The second set on the program was composed of four lieder by Richard Strauss. The first, "Die Nacht," is a tranquil poem by Hermann von Gilm zu Rosenegg. Born in 1812 in Innsbruck, Gilm zu Rosenegg was a learned lawyer in addition to a poet. His poetry, which is lyrical, melancholy, and sensitive, attracted the attention of Strauss, among other composers. "Die Nacht" is part of a set of poems that Gilm zu Rosenegg wrote called *Letzte Blätter*, all of which Strauss set to music after Gilm's death.

"Die Nacht" is distinguished by a gentle, yet forward-driving rhythmic motive that represents the night, which steps out of the forest and steals everything around her. Propulsive eighth-notes continue throughout the piece as the melodies, harmonies, and text continue to evolve. This piece starts in D-Major, but moves through the relative key of b-minor, in addition to C-Major and several other keys, before settling back into D-Major at the end of the piece. Through these key changes, led by the driving rhythm, we can hear the

trials and tribulations as the night steals the leaves from the trees, the sheaves from the fields, and the copper roof from the cathedral. The last words of the piece translate to, "Oh, I fear that the night will also steal you from me."

The second song in the set was "Amor," a florid and technically demanding song about a mischievous cupid from Strauss's famous "Brentano Lieder." This poem, written by Clemens Maria Wenzeslaus von Brentano, describes how cupid tricks a shepherdess. Throughout the piece, the piano and voice mimic their conversation, which musically spans nearly three octaves in an expressive language that includes sustained passages, trills, and coloratura. The demanding vocal line incorporates sustained notes, trills, triplets, coloratura, and a range of almost three octaves. Text-painting is apparent throughout the piece, as the listener can hear Cupid teasing and mocking the shepherdess, as well as the burning flames.

Following "Amor" was "Morgen!," the last in a set of four songs, Lieder Opus 27. The text for this piece was written by German poet John Henry Mackay. Strauss set "Morgen!" to music in 1894 as a wedding gift to for his wife, Pauline. This serene piece remains one of Strauss's best known and most widely-recorded works. The piano introduction is slow, melodic, and melancholy. It is marked "molto cantabile," or "very singingly" to set up for a perhaps surprising

vocal entrance; the vocal line uniquely does not begin nor end on the tonic. The piano and voice work together to portray the imagery of the poem. The listener hears the sun shining, the waves on the beach, and the silence of happiness. Rovi Staff of AllMusic.com eloquently states:

The poem, which blends tranquil, reassuring images of nature with deep confidence in love, inspired a natural, flowing melody of extraordinary beauty. While the atmosphere of tranquillity remains fundamentally undisturbed, the smoothly ascending movement of the melody suggests feelings of deep, boundless joy, yearning to express its immensity. Providing discrete harmonic accompaniment and gentle melodic support, the piano part beautifully complements the solo.¹

“Ich liebe dich” was the final piece of the set. This dramatic piece, with text by Detlev von Liliécron, is a proclamation of a love so strong that the narrator promises to love from the altar to the grave. The piece opens with a vocal line that mimics a trumpet, setting the stage for a grand proclamation of love. The extravagant and virtuosic piano postlude made it an excellent ending to the set.

Following the Strauss was a set of three songs by one of the master French writers of song, Claude Debussy. An Impressionist composer (though he

¹ Staff, R. (n.d.). Morgen ("Und morgen wird die Sonne... | Details. Retrieved December 05, 2017, from <https://www.allmusic.com/composition/morgen-und-morgen-wird-die-sonne-wieder-scheinen-song-for-voice-piano-or-orchestra-op-27-4-trv-170-4-mc0002480910>

apparently hated that categorization), Debussy paved the way for future composers by using the whole-tone scale, chromaticism, blurred tonality, and chord planing, among other hallmark techniques.

The first song in the set, "Green," is from Debussy's famous song cycle *Ariettes oubliées*. The poetry is by Paul Verlaine, a famous French poet of Debussy's time. Debussy composed this song cycle for Marie-Blanche Vasnier, a soprano with whom Debussy had an eight-year affair. Classified as one of his early works, *Ariette oubliées* remains one of his most frequently performed song cycles to this day. "Green" contains many qualities and characteristics that we associate with Debussy's early works, including whole-tone scales, tempo changes, and two against three rhythmic motives which symbolizes the juxtaposition between the calm and the storm.

The second piece in the set "Romance (l'âme évaporée)," is perhaps one of Debussy's most famous mélodies. The simple, but elegant piece in which Debussy set the words of poet Paul Bourget, is much more melodic than many of Debussy's other works. The music still exemplifies Debussy's identifiable style; however, the opening piano melody and the elegant vocal line are romantic and lush, making it quite popular and frequently performed.

The third and final piece in the Debussy set is a nice contrast with the first two. "Pantomime" is the story of the sad clown Pierrot, a character from the famous "Commedia dell'Arte." It is the first song in the set *Quatre chansons de jeunesse* with lyrics by the famous Paul Verlaine. This piece also features the musings of Pierrot, Cassandre, Clitandre, Harlequin, and Colombine, four of the characters from the "Commedia dell'Arte." Debussy sets this piece skillfully, as the music changes to fit each character and their actions. We hear hiccups as Pierrot empties his flask, represented by uneven rhythms; a tear run down Cassandre's face, represented by a long, descending line in the piano; and high, floating vocal lines to represent clouds as Colombine dreams.

The final set on the program was called *Natural Selection*, which composer Jake Heggie set for Nicolle Foland. The poet, Gini Savage, was Nicolle's sponsor while Nicolle was an artist at the Merola Opera Program in San Francisco. The idea behind "Natural Selection" was to move Nicolle out of her familiar "box." She grew up in Iowa with rather conservative parents and stated that her parents never really understood her love of music, and were not especially supportive of her career choices. In this story, Heggie and Savage reveal Nicolle's story through "Natural Selection," drawing on Darwin's notions of adaptation and change found in his Theory of Evolution.

The first piece, "Creation," acts as an introduction to Nicolle and her situation. She "expected more from the umbilicus," but kept following her dreams regardless of whether or not she had the support of her parents. Heggie utilizes whole tones throughout this song, and brings them back during other pieces in the set. In addition, the first and fifth song in the set build upon the same melodic and harmonic themes.

The second piece, "Animal Passion," was purported to push Nicolle out of her comfort zone. Heggie did not originally want to write a tango, but he has indicated that he ended up loving it. Savage said that the words were originally sparked by a bobcat sighting she had in the mountains; the first phrase in the piece is "Fierce as a bobcat's spring with startup speeds of sixty miles per hour." Using leaps in the vocal line, glissandi, and other tactics, the song is seductive, sexy, and blunt, which were all personal dimensions to Nicolle's experiences prior to that time. The cat motif that appears in this song and comes back in number four is based on Nicolle's cat-eyes; Savage says she always thought that Nicolle's eyes were very catlike.

Number three in this set, "Alas! Alack!" is a light, fun piece in which operatic themes and characters portrayed Nicolle's habit of falling for the "wrong" man. Two of the very unique characteristics of this specific song are the

references to other operas and Heggie's use of mimicking the styles of their respective composers. The "wrong man" theme continues in number four, "Indian Summer – Blue" in which Bluebeard represents Nicolle's ex-husband. Heggie utilizes silences in his pieces, as well as text-painting; on the words "I could doze away the days," where we hear Nicolle dozing through silences, a repeated note, and lazy-sounding triplets.

The final song in the set, "Joy Alone," concludes both the set and the program by expressing the beauty that exists in the world, with or without parental support and with or without a husband. The same piano and vocal motives that we heard in "Creation" return at the beginning of this final piece. It is a stunning song full of both joy and sadness, exemplified by realistic descriptions that create a beautiful portrait for the audience; Heggie uses diction, as well as melodic and harmonic text-painting to create a nature landscape, while Gini's text uses alliteration and description.

School of Music

University of Northern Iowa

presents

Lara Wasserman, Soprano
In a Graduate Recital

assisted by:

Polina Khatsko, piano & harpsichord
Megan Grey, cello

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

O numi eterni

O Numi eterni!
Gia superbo del mio affanno
Ma voi forse nel cielo
Il suol che preme
Ah! che ancor nell'abisso
Alla salma in fedel porga la pena
A voi, padre, consorte
Gia nel seno comincia

George Frideric Handel
(1685 – 1759)

Polina Khatsko, Harpsichord
Megan Grey, Cello

Die Nacht Op. 10 No. 3
Amor Op. 68 No. 5
Morgen Op. 27 No. 4
Ich liebe dich Op. 37 No. 2

Richard Strauss
(1864-1949)

Ariettes oubliées

Aquarelle I. Green L. 60 No. 5

Deux Romances

L'âme évaporée L. 78 No. 1

Quatre chansons de jeunesse

Pantomime L. 31 No. 2

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Natural Selection

1. Creation
2. Animal Passion
3. Alas! Alack!
4. Joy Alone

Jake Heggie
(b. 1961)

Davis Hall, at 6:00 P.M.

November 15, 2013