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Graduate Recital in Voice

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Korey Barrett, bass-baritone, presented his graduate voice recital on Thursday, April 19, 2001 at 6:00 p.m. in Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The recital was given in collaboration with pianist Nino Sanikidze and included works by Schubert, Liszt, Debussy and Rorem. This abstract discusses musical and historical features of the recital pieces.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) is a monumental figure in the evolution of the art song and the lieder presented on this recital represent his diversity of compositional styles, from strophic song to sectional through-composed song to dramatic monologue. These well-known lieder, presenting a wide range of emotions, serve as an appropriate opening to the recital.

The first piece in this set was "Prometheus," (1819) one of Schubert's most dramatic songs. Taken from Goethe, this is not an account of Prometheus's eternal punishment after offending the gods but rather an emotional tirade by Prometheus against them, disdaining them and proclaiming that his creation, mankind, will as well ("...dein nicht zu achten, wie ich!"). It is through-composed, consisting of several contrasting sections. The opening quasi-recitative consists of a powerful exclamation against the gods accompanied by forceful tremolos on the piano. The next section ("Ihr nährt kummerlich . . . ") is somewhat slower, portraying suppressed anger. Following this is another section of recitative, in which Prometheus recalls his battle against the Titans.

Crashing chords in the piano vividly illustrate boulders being hurled down by the treacherous giants.[1] Increasing anger occurs as the piece progresses, and chromatic movement in the vocal line and the piano part add to the tension ("Hat nicht mich zum Manne geschmeidet . . . "). Another softer episode follows, preparing the listener for the final climactic section where Prometheus triumphantly speaks of creating mankind. The piece ends on a single fortissimo chord, a powerful ending to a complex song.

Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* (1827), composed on texts of Wilhelm Müller, is one of the most famous representatives of the genre. "Frühlinsgtraum," eleventh in the cycle, paints a picture of stark contrasts. The protagonist of the cycle, a young man pondering his rejection in love while tracing a path in the frigid outdoors, is awaking from a dream of spring and love only to find cold reality around him. The music of this strophic piece shifts from a simple, charming major tonality (in a long, entirely diatonic passage which is rare in this cycle[2]) to a harsher minor mode to reflect this. Ultimately, the song ends on a sullen minor arpeggio that reflects the youth's resignation ("Wann halt ich mein Liebchen in Arm?"). "Der stürmische Morgen," number eighteen in the cycle, is a brief, violent depiction of a storm involving many vocal leaps and diminished chords that illustrate the weather and the emotions of the protagonist, both of which are very

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[1] Sergius Kagen, introductory notes to *200 Songs*, Vol. II, by Franz Schubert (New York: International Music Company, 1961), x.

[2] Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's* Winterreise (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 211.

tempestuous. Frustrated and angry, he finds a kindred spirit in the storm ("Das nenn ich einen Morgen so recht nach meinem Sinn!").

"An die Musik," with text by Schober, is perhaps one of the best-loved songs of Schubert. An ode to the art of music, it is a song of great simplicity and depth. Schubert "seems to have sought to reduce his utterance to the plainest and most essential state."[3] Originally in the key of D major, one that evokes simple beauty, it was performed in B-flat major. The simple reverence of Schober's tribute is mirrored in the modestly beautiful music. Consisting of two strophes, the vocal line is supported by an unassuming countermelody in the bass and graceful, pulsing chords above. The great affection many singers feel for this song is understandable after one hears its broad, expansive melody.

Goethe's 1774 "Ganymed" inspired Schubert to compose his beautifully evocative setting in 1817. The poem focuses on the mythological figure of Ganymede who, more than any other, represents the ideal of beautiful, virile youth.[4] In the traditional Greek myth, Zeus is so enamoured by the young Ganymede that he swoops down in the guise of an eagle and spirits him away to Olympus to serve as his personal cupbearer. While it is tempting for some to over-emphasize the homoerotic implications of the story, Goethe's interpretation of the tale focuses on Ganymede's point of view and

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[3] Richard Capell, *Schubert's Songs*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 66.

[4] Lawrence Kramer, *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 118.

the spiritual rapture he experiences by being lifted up to the heavens by a god. The song is an effective portrait of extreme ecstasy and opens in the key of A-flat, one that Schubert uses often to express "faith in the power of Nature to revive and renew"[5] (although the piece was performed in the transposition of E major). The opening section portrays nature and contains textual and pianistic references to breezes, birdcalls and the warmth of the sun. This soon gives way to a more agitated section that illustrates the impending ascension and the confusion of Ganymede. Repeated staccatto chords in the piano create a feeling of uneasiness. Agitation leads to excited anticipation and finally to calm images of floating upwards, represented by slowly rising pianissimo chords at the song's end.

The next set of songs on the recital also consisted of German lieder, this time by Franz Liszt (1811-1886). Liszt, a master of the keyboard, employs subtle colorings and shimmering accompanimental figures to paint charming, often delicate pictures in his songs. The first, "Im Rhein, im schönen Strome," (1841) is on a text by Heinrich Heine and has been set by other composers, most notably Robert Schumann in his *Dichterliebe.* The opening figures in the piano suggest the gently rolling waves of the Rhine. Heine's text talks of a man's memory of a painting of the Virgin Mary in a Cologne cathedral and how it reminds him of his beloved. The overall character of the piece is gentle and reverent, and the music is especially suggestive of the deep, peaceful Rhine as the man

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[5] Susan Youens, *Schubert's Poets and the Making of Lieder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 196.

describes the face on the painting; gentle, dark arpeggiated chords precede "Die Augen, die Lippen" and "die Wängelein." The piece ends by recalling the opening figure of the rolling waves.

"Es muss ein Wunderbares sein" (1839) is one of Liszt's most well-known songs. Like Schubert's "An die Musik," its beauty lies in its elegant simplicity. It is a brief description of what a wonderful thing true love between two people is and has a simple yet lovely chordal accompaniment.

The final song in this set was the colorful ballad "Die drei Zigeuner" (1860). Describing the narrator's encounter with a party of three very different gypsies, its music is full of Hungarian gypsy flavor, something Liszt often enjoyed portraying. In style, the song is especially akin to Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies. Nikolaus Lenau, author of the text, was like Liszt a Hungarian expatriate who wrote in a foreign language of nostalgic memories of his homeland.[6] The song contains many special images, from the opening cadenza-like section reminiscent of a solo gypsy violin to the proud rhythm of the czardas to the dreamy tremolos on the piano suggesting sleep and dreams to the wispy picture of smoke curling up from the end of a pipe. As the narrator's encounter with the gypsies ends, he sees them fade into the distance as the opening motive in the voice returns and dies out.

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[6] Derek Watson, *Liszt* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 304-5.

Following a brief intermission, a set of *Trois Mélodies* by Claude Debussy (1862-1918) began the second half of the recital. Set to the poetry of Paul Verlaine from his volume *Sagesse*, they are full of Debussy's unique varieties of color and texture. The first of the three *mélodies*, "La mer est plus belle," is dedicated to Ernest Chausson and has an accompanimental texture that is heavier than most found in Debussy's other songs, perhaps to honor Chausson's own musical style. The accompaniment depicts the rising and falling waves of the ocean and maintains a fairly consistent rhythm and texture throughout the piece. Verlaine's poetry is full of interesting contradictions molded into a unified idea: the sea is described as a gentle yet terrible force of nature; in the words of forgiveness the rumbling wrath of the ocean can still be heard ("J'entends ses pardons / Gronder ses courroux"); the lullaby mentioned at the beginning comes in the form of a death-rattle ("Berceuse de râles"); and the sea brings death without suffering ("Vous sans esperance, / Mourez sans souffrance"). The short lines of poetry make these conflicting elements sharper by bringing them closer together.[7] As is usual in Debussy, tonal implications shift frequently. The changing colors of the piano's accompanimental waves are a reflection of Verlaine's description of the colors of the sea's breezes: "bleus, roses, gris et verts . . . ."

"Le son du cor s'afflige" is the middle piece of the triptych. This is a song of great lament and the dark timbre of the horn is suggested throughout, from the open fifths

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[7] Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 120-1.

in the treble at the outset to the open fifths in the bass at the conclusion. The sparse accompaniment creates a desolate, mournful atmosphere that Verlaine's poetry demands ("Parmi la bise errant encourts abois / L'ame du loup pleure dans cette voix . . . "). The song is especially sorrowful and intriguing, its sparseness in sharp contrast with the lusher world of the previous piece.

The final song, "L'échelonnement des haies," is the perfect, light-hearted conclusion to this set. The buoyant, spirited accompaniment paints a happy picture of the countryside. The poetry speaks of an "echelon of hedges frothing into the infinite," a vivid image that sets an otherworldly tone for the rest of the piece. Here in this hazy Sunday are agile colts, soft white sheep, and a sky like milk, all wrapped up in Verlaine's foamy palette of language. Throughout the piece different modes are used in rapid succession, a hallmark of Debussy, creating a great variety of shifting colors; the central image of the piece, "De grandes brebis aussi / Douce que leur laine blanche," employs a whole-tone scale. And very interestingly, Debussy arranges tonal centers throughout the song to produce an *échelonnement* of keys. After an introductory section, Debussy proceeds by perfect fifths through ten of the twelve degrees of the circle of fifths, an expression of both "des haies" and their motion "À l'infini."[8]

The final work on the recital was *Flight for Heaven: A Cycle of Robert Herrick Songs* (1950) for bass and piano by Ned Rorem (b.1923). Begun en route to Morocco

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[8] Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 127-8.

from Paris, and completed in Fez in 1950 in less than a month, this was Rorem's first song cycle. The title is taken from the last line of the first song, "To Music, to Becalm His Fever." Rorem thought the poems of Herrick he selected contained words that "seem[ed] born for singing."[9] Interestingly, most of the poems contain somewhat archaic or uncommon words that present a challenge when singing to a modern audience.

Robert Herrick did not write these poems as a cycle; rather, they were chosen by Rorem from Herrick's entire output and assembled into a cohesive unit. This may seem a bit unnatural compared to great song cycles of the past such as *Winterreise* or *Frauenliebe und Leben*, whose poetry was conceived of as a unified whole. Rorem addresses this in his writings: " . . . if [the composer] plans a connected series of songs, he must find a *group* of texts, sometimes by various authors from different centuries, which can be joined in an inevitable-seeming sequence."[10] The poems of *Flight for Heaven* do form a loose progression; the implied order of events involves more of a psychological and spiritual progression than a physical one. One may interpret the cycle to follow this thrust: the narrator speaks of his love for Julia and of his feelings and memories following her death, and of his spiritual rebirth. Since little is written on this cycle, this discussion will attempt to examine the meaning behind the choices of poetry and music.

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[9] Ned Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop: A Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 479.
[10] Ibid., 479.

The first movement, "To Music, to Becalm His Fever," begins the cycle with ethereal-sounding arpeggios in the piano; this floating filmy color sets the tone for the entire work and informs the audience that this is not a cycle of earthly dimensions, but one of loftier, more introspective ideas. This feeling pervades the movement (and the entire work); it is filled with extended tertian harmonies, specifically ninth and eleventh chords, which reinforce the ambiguous otherworldly quality of the piece. The eighth-note motion in the piano is fairly constant and creates a seamless texture. The longest song in the cycle, it is a tribute to music along the lines of "An die Musik" and is not as much a part of the story of the cycle as it is a mood-setting prologue. The protagonist hopes music will alleviate his ills.

"Cherry-ripe," the second movement, begins the main thrust of the cycle. It is the first of several short movements. Here the narrator sells his cherries in the square and refers to the beauty of his Julia's lips. It is a simple charming song that, if thought of as an exposition of sorts, paints a picture of the narrator and Julia and their idyllic life together.

"Upon Julia's Clothes" is a quick, spirited exclamation singing the praises of Julia. Like "Cherry-ripe" it has a youthful simplicity that will contrast with later sections of the cycle. "To Daisies, not to Shut so Soon" continues the rapid pace of the previous song and implores the shepherd's star to "stay but till my Julia close / Her life begetting eye, / And let the whole world then dispose / Itself to live or die." The extremely fast

tempo may signify anxiety and even panic on the part of the narrator; Julia's death may be imminent here.

The next two very brief pieces are elegies, in this context presumably on the death of Julia. The first, "Epitaph upon a Child that Died," and the second, "Another Epitaph," are quite similar. They are not mournful laments but rather peaceful remembrances. The first evokes nostalgic pain while the second creates an innocent hymn-like atmosphere. The simple chordal and often two-voiced piano part is in sharp contrast to the previous movements and their denser sixteenth note accompaniments. These epitaphs, and thus the death of Julia, mark the center of the cycle and a turning point in the life of the narrator.

Movement seven, "To the Willow-tree," returns to the nostalgic feeling of "Cherry-ripe," as the narrator speaks to a willow tree and recalls how he and his beloved (though unnamed, must here obviously be Julia), both lovesick, sat beneath its shade. As with so many of the other movements, ninth and eleventh chords are predominant and create a hazy atmosphere. The setting of the poem is truly bittersweet through the use of effective harmonies; Rorem has perfectly captured the melancholy of the narrator's words.

"Comfort to a Youth that had lost his Love," despite its title, sounds more aching than comforting with painfully drooping vocal lines and widely-spaced, mournful chords. The piece follows the contours of an emotional, dynamic and textural arch; the piano

states the initial motive, which is then echoed in an unaccompanied voice part. As the song progresses, the texture thickens and the urgency increases. As emotions subside, the texture thins again and the piece closes with a statement again of the opening piano figure, slightly altered. Here the narrator seems to be addressing himself, trying to comfort himself after the death of Julia.

The ninth movement is for solo piano and recalls the piano figures from the first song, this time in a new key. The movement is a fantasia-like piece that serves as an interlude before the final song. It provides an emotional respite from the turmoil surrounding the death of Julia. It may also personify the memory of Julia and the narrator's coming to terms with her passing; the ethereal quality of the music creates a calm and relaxed atmosphere. The music conjures up the serenity that comes with the acceptance of and moving forward from the death of a loved one.

Like the first movement, the final one is somewhat separate from the story of the narrator and Julia. "To Anthea, who may Command him Anything" introduces a new person into the cycle. Like Julia, Anthea has completely enraptured the narrator. His praise of her in this movement may symbolize a moving on from the death of Julia. Viewed another may, Anthea may represent something larger than life and this movement may mirror the first in its homage to music; these two longer songs may be meant to serve as bookends for the central songs, creating a very specific dramatic and musical overall shape. As in the other movements, extended tertian harmonies are

common. A piano postlude concludes the movement and brings the cycle to a quiet, restful close.

This recital contained works of very diverse styles and presented a broad array of emotions from divine love to earthly despair, from supreme ecstasy to simple content-ment. The first half of the recital consisted of works from the traditional canon of German lieder, while the second half of the recital contained music of a more impressionistic nature; this music of Debussy and Rorem has much in common in terms of color and atmosphere. All the music consisted of skillful and beautiful settings of a wide variety of poetry.

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The University of Northern Iowa School of Music presents

Korey J. Barrett, bass-baritone

and

Nino Sanikidze, piano

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Thursday, April 19, 2001
6:00 p.m.
Davis Hall
Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center

From the studio of Dr. Jean McDonald

In partial fulfillment of a
Master of Music degree in vocal performance

Program

Prometheus . . . . . Franz Schubert
Der stürmische Morgen (1797-1828)
Frühlingstraum
An die Musik
Ganymed

Im Rhein, im schönen Strome . . . . . Franz Liszt
Es muss ein Wunderbares sein (1811-1886)
Die drei Zigeuner

Intermission

Trois Mélodies . . . . . Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

La mer est plus belle
Le son du cor s'afflige
L'échelonnement des haies

Flight for Heaven . . . . . Ned Rorem
(b. 1923)

I. To music, to becalm his Fever
II. Cherry-ripe
III. Upon Julia's Clothes
IV. To Daisies, not to shut so Soon
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VI. Another Epitaph
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IX.
X. To Anthea, who may command him Anything