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A SUPPORTING DOCUMENT FOR A GRADUATE RECITAL

Presented to
Eastern Washington University
Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Music in Vocal Performance

By
Noree Michelle Dolphay
Winter 2014

Recital Document of Noree Michelle Dolphay Approved By:

_____ Date _____

Dr. Karen Noble, Graduate Committee Chair

_____ Date _____

Steven Mortier, Graduate Committee Member

_____ Date _____

Dr. Anthony Flinn, Graduate Committee Member

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Introduction

The graduate recital of Noree Johnson¹ was given on April 23, 2011. The program was designed to demonstrate knowledge and skill in a variety of languages and compositional style periods, as well as character interpretations and styles of singing. The program was also intended to demonstrate a level of singing above the capabilities of most undergraduate students. This advanced level is consistent with both the physical maturity of the instrument (i.e. voice) and the musical and academic knowledge obtained at the graduate level.

This paper will explore the historical and musicological background needed for performing such a program. It will also give an overview of the various technical and interpretive challenges presented by the pieces listed.

Program choices

The *lieder* of Richard Strauss demonstrated the Romantic style period of the late nineteenth century and the German language. Five Songs for Voice and Piano, op. 32 was chosen because of the beautiful poetry, the high and therefore difficult tessitura (the pitch range within which most of the notes lie), the complex chords, the luscious tonalities, and the wandering key centers. The pianist accompanying Ms. Johnson was David Brewster. He was chosen primarily for his skill and musicality, but also in part for his large hand span, needed to accommodate the Strauss set. This particular set was also chosen because most of Strauss's *lieder* are generally missing from students' repertoire and awareness.

¹ Between the date of the recital and the writing of the document, Noree Johnson got married and became Noree Dolphay. The singer will be referred to as Ms. Johnson, since that was her name at the time.

Ms. Johnson had never heard more than the few most popular Strauss *lieder*, so she decided to include a piece of essentially new music with no prior influence.

Selections from the final scene of Henry Purcell's short opera *Dido and Aeneas* demonstrated the English language and the Baroque style period. Two sets of recitative and aria were chosen. One of the arias was moved from the beginning of the opera to the end in the style of a *pastiche* performance. Like much of the program, these pieces were chosen out of sentimental value to the singer: years earlier they had inspired her to devote her life to singing and the study of the voice. They also showcased Ms. Johnson's ability to bring deep expression into relatively simple music.

Francis Poulenc's *Airs chantés* demonstrated the French language and the twentieth century style period. Ms. Johnson's affinity for all of Poulenc's *mélodies* and *chansons* dictated that some of his work must appear on her program. These songs display the singer's ability to maintain rhythm and pitch accuracy while the piano and voice work in near opposition to create a single effect. These four short songs also brought lightness and joy into an otherwise heavy program.

The three Italian arias were from the posthumously named *bel canto* era of Italian opera, during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. These three arias were chosen because they had inspired Ms. Johnson in her career path. "Casta Diva" and "Caro nome" had inspired her to become a singer in the first place, and "Una voce poco fa" challenged her to pursue her Master's degree. If she could execute them, these three arias represented "Arrival" at a new level of musical, vocal, and personal achievement for the singer.

Preparing to sing the program as a whole

As with any piece not in the singer's vernacular language, the first order of business is to find or commission a good translation and commit it to memory. A singer has the honor and duty to communicate correctly both the music and, equally important, the text. Her two masters are the composer and the poet. She must then learn the pronunciation of all languages presented to her, and she must learn the rules of syllabification (decisions related to dividing words into syllables and pairing them with notes). A basic understanding of acting and affectation are also necessary.

The second duty of any good musician is to listen to as many recordings as possible of the pieces. With the availability of YouTube and iTunes, along with the resources provided by Summit and Interlibrary Loan, there is no excuse for any musician not to listen to multiple interpretations of each piece. There is great benefit to coming to a piece with fresh ears and learning it with no outside influence, but at some point the professionals ought to be consulted. The musician needs to listen and (in the case of an opera) watch intently, both with and without the score in hand. She must take clear notes in the score and elsewhere on ideas and techniques gleaned from the recordings.

YouTube now provides a performer with an excellent resource not seen before this decade: the opportunity to hear both professionals and a great number of amateurs present a piece of music. Not only can a singer now be informed on how professionals interpret their pieces, they can see the major pitfalls facing other students and attempt to avoid them. Even though a good musician will do her own research into why one idea is correct and another is incorrect, it can be assumed that the commonalities in professional

performances are correct performance practice. The most interesting research begins when professional singers perform their pieces differently from each other.

Chapter 1

Richard Strauss: Five Songs for Voice and Piano,

op. 32. 1896

Composer biography

Richard Strauss was born in Munich, Germany in June of 1864. He was the son of a horn player named Franz Strauss. Strauss's mother began his musical education at the piano at an early age, and at the age of six he wrote his first song. His musical education continued through to adulthood. In 1894 he married the lyric soprano Pauline de Ahna.² He wrote *lieder* and operatic roles either specifically for his wife or inspired by her presence. In fact, every one of his operas has at least one major soprano role. Frau Strauss performed with her husband on many recitals, and after her retirement a young singer named Elisabeth Schumann took on the role as his chief recitalist.³

² Franz Trenner and Simon Gertrude, "Richard Strauss and Munich," *Tempo* New Series no. 69, Richard Strauss 1864-1964 (Summer 1964): 6-8.

³ Alan Jefferson, *The Lieder of Richard Strauss* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1971), 14-19.

Historical significance

"*Lieder*" literally translates to "songs," but the term refers specifically to songs in the German language for solo voice and piano from the Romantic style period. Song recitals were both popular and lucrative throughout the nineteenth century, and *lieder* featured heavily in German speaking countries and throughout Europe.⁴ The most famous *lieder* composers include Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and Felix Mendelssohn. Indeed, nearly every German or Austrian composer of the nineteenth century composed some *lieder*. These songs were generally composed in sets or opuses like the one from Ms. Johnson's recital, or in song cycles. A song cycle contained any number of songs, setting to music a set of poetry by one author with a single character or storyline.

As one of the last major *lieder* composers, Strauss expanded the genre to occasionally use orchestra as the accompaniment instead of piano. He continued to compose *lieder* well into the twentieth century. Strauss was fond of orchestrating his own songs that he had originally composed for piano accompaniment, as well as allowing others to orchestrate his songs.⁵ Strauss's *lieder* in particular remained in demand past his death, when the *Four Last Songs* were first performed.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 16-19.

⁵ Ibid., 15, 56-7.

⁶ Willi Schuh and Max Loewenthal, "Richard Strauss's 'Four Last Songs,'" *Tempo* New Series no. 15 (Spring 1915): 25.

How this piece came to be written:

Though more famous for his operas and symphonic poems, Strauss wrote 205 *lieder* throughout his life.⁷ Elena Gerhardt, a singer who gave recitals of Strauss's music for forty years, said that he wrote *lieder* in a unique style, and this author agrees wholeheartedly.⁸ While the great *lieder* composers all have their own fingerprint, Strauss's *lieder* seem to come from a different place entirely.⁹ Part of the reason for his uniqueness is that he carried the genre into the twentieth century, and most other *lieder* come from the early to mid-nineteenth century. His songs therefore explore tone colors and depth of texture from a new generation, while remaining somewhat old fashioned at the time he composed them. Having been inspired by Wagner in addition to the Italian *bel canto* school, Strauss's vocal pieces require much more strength and endurance from the performer than do the lighter lines of Schubert.¹⁰ Opus 32 was composed almost too late to count as part of the Romantic style period; it is the songs' old-fashioned quality and Strauss's position in musical history that allowed them to fill that portion of the recital program.

Rather than choosing poems from a single poet, Strauss found five poems from three sources that combine to tell a story of love and devotion. Karl Henckell (1864-1929) penned "Ich trage meine Minne," "Liebeshymnus," and "O süßer Mai!" Detlev von Liliencron (1844-1909) wrote "Sehnsucht." "Himmelsboten" is from *Des Knaben*

⁷ Jefferson, *ix*.

⁸ Elena Gerhardt, "Strauss and His *Lieder*," *Tempo* New Series no. 12 Richard Strauss Number (Summer 1949): 10.

⁹ Jefferson, 56.

¹⁰ Trenner, 9.

Wunderhorn, which is a collection of German poems and fairy tales.¹¹ The narrator of all five poems is male, and he is speaking about his beloved. She is probably his betrothed, as he speaks of loving her for all eternity, yet they are not married because in the fifth poem he speaks of lying awake thinking of her in her bed away from him.¹²

Five Songs for Voice and Piano, op. 32 was composed in 1896, which was a busy time for Strauss. His famous tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* had its premiere that year, and one article has him conducting concerts in Brussels, Liège, Moscow, and Düsseldorf.¹³ In Strauss's hometown of Munich he was responsible for the Musical Academy concerts from 1894-1896.¹⁴

Relevant analysis and text setting

The following analysis of these five *lieder* will examine: form, Strauss's treatment of the poetry, and the music as it relates to the text. While a chord-by-chord, in-depth musical analysis would be possible, this author believes that such a study would be futile and irrelevant to the average singer, not to mention beyond the scope of this paper. The piano part has many colors, modulations, and complex harmonies intended to create a lush landscape over which the vocal melody floats. The singer must look at the music and understand generally where she fits in the puzzle, and she must be a first-rate musician in order to stay on pitch and in rhythm. Getting caught up in each note or each chord would be to miss the forest for the trees.

¹¹ Mary Beth Stein, "Brentano, Clemmens," *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, ed. Jack Zipes (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 62.

¹² Stanley Appelbaum, English Translation of *Fünf Lieder*, Op. 32 by Richard Strauss, In *Fifty-seven Songs for Voice and Piano* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 250.

¹³ *The Musical Times*, "Richard Strauss," 44 no. 791 (Jan. 1, 1903): 12.

¹⁴ Trenner, 9

The first observations the singer and pianist must make together are to notice Strauss's detail-oriented compositional style. Where previous generations would trust the singer to know how to sing an ornament or crescendo a line, Strauss leaves nothing to chance. He notates each ornament with precise rhythms. Instead of indicating staccato articulation, he inserts sixteenth rests between the notes with a slur over the line to signify that the phrase has not ended at the rest. His phrasing and dynamics are extremely specific. The singer should notice, however, that Strauss has indicated these things in order to ensure a speech-like delivery. Speaking the poetry "in time," or speaking it in the rhythm Strauss wrote, sounds close to a perfect recitation. The singer must always take note of the words that the composer emphasizes in order to indicate the more subtle meanings of the text.

Strauss was an early member of a generation of composers who took very little care to make the music singable or playable. Rather, his inspiration seems to have come from precise sounds in specific keys. He makes no effort to put the songs in easy keys for reading or playing, he cares very little that the tessitura of the songs is so high as to be nearly ridiculous, and he leaves pianists with smaller hands completely out of consideration. The songs are exactly Strauss's vision, regardless of what may or may not be possible to achieve.

"Ich trage meine Minne" (I carry my love)¹⁵

The poem is sixteen lines in four stanzas, and the song is in ABA format (also known as ternary form). At the repeat of the A section Strauss restates the first eight lines

¹⁵ The poetry of this first song and all following texts may be found in Appendix I.

of poetry in nearly identical symmetry, though the restatement is quieter and Strauss elongates the ending. While the A section is stable and in a major tonality, the B section is tumultuous. We hear mostly minor tonalities, but he never lands on a key until he modulates back around to his original D-flat major at the restatement of the A section.

This text is a letter to the poet's beloved. We are introduced to the pair as he tells her that he carries her love like a burden. He is happy with his burden, but the text implies that his love is sometimes painful, as is every passionate romance. The A section is calm and pastoral as he tells all about his love. We can imagine that they are picnicking in an open field of grass and flowers. In the B section the poet expresses the fears all who are in love have, but he comes back around to her love. He says that if all the world were evil, if all manner of awful things happened, even yet her love would shine through like a bright light.

"Sehnsucht" (Longing)

This song and the three following it are all through-composed, which means each stanza of text has new music, though melodic or rhythmic themes may be repeated. This poem has sixteen lines in four stanzas. The most immediately interesting feature of this song is the thirty-second note runs in the piano part. This is a perfect example of Strauss's attention to detail in his composition: usually one would simply see some kind of rolled chord, maybe with specific instructions. But Strauss's notation tells the pianist the exact speed that the chord should be rolled. The effect is beautiful, smooth, and mysterious.

The first few simple lines of the voice are overshadowed by the piano; the effect is similar to a movie soundtrack against a subdued monologue. The two instruments together gradually build over three stanzas to a tempestuous climax. In the peaceful fourth stanza the sun has come out, the clouds have cleared, and the longing has been satisfied.

The musical setting of this poetry consists of long, arching, vocal phrases against the rhythmic piano part. The title of the poem (“Longing”) does not appear in the poetry but is heavily present in the melody. Each sung note very much longs for the next, and it stretches through the slow, legato phrases. The narrator is on a journey searching for his beloved. Stanzas two, three, and four end with, “*Ich liebe dich!*” or “I love you!” but all three statements use different affectations.

“Liebeshymnus” (Hymn of Love)

This poem consists of twelve lines arranged in three stanzas. Because of the title the first thing a musician should notice is how or if the song resembles a hymn. Hymns are strophic and homophonic. “Strophic” refers to the verses. “Homophonic” means that the voices on different melodies sing together in the same rhythm. The song is, as mentioned, through-composed in form and therefore not melodically strophic, though the rhythm in all three stanzas is very similar which gives the subtle feeling of having verses. Since there is only one voice part, we look to the piano for homophony. The left hand follows the rhythm of the voice in two short phrases. The right hand could be considered homophonic in its own right because it plays huge four- and five-note chords in steady eighth notes throughout the song.

The poem is much like an ode. The narrator speaks not to his beloved directly, but in an ode to love and to being in love. He blesses the day she was born, and blesses the day he met her. Characteristic of its genre, the poetry combines love with nature, comparing the beloved's glance to the heavens opening and the sun shining down.

This is the weakest of the five songs: the vocal melody is unappealing and the text is saccharine. It pounds away with no musical or rhythmic interest. The tessitura is unreasonably high, and the music calls for the strength of a Wagnerian soprano. Alas, there is no way to make it sweet. Possibly the solution would be to sing the song in a lower key or specify that only tenors, with their ability to mix registrations, sing the song in the future. This singer used the strength she had available to her and sang the song to the best of her ability. Meanwhile, she learned a lesson in humility regarding repertoire choices: singers should pay attention to their voice types and not assume that all songs may be sung by all singers.

“O süßer Mai!” (Oh, Sweet May!)

This poem consists of twelve lines arranged in two stanzas. Musically, it is exciting. Sixteenth notes run quickly around the piano evoking the life and movement of spring. It suggests a babbling brook, squirrels chasing each other up a tree, or the breeze racing through the flowers: the scene is set. Strauss's key signature is A major, but this is just a formality. Accidentals appear within three measures. Both the vocal and piano parts subtly but consistently shift tonalities throughout the song, though they do circle back to A-major at the end. The melodies are alive and the chromatic changes move subtly and smoothly, without any jarring modulations.

This text is set with breathless energy. The tessitura does not greatly differ from “Liebeshymnus,” but the vocal line is so light and nimble that the singer can sail through the high notes. Gone is the weight of the previous song. This melody soars; it seems to pour out of the singer. She has no time to think, just to sing and to fly through the poetry. The poem is an ode to the escape from winter and to the month of May. The narrator enumerates several attributes of this beautiful month. In the end, the beloved is compared to the month of May in all its aspects.

“Himmelsboten” (Heavenly Messengers)

There is no mistaking that Strauss saves the best poem for last. It is also the longest, consisting of twenty-four lines in six stanzas. The text in this song needs explaining for those not familiar with all of the Classical Greek imagery.¹⁶ Phoebus is Apollo, specifically in his sun god role. In this poem he is ready for dawn’s approach. The sun’s steeds are harnessed to the chariot, reins in hand. Lucifer is Venus, the morning star. He is already in the sky, the forerunner to dawn, and he has brought the morning dew with him. The narrator has been awake all night thinking of his beloved. He sees that dawn is about to break, and calls on these “heavenly messengers” along with the rays of sun to creep in her window and gently awaken her.

The music is the purest form of through-composition, with no repeated themes and no noticeable form. The music evolves and changes with the text, many lines of which get an almost literal piece of word painting. Phoebus’ horses can be heard anxiously pawing at the ground. When the clouds part the piano sweeps up. The dew falls

¹⁶ The text of this song may be found on page 65.

to the ground with a cascade of descending staccato sixteenth notes. The vocal line savors each word, especially in the last two lines of the song:

küßt ihr für mich den roten Mund,	Kiss her red lips for me,
und wenn sie's lied't, die Brüstlein	And, if she allows it, her round breasts.
rund.	

He savors the kiss of her “roten Mund,” and the trill in the piano could be the charming end of the piece. But he chances one last line: “und wenn sie's lied't,” is slyly inserted and the piano responds in the affirmative, as though Tinkerbell were replying. Strauss gives the singer two whole measures to thoroughly savor the thought of kissing his beloved's round breasts, and the melody ascends in delight.

Vocal and technical challenges

Performance practice in art song allows singers to perform a piece of music with a clearly opposite-gender narrator so long as the singer can appropriately determine who she is in the piece. One option would be choosing to sing as the beloved recounting the poetry she heard from her suitor. She could also choose to take on the male character, as an opera singer would sing a pants role.

A significant challenge is the high tessitura of the five songs. Certainly one can see in trying to perform these songs that a bigger, heavier, Wagnerian voice would be appropriate. In listening to recordings of the recital, this author wishes that she had used more strength and less finesse. The light, free production useful in the Poulenc *chansons* did not fit the Strauss *lieder*. The tone came out straight, and flat in pitch. It was full of tongue tension and constriction. More strength would have opened up the voice and let it bloom. The piano would have had to play louder to balance, but that would have been

manageable for Mr. Brewster. “O süßer Mai!” was the one exception, with strong vibrato and movement through the phrasing. The singer’s fear was that more strength and power would cause the round warmth of the tone to disappear, but in reality the strength would have allowed the voice to be freer.

Chapter 2

Henry Purcell: *Dido and Aeneas*, Z.626, 1688 or 1689

Composer biography

Henry Purcell was probably born on September 10, 1659. While there is no existing baptismal certificate, his tombstone and an inscription on a frontpiece of music indicate the year he was born. An inscription on another piece of music confirms the date in September as probably his birthday. Purcell was a choirboy at the Chapel Royal in London. Church records indicate his voice changed in 1673, and at that time he continued working for the Church¹⁷ in the capacity of a keeper of instruments. During that time he received his musical and compositional education from the adult musicians in the employ of the Church.

Throughout his young adulthood Purcell held various positions at the Church, including violin composer and organ tuner. It is likely that the Church gave him whatever title was available as he matured. In 1679 Purcell became the permanent organist of

¹⁷ The Church, with a capital “C” indicates, not a specific location, but the organization as a whole. It is likely that Purcell worked at various church buildings around London.

Westminster Abbey, succeeding his teacher John Blow. Purcell also continued to compose for the Church and the court.¹⁸

Purcell composed some incidental music before *Dido and Aeneas*, specifically for *Theodosius* in 1680 and *A Fool's Preferment* in 1688.¹⁹ Ellen T. Harris writes, "In the nine years before *Dido* Purcell composed incidental music for seven plays. In the six years following *Dido* he wrote incidental music for thirty-five plays and for five dramatic operas [or semi-operas]."²⁰ After the opera's success both he and the public recognized his talent for theatre music.

Historical significance

Opera was generally not welcome in late seventeenth-century England. One contemporary librettist wrote, "Experience hath taught us that our English genius will not relish that perpetual singing."²¹ While some Italian operas were fairly well received, the land of Shakespeare preferred the spoken word. Understanding that context deepens one's appreciation for *Dido and Aeneas*' lasting success. While it is a fully-sung entertainment, the vocal writing is declamatory and there is a great deal of recitative, in which the singer moves through the music quickly as though she were speaking on pitch. The music is best performed when the singer places the most importance on emotional expression and clear delivery.

¹⁸ Mark Humphreys, "Purcell," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 20:604-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 613.

²⁰ Ellen T. Harris, *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1987), 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Court masques were the popular entertainment for the wealthy at that time. These elaborate productions contained singing, dancing and acting with elaborate costumes and set design. Masques required incidental music for the dances and the songs. This music occurred in plays where music might occur in real life: religious or ritual scenes, drinking songs, and lullabies all needed composition.²² The first professional performance of *Dido and Aeneas* that we know of was in a masque in 1700, eleven years after its premiere at a girls' school. The scenes of the opera were broken up and inserted in between scenes of Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure*.²³

How this piece came to be written

Josias Priest was master of a girls' school at Chelsea. He was also a professional choreographer, well known in England's theatrical community. It seems to have been his idea to stage an opera at the school, and one with plenty of dances. Nahum Tate had written a libretto based on Virgil's ancient *Aeneid*, and Purcell either adapted it for his own use or worked with Tate to adapt it. Tate had already written a play called *Brutus of Alba* that was loosely based on the same story, but the new libretto stayed closer to Virgil's original plot and characters. Purcell was young at the time, and had written only a few pieces of theatrical music.²⁴ He and Tate set about to write and stage an opera, which, again, was an unconventional endeavor at the time.

²² Humphreys, 614.

²³ Harris, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 20.

Text setting and score issues

The greatest challenge in performing all or part of *Dido and Aeneas* is figuring out which score to use and how much to scrutinize each note. The problem is that there is no manuscript score; indeed the earliest surviving score dates from 1775. We have librettos and textbooks from 1689, 1700, 1774, and 1787, but they match neither each other nor any existing score.²⁵ Curtis Price's critical score is an excellent place to start and has many merits, the greatest of these being his explanations of choices.

The first two known performances were opposites of one another. The first performance went straight through the whole opera using minimal set and costumes, amateur performers, and a small audience. The second performance saw the acts of the opera broken apart and probably used grand costumes and sets, professional performers, and a large audience. Because we know the opera was adapted early on for different uses, we therefore can assume that it would be appropriate to adapt it for our own use. *Dido and Aeneas* comes from the same place and the same century as Shakespeare's works, which are constantly molded into new shapes and forms. Though music historians generally equate original performance practice with correct performance practice, from a theatrical point of view it would be appropriate to fresh spin on a new production of this old opera.²⁶

There has been some recent scholarly work to suggest that the first performance of *Dido and Aeneas* actually occurred in 1688 with a professional troupe, but the

²⁵ Harris, 45.

²⁶ Roger Savage, "Producing *Dido and Aeneas*: An Investigation into Sixteen Problems," in *The Purcell Companion*, ed. Michael Burden. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1994), 452-4.

evidence in support of this is thin.²⁷ The Nahum Tate libretto from 1689 gives us our assumed first performance date and location. The libretto does not, however, seem to match Purcell's version of the opera. It differs from other librettos and scores in ways that all other documents agree.²⁸ The playbook from 1700 is the one from the performance with *Measure for Measure*. In the case of each libretto the drama was altered to fit the needs of the performance.²⁹

The earliest musical source for any piece of *Dido and Aeneas* is a printing of the aria "Ah! Belinda, I am press'd" in *Orpheus Britannicus*, a collection of Purcell's works published in 1698, soon after his death.³⁰ The earliest full score from 1775 is called the Tenbury score, and it is far from complete. The scribe was clearly copying an earlier score (probably one from 1704) and he preserves the old-fashioned notation both in style and in idiosyncrasies. He does not include the Prologue or the end of Act II, and many dances indicated in the libretto are missing.^{31, 32} The Tenbury score is the most referenced score, as every score following it is either copied directly from it or its source.³³ For this recital, the singer checked out the two scores available in the JFK Library in Cheney, WA and ordered a third on Summit. She then listened to many recordings from the library, iTunes, and YouTube. Where the scores and artists differed from each other, an adequate answer was found in scholarly research.

²⁷ Curtis Price, "Dido and Aeneas," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), 1:1169.

²⁸ Savage, 147.

²⁹ Harris, 49-50, 54.

³⁰ Price, "Dido and Aeneas," 1170.

³¹ Harris, 45-8.

³² Curtis Price, "Dido and Aeneas in Context," in *Dido and Aeneas: An Opera*, by Henry Purcell, ed. Curtis Price. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 17.

³³ Harris, 47.

Tuning and instrumentation

Regarding pitch and tuning, Andrew Parrott recommends for Purcell's works that one either choose the "organ pitch" (modern pitch at A=440Hz) or "orchestral pitch" (one half step down). Because Parrott's "orchestral pitch" refers to how woodwinds were tuned at the time, and as *Dido and Aeneas* has neither organ nor woodwinds, this leaves the singer with a choice to make.³⁴ In reality, the orchestra probably would have tuned to whatever the harpsichord was tuned at. Most recordings that this author has heard have the orchestra tuned down a half step from modern pitch, though there are some that use modern pitch. For Ms. Johnson's graduate recital, it was more expedient to use modern pitch, which also kept the music closer to a soprano (rather than mezzo-soprano) tessitura.

When a singer brings an operatic aria into a recital setting, choices must be made regarding instrumentation. Since it would not be possible to bring in an entire string orchestra, the choice was made to use harpsichord and solo cello to accompany the voice. The harpsichord more than sufficiently filled in for the string orchestra, but it could not adequately bring out the ground bass line. The bass line in both of these arias is arguably the most striking part of the composition, and a solo cello warmly brought it to life. The cello acted almost as a second voice speaking pure emotion, heightening the beautiful anguish of the character's words.

³⁴ Andrew Parrott, "Performing Purcell," in *The Purcell Companion*, ed. Michael Burden. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1994), 417.

Continuo realization and ornamentation

Purcell's basso continuo figuration is sparse in all of his compositions, and the continuo realization should likewise be simple. The harpsichordist would do well to double the strings and add simple arpeggiation.³⁵ Most piano reduction scores do just that and can be trusted to be adequate, but they should be checked against an orchestral score. Curtis Price's critical edition has a written-out harpsichord part along with four-part strings and basso continuo figures in the cello part.³⁶

Vocal ornamentation should be sparse, simple, and tasteful. It should not cloud the text or the expression, for the written music is beautiful in its simplicity and directness. A small trill or appoggiatura may be occasionally inserted, but it should be light and meaningful. Price's critical score is well marked in this manner. Also important is remembering that vibrato was considered a type of ornamentation in Purcell's time. The singer should be judicious in her use of vibrato, not assumed on every note but used specifically to give warmth to the tone. Ornamentation in the harpsichord should follow similar guidelines.³⁷

Story and interpretation of character

The story of *Dido and Aeneas* takes place in Carthage, where Dido is the queen. We know from Virgil's *Aeneid* that her husband has recently died when Aeneas and the Trojans arrive. Dido is in physical pain from the grief. Aeneas is a visiting Trojan prince

³⁵ Benjamin Britten, "On realizing the continuo in Purcell's songs," In *Henry Purcell 1659-1695: Essays on his Music*, ed. Imogen Holst. (London: Oxford UP, 1959), 7-9.

³⁶ Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas: An Opera*, ed. Curtis Price (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 82.

³⁷ Parrott, 400-01, 408.

who falls in love with the queen and has one night of passion with her. The Sorceress, who hates the queen without any apparent reason, contrives to trick Aeneas into sailing home instead of marrying Dido. When he leaves, Dido dies from guilt and sadness. She is a powerfully conflicted woman with huge displays of emotion. She is not complex; rather, the sadness and shame she feels must permeate every note she sings.³⁸

Relevant analysis

“Your counsel all” and “Ah! Belinda! I am press’d”

Though we do not know what the court has counseled her to do, Dido, queen of Carthage, addresses the court and rejects its counsel in the recitative. She feels deep shame for having lost her chastity to a night with Aeneas, and she knows he is about to betray her. Here she begins to realize that death is her only way out, “the only refuge for the wretched left.” Dido’s desperation and sadness have inspired a great deal of anger. She seems to be losing her resolve, and the hopelessness that will lead to her death has begun to set in.

“Ah! Belinda!” actually comes from the beginning of the opera. Dido is “press’d with torment” because her husband has just died. The aria also works well displaced to the end of the opera because Dido’s journey comes full circle: from torment, through brief happiness, and back to despair. Even in her brief happy time with Aeneas she feels ashamed in this English version of the story because they are unmarried and therefore committing a sin. Now she is “press’d with torment” again because Aeneas is about to

³⁸ Harris, 11-17.

leave her. For the purpose of this recital, the text flowed well and made sense, and musically the key centers all fit together for fluid movement.

The aria is in binary form: an A section is sung twice followed by a longer B section. The prominent bass line is a four-measure pattern that is repeated throughout. In the Price critical score both the recitative and aria are scored only for harpsichord and cello. Because early Baroque scores are non-specific as to syllabification, modern scores typically differ slightly. This requires the singer to make decisions based on word stress and personal preference.

“Thy hand, Belinda” and “When I am laid in earth”

In the recitative, Aeneas has just left Carthage and Dido finds herself in fear and exhaustion. Darkness has overcome her, physical strength has left her, and death is now her only balm and comfort. Her aria is desperately tragic. Dido expresses her last wish to Belinda. She wants everyone to forget her wrongs and not be troubled by them. She desires to be remembered well.

Both the recitative and the aria descend chromatically toward Dido’s grave: the recitative in the vocal line, and the aria in the ground bass. Though Purcell was not the first to use a chromatically descending bass line, he used it very effectively. “When I am laid in earth” is in double binary form, which is AABB. The biggest issue in singing the recitative was deciding whether to sing an A-natural or an A-flat on the words “shades me.” That single note significantly alters the mood of the recitative. At first the singer thought it was an issue of personal preference, but then, challenged by her voice teacher Steven Mortier, she began to research the question. The arguments on either side are well

founded, but for this performance the A-flat won out.³⁹ The answer came in a literary argument regarding key references:

The recitative before the Lament (No. 37), far from simply foreshadowing once more the inexorable descent to the grave, seems to summarize the entire drama. Dido turns again to her confidante and to C minor (“Thy hand, Belinda”), descends into the Sorceress’s black key of F minor (“darkness shades me”), and then, before retreating to G minor for the last time, grasps for her C-major glory only to have it slip away (“More I would, but Death invades me”).⁴⁰

The “Sorceress’s black key of F minor” contains the A-flat in question. The argument on the side of the A-natural is that it follows a chromatic descent in the melody, though that chromatic descent is imperfect and requires a more subjective analysis.⁴¹

Vocal and technical challenges

The biggest challenge in singing selections from *Dido and Aeneas* is making the literary and musical decisions already discussed in relation to the score, ornamentation, and syllabification. From a technical standpoint, early music is approached much differently from either *bel canto* or Wagnerian operatic singing, and even more so in an English piece so centered around the text and the drama. The vowels should not be overly dark but more neutral and speech-like so that the text may be declaimed clearly. The singing itself should be simple and direct, remembering that it was performed for the first time by schoolgirls. An adult or professional singer should not strive to sound like a student if she is not one, but should find a balance between a youthful sound and an

³⁹ The note in question is either the raised or flat sixth degree of the minor key. Since many recordings play tuned down one half step, they would sound either a G-sharp or a G-natural.

⁴⁰ Price, “In Context,” 36.

⁴¹ Harris, 117-19.

authentic tone. Since Dido's melodies make their home around the *passaggio* (around E₅ to G₅), the singer should practice freeing up that typically tight area, moving through it in warm-ups and practicing *messa di voce* exercises (stability exercises over changing volume levels) in that range.

The character of Dido is the real challenge of these pieces. Leave her out, and the arias become terribly repetitive and boring; but with her desperate, tragic sadness they come alive. The expression is everything: if the singer lets Dido speak, the singing will take care of itself. If the voice is under control, both strong and free, then the singer does not need to pay attention to the actual act of singing. As our emotions control how we speak, our emotions can control our singing as well. Thus, the singer is not only a musician, she must be an actress as well.

Chapter 3

Francis Poulenc: *Airs chantés*, 1927-28

Composer biography

Francis Poulenc was born in 1899 to a wealthy family in Paris. His father directed a large, lucrative pharmaceutical company. Poulenc's mother started him on the piano at age five. From 1914-17 the teenager was sent to study with Ricardo Viñes, a great champion of contemporary French composers such as Ravel and Satie. Poulenc met some of these composers through Viñes and was granted entrance into their circle. Poulenc was, by all accounts, a great pianist and performer. As a composer he was mostly self-

taught, though in Paris he had many other inspiring composers with whom to consort. His adroitness at composition and performance made Poulenc famous as early as 1917 when his first work, *Rapsodie nègre*, was given a public performance.⁴²

Poulenc met and befriended many of his favorite poets at Adrienne Monnier's then-famous bookshop in Paris. Poulenc fell in love with this new style of poetry and with the reaction against Impressionism.⁴³ He particularly loved composing songs to new poems by poets he knew personally, and one gets that sense when singing his songs.⁴⁴ According to Pierre Bernac, the man who sang Poulenc's songs in recitals with the composer for twenty or so years, Poulenc believed that his best piano compositions were his songs. He never referred to the piano part as an accompaniment, either giving piano and voice equal importance, or occasionally giving the piano more importance.^{45, 46}

Historical significance

Airs chantés premiered March 3, 1928 at Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, with Jane Bathori singing and Poulenc himself on piano.⁴⁷ At that time song recitals in Europe were popular, and French songs were preferred over *lieder* in Paris.⁴⁸ Though Poulenc made a distinction between his *mélodies* and his *chansons*, the terms are typically

⁴² Myriam Chimênes, "Poulenc, Francis" *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 20:227.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Pierre Bernac, *Francis Poulenc: The Man and His Songs*, trans. Winifred Radford (London: W.W. Norton & Cos, 1977), 202.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁶ Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 355.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 355

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 22.

interchangeable.⁴⁹ *Airs chantés* will be referred to as *chansons* in this paper. Poulenc and Bernac gave many recitals all over France and in the United States.⁵⁰ Altogether Poulenc composed 152 songs and was “perhaps the last great proponent of the French art song.”⁵¹ The Parisian community of artists, composers and painters was tight-knit, and Poulenc developed close personal friendships with them all.

How this piece came to be written

In 1927 Poulenc purchased an estate in the countryside at Noizay, a mile away from any village. Surely he felt inspired to set poetry about beautiful nature.⁵² And yet, *Airs chantés* was the poetry of Jean Moréas, a Greek man whose real name was Yannis Papadiamantopoulos (1856-1910), and whose poetry Poulenc despised.⁵³ In this set of songs we find Poulenc going against everything we know about him. He loved contemporary poetry, and Moréas was from an earlier generation. Poulenc liked writing songs for poetry of personal friends, yet he did not know Moréas. The poetry itself was considered second-rate⁵⁴ and offers no obvious inspiration, being overly descriptive and yet containing very little meaning or purpose. Poulenc tells us this:

I perpetrated in 1927 four *Airs chantés* on poems by Jean Moréas. I do not admire this poet, but for fun, to tease my publisher and friend François Hepp, who adored his work, I decided to set four of his poems to music, promising myself every possible sacrilege.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ibid., 443-4.

⁵⁰ Chimênes, 227.

⁵¹ Daniel, 243.

⁵² Ibid., 28.

⁵³ Ibid., 257.

⁵⁴ Bernac, 202

⁵⁵ Ibid.

I am always astonished at myself for having been able to write these songs. I detest Moréas and I chose these poems precisely because I found them suitable for mutilation. In ‘Air champêtre’ I have actually permitted “sous la mou, sous la mousse à moitié”. [sic] Have I been punished for my vandalism? I fear so, because this song that irritates me is said to be “a hit”.⁵⁶

Poulenc composed the songs ironically, but in the end he hated his composition as much as the poetry. He even called “Air grave” “indefensibly conventional.”⁵⁷

Relevant analysis and poetry interpretation

The four poems in *Airs chantés* contain nature imagery and not much else. The narrator seems to be deep in contemplation about some unnamed topic, but in her contemplation she describes the scene very beautifully. The poetry resembles four Impressionist landscape paintings. Though the meaning of the text is important for singers to learn, the French language itself is beautiful to sing regardless of the translation. This singer could only think of Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* saying, “The French don’t care what they do, actually, so long as they pronounce it properly.”⁵⁸ The language sounds so wonderful and the music moves so rapidly in three of the songs that there is no time to think of delivering each specific word. To serve the text, the singer studied the translation in order to paint the scene in her mind. She then sang the whole painting, and gave not a declamation but a translation of the poem in the language of music.

⁵⁶ Francis Poulenc, *The Diary of My Songs [Journal de Mes Mélodies]*, trans. Winifred Radford (London: Victor Gollancz LTD., 1989), 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, *My Fair Lady*, DVD, Audrey Hepburn, Rex Harrison, directed by Cecil Beaton (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros., 1998).

Looking at Poulenc's complete *oeuvre* one can see why he may not have liked this set of songs very well. The poetry sets a beautiful scene in which no action takes place. The word painting is rather literal, and the musical colors are not particularly inventive compared to his usual output. But *Airs chantés* is delightful. It is by no means easy to sing or play. It feels fresh and light. The music moves with vicious speed. The singer and pianist together become the rushing wind (the main poetic theme in the first and fourth songs). Twentieth century artists frequently made complex works out of little substance, and that is what Poulenc did here. The music sits beautifully in a soprano's range, lightly moving through the melody and easily exploring both high and low. For this author, the text mattered less in the choice of *chansons* than how well it was set, and Poulenc could always pull incredible music out of his texts. Excellent composition aside, it is the performer's duty to set the mood for the journey. A great musician can engage an audience regardless of the quality of the material by the skill of her performance.

"Air romantique" (Romantic Air)

In the first landscape the narrator is walking through a storm and a crow is following her. One can hear the raindrops splashing in the puddles in the vocal line. The wind in the piano whips around her and the lightning flashes. Poulenc set this exciting scene with alternating melancholy and cheerfulness. Possibly the narrator has chosen to go out in the storm and play in the rain. Perhaps she is safe inside now, recounting her story through rose-colored glasses.

"Air romantique" is through-composed, and the poem consists of three stanzas of four lines each. Here Poulenc has made the language simultaneously percussive and

legato. The melody moves smoothly from high to low. There is no piano introduction to the first song. The singer takes off immediately and the piano follows after a quick eighth rest. Both piano and voice move at full tilt through the first stanza, and the “wind” pushes the tempo even quicker for the second. Between the second and third stanzas the music seems to slow down, but it is the rhythm that expands and not the beat that slows; both Poulenc and Bernac were very clear about keeping the quarter note steady.⁵⁹ Even though the song feels slower for a moment, there is a latent expectation that the pace will quicken again. The song ends with the same frantic flurry of notes with which it began.

“Air champêtre” (Rustic Air)

The second poem is a memory of a day walking in nature with a friend who seems to have since died. The music is lovely and light, reflecting the general happiness of the memory. Once more the poetry is best described as a painting. This time it is a stop-motion piece portraying a single moment in time. The first stanza describes the scene visually. In the second, the narrator recounts her emotions.

The second song is in ABA' form. The poem consists of two stanzas of four lines each, and Poulenc repeats the first stanza at the end with musical variations. Though the tessitura of the song is quite high, it moves so freely and delicately that a light soprano should have no trouble with it. While Poulenc demanded much of his singers in musicality, he clearly understood the movement of the voice. This song also demonstrates his penchant for writing down melodies exactly as they came to mind and never

⁵⁹ Bernac, 44-5, 203-4.

transposing them as he built the rest of the song around them.⁶⁰ The first and second stanzas are not so dissimilar that they should be in separate songs, but the second stanza has many different musical ideas that most composers would not think to string together. The effect is a meandering one, but ultimately successful as the piano ties the ideas together and plays a lovely interlude that circles back to the repeat of the first stanza.

“Air grave” (Grave Air)

The slowest song of the four, the one with the most opportunities for perfect text declamation, contains the poem that makes the least sense. The narrator is distraught, possibly from memories of the previously mentioned deceased friend. She might be caught in a bad dream or a traumatic memory, but the poem paints only the landscape with no action. It is the opposite of an opera character. As soon as the singer recognizes that she will be a paintbrush instead of a storyteller, she can become a fantastically dramatic paintbrush. Though this was Poulenc’s⁶¹ and Bernac’s⁶² least favorite of the *Airs chantés*, it is the singer’s responsibility to make it enjoyable for the audience. The music sets the scene well, with undulating sadness and occasional outcries. Instead of trying to imagine a tragic event to paint on top of the landscape, this singer chose to sing of depression, which usually lacks a specifically sad object.

The poem consists of three irregular stanzas of very short lines, two to four words each, with two lines at the end that echo the first stanza without repeating it. Poulenc’s composition is through-composed, and the last two lines of vocal melody also echo the

⁶⁰ Daniel, 246.

⁶¹ Poulenc, *Diary*, 25.

⁶² Bernac, 205-6.

beginning. The piano part reminds one of an early *lieder* accompaniment. It is straightforward and old fashioned. There are no more complicated rhythms than simple eighth notes, and the tempo is remarkably slow in comparison with the other three songs in this set. The song, like the poem, has many short, disparate ideas lined up next to each other, though the emotional tone remains the same throughout.

“Air vif” (Lively Air)

The final poem consists of two stanzas of three and four lines respectively, and the song is in ABA' form. The tempo is unreasonably fast for both the singer and pianist. Poulenc set the quarter note at 192 beats per minute, and there is no shortage of complex sixteenth and eighth note patterns. Pierre Bernac suggests that Poulenc's metronome markings are often too fast, particularly on his earlier works.⁶³ But on this relentlessly fast song, Bernac says to hold steady if at all possible.⁶⁴ In that case, the five pages of music go by in just under sixty seconds. This song is the jewel of the four. Finally the verbal landscape has motion and substance! All of nature is bursting with pleasure. The wind theme reappears. Its voice rises and seems to threaten the flowers and the orchards. But the noble ocean can withstand the wind's tempest. The singer is part of something exciting!

The most interesting line in all of the four songs is the last of the first stanza: “Hélas! et sur leur tête le vent enfle sa voix,” or, “Alas! and over their heads, the wind raises its voice.” In the first stanza of the song, “Hélas!” is repeated several times as a passionate lament. At the end of the song, which repeats the first stanza, Poulenc sets the

⁶³ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 206.

most vicious cadenza on the word “voix” (“voice”). Until that moment, the wind has been represented only in the piano part, but at the end of the four songs the singer becomes the howling wind, swirling and churning rapidly to the finish.

Vocal and technical challenges

Pierre Bernac wrote a wonderful book called *Francis Poulenc: The Man & His Songs*. Bernac was Poulenc’s chief recitalist for twenty-five years, and knew better than anyone how to sing his friend’s songs. Although Poulenc kept his own song diary, when singers asked him for advice on how to sing his songs he would reportedly say, “Go and see Bernac, he will be able to tell you better than I what should be done.”⁶⁵ In keeping with all art song performance practice, Poulenc and Bernac both specifically mandate that singers engage with the poetry and know how to deliver it before learning the music.⁶⁶ The singer must be able to speak the poetry first. She must enter the poem and understand it. For a singer who does not speak French, a translation must be obtained. Not having Bernac’s book at the time of the recital, this singer commissioned a translation from the French Department at Eastern Washington University.^{67, 68}

In addition to knowing the poetry and pulling the audience in with the text, Bernac says the melodic line must maintain integrity with no unnecessary breaks. He also says that in singing Poulenc one must never change the tempo or employ rubato. Poulenc always wrote metronome markings and specific tempo changes throughout his songs.

⁶⁵ Bernac, 13.

⁶⁶ Poulenc, *Diary*, 19. Bernac, 42-3.

⁶⁷ Yvonne Lucero, English Translation of *Airs chantés* by Francis Poulenc (Cheney, WA: 2009).

⁶⁸ Though Ms. Lucero did admirable work on her translation, the translation from the Bernac book is listed in Appendix 1.

Like Strauss, he wrote many specific instructions and the singer is urged not to add anything that is not written on the page already (such as crescendos on held notes or dynamically shaped lines).⁶⁹

When singing Poulenc's *chansons* it is important to keep the vocal production very light. Correct intonation is extremely important in compositions with chromatic elements and modulations. If the voice becomes too heavy the delicate balance of accurate intonation and quick tempi will be lost. Poulenc preferred the Italian school of singing to the heavy German and Wagnerian style.⁷⁰ Thus, the singer must be able to maintain legato lines over a swift tempo. No matter what the piano is doing, which is sometimes almost in opposition to the singer, the vocal line must continue to soar over it. The singer and pianist need to work together in rehearsal to find out where they go apart and where they find each other again.⁷¹ A clean performance of Poulenc *chansons* is exhilarating.

⁶⁹ Bernac, 42-6.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Daniel, 245.

Chapter 4

Selections from three *bel canto* operas

Introduction to the Italian arias

The *bel canto* style period in Italy

Bel canto is an ambiguous term usually applied to the Italian singing style of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Literally translated, it means “beautiful singing.” Like most musical designations, the term was not used at the time but afterward. Singing teachers usually use it to bemoan the “lost art of beautiful singing”⁷² in comparison first to the heavy singing style of Wagner and Strauss, and later to twentieth-century commercial music.⁷³ Truly, the term leaves a bad taste in the mouth of this author and other commercial singing professionals, as we consistently run into self-aggrandizing, supercilious, strictly-classical singing teachers who think their music has the exclusive rights to “beautiful singing.”

In search of an unbiased, academic application and definition, the general consensus is that “the qualities of [*bel canto*] include perfect legato production throughout the range, the use of a light tone in the higher registers and agile and flexible delivery.”⁷⁴ Most musicians specifically refer to Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti as the

⁷² Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, “bel canto,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 3:161-162.

⁷³ “Commercial music” and “Contemporary commercial music” are terms used in vocal pedagogy and among teachers of singing to refer to music that was formerly called, “non-classical,” as that term has pejorative implications. “Commercial music” includes pop, rock, musical theatre, country, jazz, rap, etc. etc.

⁷⁴ Jander and Harris, 161.

three champions of *bel canto*, though Verdi certainly lived and composed in the same time and place during the first half of his career.

The Italian operas during the so-called *bel canto* era followed certain forms and procedures for musical structure and storylines, though Verdi's long career saw a gradual move away from the old-fashioned forms as with *Rigoletto*.⁷⁵ The arias in this recital following the traditional *cavatina-cabaletta* format were "Casta Diva" from *Norma* and "Una voce poco fa," from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. This format consists of a slow section, or *cavatina*, followed by a quicker *cabaletta*. In "Una voce poco fa," the earlier piece, the form is tight and the two sections follow one right after the other. In "Casta Diva," the *cabaletta* takes place after a great deal of conversation between Norma, Oroveso and the chorus, and is a completely separate aria. For that reason, this singer did not perform the *cabaletta* in her recital. "Caro nome," the aria from *Rigoletto*, is not in *cavatina* format. It is one of the few solo arias in the whole opera, which was envisioned as an opera of duets.⁷⁶

Historical significance of *bel canto* opera

Opera in nineteenth-century Italy was immensely popular. Modern Europeans' maniacal obsession with soccer might be an accurate comparison. There was a great deal of money to be made or lost in commissioning and staging operas. The big cities all had one or more opera houses, and there was a staggering number of extant composers, musicians, directors, and librettists. Competition in that day and age was fierce for

⁷⁵ Julian Budden, *From Oberto to Rigoletto: The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.

contracts.^{77, 78} Most operas were never heard again after their initial run. The ones that were staged multiple times and in cities all over Europe and the world are not representative of the average opera. Passed down to us are the *crème de la crème*, the extraordinary operas by the exceptional composers.

The opera industry in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Italy represents a self-sustaining model on a level never seen before or since in classical music. Before that time the best composers worked for a church, a private court patron, or both. In modern terms we would look to commercial music to find the equivalent “music industry.” The song recitals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did bring in money and fame for composers, but not on the “rock star” level of Italian opera or the modern commercial music industry.

Historical significance of these three operas

The three *bel canto* operas represented in this graduate recital were *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Gioachino Rossini (1816), *Norma* by Vincenzo Bellini (1831), and *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi (1851). They will be described here chronologically, though the arias were performed at the recital in a different order determined by logistics and artistry.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia was an *opera buffa*, which is a comic opera. Typically *opere buffe* featured stereotypical, simplistic characters and simple music, but *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* contained more highly developed characters and more complex music than its

⁷⁷ Richard Osborne, “Rossini’s life,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici, 11-24, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 14-17.

⁷⁸ David Kimbell, *Norma*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 1-2.

cousins.⁷⁹ Another composer named Giovanni Paisiello had already composed an opera to a libretto taken from the same Beaumarchais play in 1782, and it remained the preferred version among Italians, who saw Rossini as trying to usurp his predecessor's rightful place. Paisiello's most loyal followers infiltrated opening night and caused an opening night disaster remembered to this day. Rossini won the battle, however, and his *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is still celebrated as one of the greatest operas of all time.⁸⁰

Norma is a tragedy that represents an interest then in vogue among Italians: Druid and Scandinavian history and mythology combined with traditional Greek and Roman subjects.⁸¹ *Norma* was one of Bellini's last operas, and is his most celebrated.⁸² At the time the young composer was in demand all over Italy, and had his choice of contracts.⁸³ The opera's highly florid and chromatic melodies were consistent with the move from a largely improvisational singing style to precisely notated compositions. Whereas previous singers had improvised heavy decorations onto a simply written melody, the *bel canto* composers wrote out their own florid ornaments and cadenzas for the singer to execute.⁸⁴

Rigoletto represents the near end of the *bel canto* era. Italy underwent vast political change during this time period, and opera saw many new ideas as other European cultures' experiments with the genre grew in popularity.⁸⁵ In a letter to his

⁷⁹ Janet Johnson, "Il barbiere di Siviglia," In *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici, 159-74, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 159.

⁸⁰ Charles Osborne, *The bel canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994), 54-6.

⁸¹ Kimbell, 20-22.

⁸² *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1

⁸⁴ Jander and Harris, 161.

⁸⁵ Budden 3.

librettist, Verdi called *Rigoletto* “revolutionary.”⁸⁶ The libretto was highly controversial at the time and underwent many changes to gain the approval of the censors.⁸⁷ Verdi is not usually counted among the *bel canto* composers because his operas typically require more strength and power than his predecessors’ works and move more toward the realm of Wagnerian singing. His earlier works, however, do fit into the *bel canto* style.⁸⁸ Gilda, the character from *Rigoletto* who sings “Caro nome,” is a very young girl who can be expected to have a lighter quality to her voice.

The move from Rossini through Bellini to Verdi perfectly illustrates the difficulty presented by trying to classify styles and periods in music. Verdi did not break a form so much as continue the gradual movement away from one form into another, as demonstrated by the large scope of Norma’s *cavatina* compared to the more limited scope of the earlier “Una voce poco fa.” In Verdi’s own operas one can see a move away from strict recitative/aria form, in which the recitative contains the dialogue and moves the plot forward while the aria stops the action for one character to reflect and the singer to show off. Conceiving an opera of duets enables the best music to move the plot forward with few to no stops in the action for reflection, and represents a move toward Wagner’s conception of “music drama.” Calling *Rigoletto* a *bel canto* opera could be controversial for these reasons, but is clearly justified when one hears “Caro nome” juxtaposed with the other two arias. This dramatically illustrates the continual need for musicians to think with both their head and with their ears.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 484.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 481.

⁸⁸ Charles Osborne, 1.

Gioachino Rossini: “Una voce poco fa” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816)

Composer biography

Gioachino Rossini was born in 1792 in a town called Pesaro in Italy. The family moved to Bologna when he was young. His father was a trumpet and horn player and his mother was a professional singer. The Rossinis were busy, travelling musicians. Nevertheless, they made sure that their talented son received a comprehensive education, which included music, languages, and mathematics. He was admitted to the music school in Bologna at age fourteen. In 1814 Rossini moved to Naples where his contract with the Teatro San Carlo required that he not only compose operas, but also that he direct, stage-manage, conduct, costume, and draft librettos for them. At that post he also learned about administration and staff management.

Throughout Rossini’s career he lived and worked all over Europe, including Bologna, Venice, Milan, Naples, London, Paris, and Florence. Like many of history’s great composers he very likely had bipolar disorder. He had well-documented periods of intense productivity followed by periods of illness. In 1855 he settled in Paris to live out his retirement, and died there in 1868. Rossini lived a long life, but completed most of his work before the age of thirty-seven. He was extremely famous in his own time, as well as being a very popular personality in most circles.⁸⁹

How this piece came to be written

During Rossini’s time in Naples his contract allowed him to travel all over Italy and stage operas for various companies, which was why he was able to accept the

⁸⁹ Richard Osborne, 11-24.

additional contract from the Teatro di Torre Argentina in Rome. Naples, where the composer was mostly living and working, was the center for the *opera buffa* tradition and had been for a hundred years, as it was the city where this art form had developed and evolved. Rossini was at the height of his compositional career in 1816, but he was hardly the only popular composer in a country where opera was the life-blood of the people. He continually fought for recognition and glory.

The contract Rossini signed in December of 1815 required him to deliver the score ready for rehearsal by the middle of January, and allowed him to choose whatever libretto, new or old, that he thought suitable. He decided to rework an existing opera by Giovanni Paisiello, which had been running steadily in Italy since its premiere in the late eighteenth century. Rossini worked with Cesare Sterbini using both Beaumarchais' play *Le Barbier de Séville ou la Précaution inutile* and Paisiello's libretto for his *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Not wanting to appear as though he were attempting to steal Paisiello's glory, Rossini first chose to call his opera *Almaviva o L'Inutile Precauzione*. Paisiello's supporters caused a riot on opening night nonetheless. The public began to call it *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* around six months after its premiere, and by then it was so popular that no one minded the title.⁹⁰

Story

Il Barbiere di Siviglia is categorized as an *opera buffa*. Christoph Willibald von Gluck had recently revised the "rules" that *opere buffe* were supposed to follow. Rossini followed some of them, (such as the unities of time and place), while retaining a

⁹⁰ Charles Osborne, 52-61.

modicum of grand spectacle for the audience's enjoyment.⁹¹ "Una voce poco fa" comes near the beginning of the opera and serves as an exposition of Rosina's character. She is the ward of Dr. Bartolo, a young lady who has fallen in love with a man who introduced himself as Lindoro by way of a serenade from her from underneath her window. In typical opera fashion this man is actually Count Almaviva in disguise. The aria is unimportant to the plot and the text is in neither Beaumarchais' play nor Paisiello's libretto. The Count and Figaro devise several different plans for the Count to marry Rosina, and they ultimately spoil the Doctor's plans to do the same.⁹²

Text setting and interpretation of character

Rosina's aria gives the singer a chance to show off and earn some applause for her vocal acrobatics. The text of "Una voce poco fa" gives the audience a lyrical exposition of Rosina's character. In the *cavatina* (the slower opening section) we learn that she is young and in love, but moreover, that she is determined to get what she wants. She will refuse to marry Doctor Bartolo and will find a way to be with Lindoro. The *cabaletta* reveals that Rosina is obedient and kind, but also cunning and devious. She is happy when she gets what she wants, but a venomous viper if anyone stands in her way. The music of "Una voce poco fa" is also a type of character exposition: the melody is playful and showy. Rosina is like a cat playing with a mouse before she eats it. She demonstrates her independence by making this grand statement to no one but herself.

⁹¹ Philip G. Downs, *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992), 186-88.

⁹² Charles Osborne, 58-60.

In such an acrobatic aria it would be tempting for a singer to temporarily cease being Rosina and just be a star recitalist. To think of having to interpret a character amidst these many notes may seem daunting, but because of her scheming, youthful character it is not altogether difficult to picture Rosina singing a song like this to herself. It may be a nineteenth-century opera, but girls singing about boys in their bedrooms has not changed. For a modern, young soprano, it is the equivalent of singing along with the radio alone in her bedroom, using the hairbrush as an imaginary microphone. She is dreaming of the boy she has a crush on, and thinking of her “stepfather,” in modern terms, getting in the way. She winks at the audience as she plays with the words.

Relevant analysis

Originally Rosina was written for a mezzo-soprano, but coloratura sopranos are frequently cast in the role. In that case, “Una voce poco fa” is transposed from the original E major up to F major and the cadenzas, which dip below C₄ multiple times, are rewritten.⁹³ The *cavatina con cabaletta* is concise in its format, and both sections together are back to back with no break in between. The slow section seems more like *recitativo accompagnato* than aria, and is very rubato in places. Though Rossini wrote clear notation, the singer may take appropriate license with the aria and adapt it to her taste and preferences with respect to the cadenzas.

⁹³ Ibid., 60.

Vocal and technical challenges

The main difficulty when approaching “Una voce poco fa” becomes immediately apparent once the singer listens to her first recording with the score in hand. This author only heard one recording that closely follows the notes provided in the score, and no two performances are the same. The opportunities for cadenzas and ornamentation are initially overwhelming though exciting to a student performer. A seasoned professional opera singer may know exactly what may be appropriate regarding adaptation of an early nineteenth-century show aria. On the other hand, a student with only book learning and no professional experience has no chance of creating an acceptable original performance without standing on the shoulders of the great sopranos before her.

Fortunately, resources abound in the age of the Internet. This singer dove into YouTube, iTunes, Summit and Interlibrary Loan to listen to as many professional versions of the aria as were available, in addition to some student renditions. It soon became apparent that the best way to create an original and appropriate performance would be to lift and adapt favorite ideas from various recordings. In an effort to avoid common pitfalls, the student renditions were mostly used to hear some ideas that might be overused or ineffective. Unfortunately, some of the professional performances were useful in that capacity as well. After trying out many ideas for herself and seeing what fit her voice best, this singer wrote out an authentic, individualized version of “Una voce poco fa,” using both musical notation and personal shorthand.

Once the singer settles on her cadenzas and ornamentation, execution becomes the challenge. As with the rest of the *bel canto* arias, success comes down to strength, flexibility, and accuracy. Quickly-moving scales and arpeggios must begin slowly

enough to make sure that there is vibrato on each note. Vibrato is an expression of a properly balanced voice in classical singing. If vibrato is not possible on a note, then it has been produced incorrectly. Also, moving through a run will be more easily achieved by doing it “on the vibrato,” or by changing notes at the same rate as the flutter of the vibrato. Singers do not get to practice with a metronome as often as instrumentalists, but for scales and runs the work is the same as with practicing scales on the piano: the singer starts slowly and moves gradually faster until the necessary tempo is achieved. The singer builds up the necessary strength and stamina by doing her cadenzas slowly, and she builds agility and flexibility by moving the tick of the metronome increasingly faster.

Vincenzo Bellini: “Casta Diva” from *Norma* (1831)

Composer biography

Vincenzo Bellini was born in 1801 in Catania, Italy. He lived a short but highly successful life, composing only ten operas and revising one. Most musicians point to *Norma* as his crowning achievement.⁹⁴ Until the age of seventeen Bellini’s grandfather and the local church were in charge of Bellini’s instruction, both musical and literary. In 1819 he was granted a pension to study music at the *Colegio* in Naples. Over the next eight years Bellini studied and composed for school and later for the local opera companies, gaining recognition for his considerable talent, increasing knowledge, and strong personality.⁹⁵ In his lifetime he would compose operas for the finest opera houses

⁹⁴ Kimbell, *ix*.

⁹⁵ Herbert Weinstock, *Vincenzo Bellini: His Life and His Operas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), 8-18.

in Italy and one in France. He died at the age of thirty-three in Paris from an inflamed colon, probably chronic amebiasis.⁹⁶

How this piece came to be written

In 1830 Bellini was living in Milan.⁹⁷ The Società Crivelli, which managed La Scala in Milan and the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, had a contract with him to produce an opera in Venice for the upcoming season. A new management group, the Litta group, obtained contracts with a number of famous singers and bought out Bellini's contract with the Crivelli group. This was part of an effort to take over La Scala, and they negotiated with Bellini to produce an opera at that theatre for more money than his original contract would have given him. However, the Litta group failed to take over La Scala and they moved their production, along with a new opera from Donizetti, to a smaller theatre. Thus was born *La Sonnambula*. The Crivelli group then re-arranged the old contract with Bellini at the theatre in Venice for the carnival season of 1832 (which had been the original intention), as well as another opera for the 1831 Fall season at La Scala. The 1832 opera would be *Beatrice di Tenda*, and the 1831 production at La Scala would be *Norma*.⁹⁸

Bellini and Felice Romani, the librettist for most of Bellini's operas, decided in June or July to base the libretto of their opera on a Parisian play called *Norma*. This play, written by Alexandre Soumet, had premiered in April of 1831. Romani was highly qualified to cover this subject area. He was a mythology scholar by profession and had

⁹⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁷ Kimbell, 1.

⁹⁸ Weinstock, 87-9

written a libretto on a similar subject for a Pacini opera in 1820. Romani had coauthored an unusual encyclopedia for its time, covering all known mythological subjects rather than just Mediterranean ones. Rehearsals started at the beginning of December for the premiere the day after Christmas.⁹⁹

Story

Norma is the high priestess of the Druids in Gaul during the Roman occupation. She holds immense power and sway over the Gallic people because of her status. “Casta Diva” takes place near the beginning of the opera in the exposition of the plot and characters. Norma has broken her chastity vows with the Roman pro-consul Pollione, and has two children by him. We are told that they have been together for seven years. She knows that Pollione will be called back to Rome in the near future. Norma desperately hopes that he will take his family with him, though she fears he does not love her anymore. Before we even meet Norma, Pollione’s scene with Flavio confirms that Pollione has indeed fallen in love with a younger priestess, what the Catholic Church might call a “novice.” Pollione plans to take her back to Rome and marry her instead of Norma. Flavio’s fear of Norma’s wrath tells the audience that it should expect to meet a powerful, passionate, and formidable woman.

When Norma does appear to perform the sacred rites with mistletoe under the full moon, the audience knows more about her internal thoughts and feelings than how she leads her external life. Her first scene reveals a woman practiced at manipulating and lying to her people, though she remains an incredibly sympathetic character. The Gallic

⁹⁹ Kimbell, 5, 13, 20-22.

army has gathered for the rite. They beg Norma to let them go to battle against the Romans to drive them out. They are angry and bloodthirsty, especially for Pollione's head. Norma uses her role as a prophetess to ostensibly speak for the gods, although she is actually speaking for herself. She denies the army its request to fight, saying that the Romans would slaughter them all. She then predicts that Rome's downfall will be from within. In "Casta Diva" Norma prays to the chaste Goddess of the Moon. She asks the Goddess to spread her peace throughout the land and temper the zealous hearts of her people.¹⁰⁰

Interpretation of character

Norma is complex and conflicted, more than any character this author has ever encountered. In this wooded scene she must put on the priestess show, though she knows she is unworthy. While she does believe that her people will die if they go to battle, her true motivation for keeping peace is her love for Pollione. She knows he will be the first to die at the hands of the Gauls.

The singer of "Casta Diva" must figure out how much of Norma's prayer is genuine, and how much is selfishly motivated. She has lied to her people for seven years about the same thing, so one must assume that she is fairly jaded. On the other hand, the aria is so passionate that she seems to genuinely desire peace. Her people do not know or understand her true motivation, but her love for Pollione and her children make the desire for peace more urgent, albeit treasonous. While her people think that she desires their

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 29-32.

safety, her prayer is in fact for her children and her lover. Her desperation is increased by her fear that Pollione may leave them alone.

Text Setting

“Casta Diva” is a strophic aria; it has two stanzas with an interlude and an ending. The music is reverent and slow. The accompaniment is peaceful, like a lullaby. The strings play simple arpeggios in slow eighth notes and the orchestration of the aria is light overall. The dramatic portions contain swells only in the strings and woodwinds. The chromatic, florid melody is inevitable: when one sings it one feels as though there were no possible alternative setting for the text. The way it bends and flows, it pours out of the singer over the strings and one cannot help being transported to the heavens with the Moon Goddess herself. The chromatic, meandering melodic line stays tonal because of the arpeggios underneath and because the non-chord tones bend inexorably through and towards the key center. Bellini creates suspense and tension with the melody. When Norma lands on the tonic at the end of each verse the audience can finally exhale.

Relevant analysis

The famous legend around the aria “Casta Diva” is worth mentioning. It is said that Giuditta Pasta patently refused to sing the aria, and that it would not fit her voice. Bellini pleaded with her during rehearsals and they struck a deal: she would rehearse it with the composer every morning for a week and then make a decision. Of course she fell in love with the aria and agreed to perform it, but Bellini had to move it down one full step from G to F major. As far as it is known, Maria Callas was the first person to

perform the aria in G major when she sang the role in 1953, one hundred twenty-two years later.¹⁰¹

According to David Kimbell we know that Bellini meant “Casta Diva” to be in G major because the music leading up to the *cavatina* leads by a Neapolitan pivot modulation to G major.¹⁰² To most ears, moving from an A-flat major chord to the key of G major sounds neither expected nor correct, but the reasoning is as follows: The name “Neapolitan” applied to this modulation is important, as the composer spent eight years training in the city that made this practice standard in opera composition. A “Neapolitan six” or “N⁶” chord is a “flat two” or *bii* chord, usually used in first inversion.¹⁰³ Though the key signature has only three flats, the scene leading up to “Casta Diva” has modulated to D-flat major and ends on an A-flat major chord, which would be the dominant chord in that key. It is a pivot modulation because that chord doubles as the Neapolitan chord of G major, even though it is in root position, not in first inversion.¹⁰⁴

Vocal and technical challenges

In *Norma*, Bellini expanded the *cavatina-cabaletta* form. Whereas in “Una voce poco fa” the slow and quick sections followed one another with no break, the two sections in *Norma* were composed as separate arias with pages of recitative in between. In a simple recital setting, performing the entire *cavatina con cabaletta* would be problematic. For the full effect, a chorus would be necessary as well as bringing an

¹⁰¹ Weinstock 273, Kimbell 9-10.

¹⁰² Kimbell, 10.

¹⁰³ First inversion chords are indicated in basso continuo notation with a superscript “6.”

¹⁰⁴ Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma: in Full Score* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 121-3.

Oroveso on stage. Since “Casta Diva” is a self-standing aria both in the score and in recordings, it was appropriate to perform only the first of the pair of arias.

Because the beautiful flute solo in the beginning would be poorly represented by the piano, the choice was made to use piano and flute as the accompaniment. This singer purchased the flute part for the solo, then wrote out additional parts for the flute throughout the aria taken from the various woodwinds in the full score. The resulting duet between the piano and flute then seemed cohesive and sublime, fleshed out but not overpowering.

Preparing to sing “Casta Diva” meant serious exercise both for the body and the voice. The voice must be strong, flexible, coordinated, and free. This singer used exercises from Mathilde Marchesi’s *Graded Elementary Exercises*¹⁰⁵ and her *Twenty-Four Vocalises*,¹⁰⁶ which involved chromatic and diatonic scales, and runs of various sizes and shapes. Stability exercises over changing volume levels known as “*messa di voce*” exercises were also included. Breath support and stamina were key to singing the aria not only successfully, but in getting the notes to come out at all.

With “Casta Diva” more so than any other piece, the first task was to take on Norma’s character, and the music came second. In order to experience the “pouring out” of notes referred to earlier, one must understand her character. Her pain, her desire, and her power feed the singing. This aria is a prayer for her people but it is also a personal plea for help. She does not pray to the chief god Irminsul but to the Moon Goddess, in whom she hopes to find mercy. In every text this author read regarding *Norma* or “Casta

¹⁰⁵ Mathilde C. Marchesi, *Graded Elementary Exercises*, Op. 1 (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1917).

¹⁰⁶ Mathilde Marchesi, *Twenty-Four Vocalises For Soprano or Mezzo-Soprano*, Op. 2 (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1884).

Diva,” both before and after the recital, the same famous sopranos were always mentioned as having superior acting abilities. Maria Callas, the most famous Norma from the last hundred years, is frequently noted as having an odd or even grating quality to her tone, though certainly few could match her artistry and technique.¹⁰⁷ In her meeting with maestro Tullio Serafin on her first engagement to do *Norma*, he told her to speak the entire opera for him start to finish. He already knew she could sing it, but he needed to find out if she could portray the role effectively.¹⁰⁸

The ideal Norma, one might suppose, would be one who commands a tireless flow of lustrous tone and a flawless coloratura technique; but experience has proved, from [Giuditta] Pasta onwards, that the qualities of a great singing actress are even more vital. Norma must be a mistress of dramatic declamation, who can colour her phrases with an infinite number of shades, and time them and articulate them thrillingly; and she must be an outstanding personality who, simply by her presence and deportment on stage, can rivet an audience’s attention. These assets Callas had in abundance.¹⁰⁹

Giuseppe Verdi: “Caro nome” from *Rigoletto* (1851)

Composer biography

Giuseppe Verdi was born in 1813 in a small town called Busseto, where he owned land and called home until his death in 1901. His parents were tavernkeepers and landlords, and started their son’s musical instruction at the age of four. When he was seven years old his parents purchased a piano for him, which would have been unheard of at the time for a family of their stature. It is likely that they funded this purchase with an inheritance from Verdi’s grandfather. At age ten Verdi became the official church

¹⁰⁷ David Littlejohn, *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 157.

¹⁰⁸ Kimbell, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

organist in his town, which sounds like an apocryphal story but the textbooks do not contradict each other on that point. Verdi went to Milan when he was nineteen to learn counterpoint, and he became a conductor and composer for the local *Filharmonica*.

Later in Verdi's life he became a landlord and a charitable benefactor, as well as a reluctant politician. He died in 1901 a very old man who had lived and worked through the height of the *bel canto* era, as well as through Wagner, Strauss, Berlioz and Liszt. His operas alone span five decades, and he witnessed and adapted to some of the vastest changes in compositional style and popularity in that genre.^{110, 111}

How this piece came to be written

In April, 1850 the Teatro La Fenice in Venice commissioned an opera from Verdi for the carnival season of 1851. It was a standard contract, which gave no specific subject for the libretto but assigned Verdi as librettist his dear friend Francesco Maria Piave, with whom he worked on many operas. *Rigoletto* comes from the early-middle period of Verdi's career, and was composed during a sort of musical turning point for the composer.

Verdi was inspired by a Victor Hugo play called *Le Roi s'amuse*, which had been banned by the Parisian censors after its opening night in November of 1832, although Hugo had been allowed to publish the script with a lengthy preface defending the work. Verdi and Piave went through a great deal of confusion and revisions with the censors in

¹¹⁰ Scott L. Balthazar, ed., "Chronology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), xvii-xxvi.

¹¹¹ Mary Jane Philips-Matz, "Verdi's life: a thematic biography," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 3-14.

Venice in order to get the opera approved. They had to change the location, character names, and several key scenes. In the end Piave and Verdi got approval for the libretto, but the number of changes required the premiere of the opera to be delayed. *Rigoletto* premiered on March 11, 1851 and the public seemed to love it, though the reviews at the time were mixed at best.¹¹²

Story

Rigoletto's title character is a degenerate, hunchbacked court jester who goads on the Duke of Mantua in his sexual exploits, and ridicules everyone else at court. In the opening scene Rigoletto mercilessly taunts Count Monterone who has come to complain to the duke about his daughter's dishonor. As he is removed from the court the Count exclaims, "It was an act of baseness, Duke, to set your dog on the dying lion. And you, serpent, who mock a father's grief, be you accursed!"¹¹³ Rigoletto is struck with fear and takes this curse to heart. Secretly, he has a sixteen year-old daughter named Gilda who has never left home except to go to church. She does not know her father's real name and certainly not his profession. As the audience is introduced to Gilda it sees how much Rigoletto loves her and fears for anyone finding out who she is. He knows that everyone in the city hates him and would seek to hurt him by hurting his daughter, and he fearfully puts stock in Monterone's curse.

Gilda is sixteen years old, but she is sheltered and immature even for her young age. The evil Duke of Mantua has seen her at church and has tracked her home. Rigoletto has been seen at the building so people assume that the pretty lady there is his mistress,

¹¹² Budden, 477-83.

¹¹³ Budden, 491.

though they can hardly believe that Rigoletto could have a mistress. The Duke overhears the conversation at home between Gilda and her father, and the Duke finds out that she is, in fact, Rigoletto's daughter and the girl from church all at once. The Duke bribes Gilda's governess to let him in, but first she must talk to Gilda and find out what kind of man she would fall in love with. Gilda wants to meet a man who is poor like herself. She would love to be in love. The Duke eavesdrops on the conversation and enters as the governess leaves, though the reasons for his disguise are much more malicious than were Count Almaviva's. He introduces himself as Gualtier Maldè, a poor student, and Gilda falls deeply in love with him. After he leaves she sings a song not to the man, but to his dear name, his *caro nome*.¹¹⁴

Interpretation of character

Gilda is young and impressionable. She cannot tell that she is being lied to, or that she is in danger. Tellingly she sings a song to the name of the man she loves, to the idea of the man and not the man himself. She does not know who he is. Gualtier Maldè might be a fine man if he existed, but she has not the wisdom to distinguish the facts. Eventually she will be kidnapped and raped by the Duke. Later in the opera we find out that she has been his mistress for a month and still believes that he loves her. The singer entrusted with Gilda's role is obligated to convey both her innocence and her complete inability to judge character. Her father has done her a disservice in sheltering her, as she is tragically undiscerning.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 487-98.

Relevant analysis and text setting

The first part of “Caro nome” reflects Gilda’s heart palpitating on staccato syllables with eighth rests between them. She is breathless, jittery, and giddy. The aria is not fast. Gilda slowly savors the syllables and chooses just the right words to express her young feelings. The coda at the end is interesting. It completely changes keys but is not jarring. In the opera, “Caro nome” continues after the solo ends and Gilda repeats the beginning over the male chorus outside. In a recital setting the solo ends after the cadenza on the words “*Caro nome tuo sara,*” and the singer leaves out the return of the “*Gualtier Maldè*” text.

“Caro nome” is Gilda’s only solo aria in the opera. She sings a short recitative at the beginning and goes into the aria after a short musical interlude. One author points out that Verdi takes the forms that were traditional for *bel canto* operas and changes or adapts them just enough to be barely recognizable. They are “dissolved” into the opera.¹¹⁵ This aria follows the form of recitative followed by aria, but it is not part of a *cavatina* even though it is part of the introduction to the character.

Vocal and technical challenges

Verdi said he did not see “Caro nome” as an acrobatic or challenging aria because it is slow and to be sung *sotto voce*,¹¹⁶ which roughly translates to “in a low/quiet voice.” It could be considered as just singing *piano* or *pianissimo*, but the voice must still carry over the orchestra. The singer must learn how to properly resonate the voice and the vowels while producing, essentially, the least amount of sound possible. For this singer,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 483.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 497.

the goal was to find the balance between continuing to vibrate and make sound while allowing absolutely no excess pressure or exertion. Apparently in Verdi's time *sotto voce* technique was part of singers' standard skills, but there is a certain level of physical and vocal maturity that must be obtained before trying to sing so quietly so well.

In "Caro nome" the overall effect needed to be sweet and warm, and the delivery blissful and gentle. The freedom required to convey that sweetness had to be backed up with a balanced, strong instrument. That vocal agility being once obtained, Verdi was right: it was a fairly easy aria to sing. The ornaments and the vocal "tricks," the elements that sound so impressive, came to this singer much more quickly than expected. They flowed naturally from an instrument properly prepared for them.

Summary

The opportunity to work on advanced repertoire and give a graduate recital was a driving factor in Noree Johnson's decision to enter graduate school. So much repertoire is unavailable to a singer at the age when she finishes undergraduate work, simply because of the lack of physical maturity. In a spirit of "Arrival," Ms. Johnson chose all of the pieces on the program specifically for her former inability to execute them and her desire to conquer them. Collectively, the pieces on the recital program taught the singer discipline, score research, nineteenth-century ornamentation, small-scale orchestration, collaboration, self-confidence, and balance. Each piece presented a new challenge to the singer as a musician and technician, and also as a music researcher.

The research for this supporting document began three years ago in preparation for the recital in the spring of 2011, though little was formally written down until 2013. Similar to the recital itself, the research and writing of the document represented the silencing of doubts and arrival at the end of a long journey. This author learned much about composers, singing styles, and music interpretation, to be sure. But in the intervening years Ms. Johnson, now Ms. Dolphay, has become a teacher and performer of modern commercial music. The more accurate conclusion of this document would be to say that the author experienced growth in perseverance, prioritization, delegation, and gratitude.

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Appendix 1: Texts and Translations

Richard Strauss: *Five Songs for Voice and Piano, Op. 32*

Ich trage meine Minne

Ich trage meine Minne
vor Wonne stumm
im Herzen und im Sinne
mit mir herum.

Ja, daß ich dich gefunden,
du liebes Kind,
das freut mich alle Tage,
die mir beschieden sind.

Und ob auch der Himmel trübe,
kohlschwarz die Nacht,
hell leuchtet meiner Liebe
goldsonnige Pracht.

Und lügt auch die Welt in Sünden,
so tut mir's weh,
die arge muss erblinden
vor deiner Unschuld Schnee.

Sehnsucht

Ich ging den Weg entlang, der einsam
lag,
den stets allein ich gehe jeden Tag.
Die Heide schweigt, das Feld ist
menschenleer,
der Wind nur webt im Knickbusch vor
mir her.

Weit liegt vor mir die Straße ausgedehnt,
es hat mein Herz nur dich, nur dich
ersehnt.
Und kämest du, ein Wunder wär's für
mich,
ich neigte mich vor dir: ich liebe dich.

I Carry My Love

I carry my love—
Mute with rapture—
Around with me in my heart
And my mind.

Yes, that I found you,
You dear girl,
That will give me joy all the days
That are allotted to me.

And even if the sky is gloomy
And the night coal-black,
Brightly shines the sunny-gold splendor
Of my love.

And even if the world lies in sin,
And it pains me,
The evil world must be dazzle
By the snow of your innocence.

Longing

I went along the path that lay solitary,
The one I travel alone, every day.
The hearth is silent, the field is empty of
people,
Only the wind blows by in the brush in
front of me.

The road lies far extended in front of me,
My heart has longed only for you.
And if you came, it would be a miracle
for me;
I would bow before you: "I love you."

Und im Begegnen nur ein einz'ger
 Blick,
 des ganzen Lebens wär' es mein
 Geschick.
 Und richtest du dein Auge kalt auf mich,
 ich trotze, Mädchen, dir: ich liebe dich!

Doch wenn dein schönes Auge grüßt
 und lacht wie eine Sonne mir in
 schwerer Nacht,
 ich zöge rasch dein süßes Herz an mich
 und flüst're leise dir: ich liebe, liebe
 dich.

Liebeshymnus

Heil jenem Tag, der dich geboren,
 Heil ihm, da ich zuerst dich sah!
 In deiner Augen Glanz verloren,
 steh ich, ein sel'ger Träumer, da.

Mir scheint der Himmel aufzugehen,
 den ich von ferne nur geahnt,
 und eine Sonne darf ich sehn,
 da ran die Sehnsucht nur gemahnt.

Wie schön mein Bild in diesem Blicke!
 In diesem Blick mein Glück wie groß!
 Und flehend ruf' ich zum Geschicke:
 o weile, weile wandellos!

And as we met, only a single glance—
 It would be the destiny of my whole life.
 And if you looked coldly upon me,
 I would defy you, girl: "I love you!"

But if your beautiful eyes greeted me
 and smiled,
 Like a sun in my heavy night,
 I would quickly draw your sweet heart to
 myself
 And would quietly whisper to you: "I
 love you."

Hymn of Love

Bless the day that gave you birth,
 Bless the one on which I first saw
 you!
 Lost in the brightness of your eyes
 I stand, a blissful dreamer.

It seems to me that that heaven is
 opening
 Of which I had merely a distant
 presentiment,
 And I am permitted to view a sun
 At which my longing merely hinted.

How beautiful my image in this
 glance!
 In this glance, how great my good
 fortune!
 And beseechingly I call to destiny:
 "Oh, remain, remain without
 changing!"

O süßer Mai!

O süßer Mai, o habe du Erbarmen,
 o süßer Mai, dich fleh'ich glühend an:
 an deiner Brust seh'ich die Flur
 erwarmen
 und alles schwillt, was lebt in deinem
 Bann;
 der du so mild und huldvoll ohne Ende,
 o lieber Mai, gewähre mir die Spende!

Der düst're Pilger, der in diesen Gau'n
 entrann dem Eishauch winterlicher Zeit,
 erkor ein Mädchen, mild wie du zu
 schauen,
 lenzfrisch gleich dir in keuscher
 Herrlichkeit.
 Daß wir uns lieben und in Lieb'
 umarmen,
 Erbarmen, Mai, Holdseligster,
 Erbarmen!

Himmelsboten

Der Mondschein, der ist schon
 verblichen,
 die finst're Nacht ist hingeschlichen;
 steh' auf du edle Morgenröt',
 zu dir all mein Vertrauen steht.

Phöbus, ihr Vorbot' wohl geziert,
 hat schon den Wagen angeschirrt,
 die Sonnenroß' sind vorge spannt,
 Zügel ruht in seiner Hand.

Ihr Vorbot', der Don Lucifer,
 schwebt allbereits am Himmel her,
 er hat die Wolken aufgeschlossen,
 die Erd' mit seinem Tau begossen.

Oh, Sweet May!

Oh, sweet May, oh, be merciful;
 Oh, sweet May, I beseech you
 warmly:
 I see the fields growing warm on
 your bosom,
 And everything that lives beneath
 your spell is growing;
 You who are so gentle and endlessly
 gracious,
 Oh, dear May, grant me the gift!

The gloomy pilgrim who in these
 regions
 Escaped the icy breath of the winter
 season
 Has chosen a girl, as gentle to behold
 as you are,
 Fresh as spring, like you, in her
 chaste splendor.
 That we may love and embrace each
 other lovingly,
 Mercy, May, most lovely one,
 mercy!

Heavenly Messengers

The moonlight has already paled,
 The dark night has crept away;
 Arise, you noble dawn,
 All my trust is in you.

Phoebus, its well-adorned forerunner,
 As already prepared his chariot,
 The sun's steeds are harnessed to it,
 The reins are in his hand.

Its forerunner, Don Lucifer,
 Already hovers in the sky,
 He has opened up the clouds
 And watered the earth with his dew.

O fahrt vor ihr Schlafkammerlein,
weckt leis die süße Liebste mein,
ver kündet ihr, was ich euch sag':
Mein Dienst, mein gruß, ein' guten Tag.

Doch müßt ihr sie fein züchtig wecken,
dabei meine heimliche Lieb' entdecken,
sollt sage, wie ihr Diener wacht
so kummervoll die ganze Nacht.

Schaut für mich an die gelben Haar,
ihr Hälslein blank, ihr Auglein klar;
küßt ihr für mich den roten Mund,
und wenn sie's lied't, die Brüstlein rund.

Oh, go to her little bedroom,
Gently awaken my sweet beloved,
Report to her what I tell you,
My service, my greeting, a good day.

But you must awaken her respectably,
And, doing so, reveal my secret love;
You are to tell her how her servant lies
awake
All night so feverishly.

Look at her yellow hair for me,
Her white neck, her clear eyes,
Kiss her red lips for me,
And, if she allows it, her round breasts.

Henry Purcell: Selections from *Dido and Aeneas*

Your counsel, all is urged in vain;
To earth and heaven I will complain!
To earth and heaven why do I call?
Earth and heaven conspire my fall:
To Fate I sue, of other means bereft,
The only refuge for the wretched left.

Ah! Belinda, I am prest with torment,
Ah, Belinda I am prest with torment not to be confest,
Peace and I are strangers grown,
I languish 'til my grief is known,
Yet would not have it guessed.

Thy hand, Belinda; darkness shades me:
On thy bosom let me rest:
More I would, but Death invades me:
Death is now a welcome guest.

When I am laid, am laid in earth,
May my wrongs create
No trouble, no trouble in thy breast;
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate!

Francis Poulenc: *Airs chantés*

Air romantique

J'allais dans la campagne avec le vent
d'orage,
Sous le pâle matin, sous les nuages bas,
Un corbeau ténébreux escortait mon
voyage
Et dans les flaques d'eau retentissaient
mes pas.

La foudre à l'horizon faisait courir sa
flamme
Et l'Aquilon doublait ses longs
gémississements ;
Mais la tempête était trop faible pour
mon âme,
Qui couvrait le tonnerre avec ses
battements.

De la dépouille d'or du frêne et de
l'érable
L'Automne composait son éclatant
butin,
Et le corbeau toujours, d'un vol
inexorable,
M'accompagnait sans rien changer à
mon destin.

Air champêtre

Belle source, je veux me rappeler sans
cesse,
Qu'un jour guidé par l'amitié
Ravi, j'ai contemplé ton visage, ô
déesse,
Perdu sous la mousse à moitié.

Que n'est-il demeuré, cet ami que je
pleure,
O nymphe, à ton culte attaché,
Pour se mêler encore au souffle qui
t'effleure
Et répondre à ton flot caché.

Romantic Air

I went into the countryside with the
stormy wind,
Under the pale morning light, under the
low clouds;
A mysterious crow escorted my journey,
And in the pools of water my steps rang
out.

The lightning ran its flame along the
horizon
And the North Wind redoubled its long
moans;
But the storm was too weak for my soul,
Which drowned the thunder with its
beats.

From the golden hide of the ash and
maple
Autumn composed its dazzling spoils,
And the crow still, of an unyielding
flight,
Accompanied me, changing nothing in
my destiny.

Rustic Air

Beautiful spring [of water], I want to
remind myself without end,
How one day, guided by friendship
Happy, I contemplated your face, O!
goddess,
Half hidden beneath the moss

Only he remained that friend I mourn,
O nymph, to your worship chained
In order to mingle again with the breath
that grazes you,
And respond to your hidden tide.

Air grave

Ah ! fuyez à présent,
malheureuses pensées !
O ! colère, ô remords !
Souvenirs qui m'avez
les deux tempes pressées,
de l'étreinte des morts.

Sentiers de mousse pleins,
vaporeuses fontaines,
grottes profondes, voix
des oiseaux et du vent
lumières incertaines
des sauvages sous-bois.

Insectes, animaux,
Beauté future,
Ne me repousse pas
Oh divine nature,
Je suis ton suppliant

Ah ! fuyez à présent,
colère, remords !

Air vif

Le trésor du verger et le jardin
en fête,
Les fleurs des champs, des bois
éclatent de plaisir
Hélas ! et sur leur tête le vent enfle sa
voix.

Mais toi, noble océan que l'assaut des
tourmentes
Ne saurait ravager,
Certes plus dignement lorsque tu te
lamentes
Tu te prends à songer.

Grave Air

Ah! Flee now,
unhappy thoughts!
O! Anger, O! Remorse!
Memories that pressed
my two temples
with the grip of the dead.

Paths of plump moss,
misty fountains,
deep caves, voices
of birds and wind,
vague lights
of savages undergrowth.

Insects, animals,
Future beauty,
Do not push me back,
Oh divine nature,
I am your suppliant.

Ah! Flee now,
anger, remorse.

Lively Air

The treasure of the orchard and garden
in celebration,
The flowers of the roads, the woods,
burst with pleasure,
Alas! and over their heads, the wind
raises its voice.

But you noble ocean whom the attack of
storms
Would know how to ravage
Certainly with more dignity, while you
pity yourself,
And begin to dream.

Vincenzo Bellini: "Casta Diva" from *Norma*

Casta Diva

Casta Diva che inargenti
queste sacre antiche piante,
a noi volgi il bel sembiante
senza nube e senza vel.

Ah, sì.

Tempra, o Diva, de' cori ardenti,
tempra ancor lo zelo audace,
spargi in terra, ah! quella pace
che regnar tu fai nel ciel,

Chaste Goddess

Chaste Goddess that casts silver
These sacred, ancient plants,
Turn thy beautiful semblance on us
Unclouded and unveiled.

Ah, yes!

Temper, o Goddess, the ardent spirits,
Temper again the brave zeal,
Scatter on the ground that peace
That reigns in the heavens.

Giuseppe Verdi : "Caro Nome" from *Rigoletto*

Caro nome

Gualtier Maldè!
nome di lui sì amato,
ti scolpisci
nel core innamorato!

Caro nome che il mio cor festi primo
palpitar,
le delizie dell'amor mi dêi sempre
rammentar!

Col pensier il mio desir
a te sempre volerà,
e fin l'ultimo sospir,
caro nome, tuo sarà.

Il mio desir a te ognora volerà!

Dear name

"Gualtier Maldè,"
name of him so much loved,
you engrave yourself
in my enamored heart!

Dear name, which first made my
heart throb,
you must always recall to me the
delights of love!

In my thoughts, my desire
will always fly to you;
and even my last breath,
dear name, will be yours.
My desire will evermore fly to you!

Gioachino Rossini: “Una voce poco fa” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

Una voce poco fa

Una voce poco fa
qui nel cor mi risuono,
il mio cor ferito è già,
e Lindoro fuche il piagò.
Sì, Lindoro mio sarà,
lo giurai, la vincerò;

Il tutor ricuserà,
io l'ingegno aguzzerò,
alla fin s'accheterà,
E contenta io resterò.
Sì Lindoro mio sarà,
lo giurai, la vincerò;

Io sono docile, son rispettosa,
sono ubbidiente, dolce, amorosa;
mi lascio reggere, mi fò guidar... Ma!
Ma se mi toccano dov'è il mio debole,
sarò una vipera, sarò,
e cento trappole, prima di cedere,
farò giocar.

A voice has just...

A voice has just
echoed here into my heart
my heart is already wounded
and it was Lindoro who shot it.
Yes, Lindoro will be mine
I swore it, I'll win.

The tutor will refuse,
I'll sharpen my mind
finally he'll accept,
and happy I'll rest.
Yes, Lindoro will be mine
I've sworn it, I'll win.

I'm gentle, respectful
I'm obedient, sweet, loving
I let myself be ruled, I let myself be
guided... But!
But if they touch where my weak
spot is
I'll be a viper and a hundred traps
before giving up I'll make them fall

Appendix 2: Recital Program

Eastern Washington University
 Department of Music
 presents

Noree Michelle Johnson, soprano

in a

Graduate Voice Recital

David Brewster, piano and harpsichord

Saturday ~ April 23, 2011 ~ 3:00 p.m. ~ Cheney, WA

Five Songs for Voice and Piano, Op. 32

Richard Strauss
 (1864-1949)

- I. Ich trage meine Minne
- II. Sehnsucht
- III. Liebeshymnus
- IV. O süßer Mai!
- V. Himmelsboten

Dido and Aeneas (Z 626)

Henry Purcell
 (1659-1695)

- Recit. Your counsel, all is urged in vain
- Song. Ah! Belinda I am prest with torment
- Recit. Thy hand, Belinda
- Song. When I am laid in earth

Ricardo Montecinos, cello

Brief Intermission

Airs chantés

Francis Poulenc
 (1899-1963)

- I. Air romantique
- II. Air champêtre
- III. Air grave
- IV. Air vif

Norma

Vincenzo Bellini
 (1801-1835)

Casta Diva

Suzanne Jenkins, flute

Rigoletto

Giuseppe Verdi
 (1813-1901)

Caro nome

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

Gioacchino Rossini
 (1792-1868)

Una voce poco fa

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Master of Arts Degree in Music.

Noree is a student of Steven Mortier.

NO PHOTOGRAPHY. Please turn off cell phones and other noisemakers.

Please hold your applause until the end of each set.

Vita

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Yamaha Music for Kids Elementary Music Instructor,
Northwest Academy of Music 2011-2013

Harmony Road Music Instructor, Northwest Academy of
Music, 2011-present

The Wonderful Wizard of Opera, "Dorothy," Opera
Coeur d'Alene Operatunities Outreach Program, 2011

Faust, Chorus, Opera Coeur d'Alene, 2011

Core Voice Instructor, Christian Youth Theatre North Idaho,
2013

Member of the band Brown Sugar and Cream, 2013-present