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JOURNEY TO LAMOUR! AN EXPLORATION OF LOVE AND LOSS

by
Ashley S. Ashmore

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2018

Approved by

Advisor: Professor Nancy Balach

Reader: Professor Virginia Rougon Chavis

Reader: Dr. Debra Spurgeon

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ABSTRACT

This narrative documents a student's preparation and execution of her voice recital entitled, "L'amour! An Exploration of Love and Loss." The author documents experiences, at the University of Mississippi and beyond which influenced the direction of this body of work. The author describes the purpose of her voice recital, and describes the process programming and preparing repertoire for the December recital. The author recounts and reflects upon her performance of "L'amour: An Exploration of Love and Loss." The author includes a full copy of the program and notes provided to attendees on the day of the recital. The author includes stills from several of the sets from the December performance. Finally, the author reflects the immediate impact of the recital and predicts how this journey will effect her future performances.

A file containing all video recordings from the performance of "L'amour: An Exploration of Love and Loss" is available for viewing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor and studio voice professor, Ms. Nancy Maria Balach. Professor Balach has been instrumental in my development as a singer, scholar, and as a person. Without her guidance, this recital and capstone would have never come to fruition. Ms. Balach has always encouraged me in my aspirations and has always put me, as the student, first. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my vocal coach and collaborative pianist, Professor Amanda Johnston, whose musical expertise and constant vigor have inspired and challenged me to achieve new vocal and professional heights. I would also like to thank my committee members, Professor Virginia Rougon Chavis and Dr. Debra Spurgeon for their encouragement and advisement in this process.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the faculty and staff of both the University of Mississippi Department of Music and the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. I thank them for the support and providing a fruitful undergraduate experience.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their never-ending love and support. Specifically, I thank my parents, siblings, and grandparents for their constant love, prayers, and support of my music during my tenure at Ole Miss. I would like to thank my fellow music major colleagues for the support, laughter, and many needed coffee runs between classes and rehearsals.

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INTRODUCTION

In music, the end of a piece is signaled by a double bar line, which replaces the usual bar line at the ends of measures. In a poetic way, this capstone recital functions as a double bar line, signaling the close of my five years of musical study and exploration at the University of Mississippi. During these years at the University of Mississippi, I have attended many performances. These performances range anywhere from solo voice recitals to percussion ensemble concerts to visiting artists recitals and master classes. I have gained much performance experience as well, which includes both vocal and instrumental works: including solo, chamber, and large ensemble settings.

Being exposed to such a wide variety of musical genres and repertoire has allowed me to discover what makes a performance truly memorable and effective, no matter the instrumentation or music chosen. From my own experience and reflection, I came to the conclusion that the true litmus test of a quality performance is not in the technical abilities or degree of difficulty in the music chosen. Rather, a true indicator of a successful performance, or even of a performer, lies the ability to communicate with the audience. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, communication is simply defined as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.” Communication in the medium of performing arts utilizes behavior and sounds. Emotions and ideas are conveyed in musical terms, such as phrasing, timbral shifts, articulation, dynamics, and other musical

conventions. Considering the human voice, a whole new medium, text is available to convey thoughts and mood to the audience members as well.

With so many options for communication between performer and audience member available, I set out to craft a performance experience to challenge myself to be an expert communicator and story teller. I designed a recital, unknowingly beginning a journey that would be rife with self-discovery, both on musical and personal terms.

THE PROCESS

Why a Recital?

Often seen as a milestone in a musician's private study, a recital is the culmination of years of practice, discipline, and research. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians defines a recital as "the performance or interpretation of a specific work... a concert given by one performer or a small group." Ideally, a recital is well-balanced—containing a variety of works spanning different musical styles and genres (including Opera, Oratorio, Art Song, Musical Theatre, etc), musical time periods (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Twentieth Century and beyond), and languages (English, Italian, German, French, and others). Completing a recital is a rewarding experience, and functions as a celebration of musical achievement. The recital experience is crucial to musical development.

Seeing the evident benefits of giving a recital, in Spring of 2016, I gave a half vocal recital with a music education colleague, Raven Gordon, trumpet. My portion of the program contained thirty minutes of music. After completing that half recital and solidifying my decision to pursue graduate studies in vocal performance after completion of a BM in Music Education, I realized that a senior recital would be on the horizon.

Looking towards a senior recital with excitement, I began the process of planning the repertoire. A guiding force in my recital-crafting education came in the form of Dr. Jos Milton's Mus 303 class, a musical literature class focused on Art Songs— their

history, composers, and countries. The final project of the class was to construct a hypothetical recital program and program notes based upon an assigned theme. My assigned theme included gypsies and the fantastical. This was my first experience constructing a recital. I did not have to perform the repertoire, but finding repertoire that fit the theme proved to be quite difficult. Through that experience, I discovered several works and pieces, several of which I have studied since, and one in particular that made an appearance on this capstone recital. As I constructed my “recital” in this class, I decided to create a story arc, grouping the characters into subsections. This project truly taught me the art and process of creating a themed recital. A copy of the program from this project is provided on the following page for reference.

A Mystical Journey

Ashley Ashmore, mezzo-soprano
Sergei Rachmaninov, piano

A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41 A Charm	Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
The Enchantress	J.L. Hatton (1809-1886)
Waldesgesprach, Op. 39, No. 3	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
The Mermaid's Song	F.J. Haydn (1732-1809)
The Seal Man	Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)
Ganymed	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Der Tod und das Mädchen	
Gruppe aus dem Tartarus II, D. 583, Op. 24, No. 1	

Intermission

Malinconia, ninfa gentile	Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)
Hebe	Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)
A Chloris	Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)
Six chansons de theatre, Op. 151b I. <i>La Bohemienne la main m'a pris</i>	Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)
Chi vuol la zingarella	Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816)
<i>Zigeunerlieder</i> , Op. 103 I. <i>He! Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein!</i> II. <i>Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb</i>	Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Gypsy Songs, Op. 55 IV. <i>Als die alte Mutter</i> VI. <i>In dem weiten, breiten, luft'gen Leinenkleide</i>	Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)
Die Kartenlegerin, Op. 31, No. 2	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Siete canciones populares españolas VII. <i>Polo</i>	Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

Musical Preparation and Selection: Discovering the Puzzle Pieces

By spring of 2017, I had come to the conclusion that a performance-based honors capstone would best serve me, considering my educational plans and professional aspirations. Whilst it was a personal accomplishment by just simply settling on a capstone project (I changed my topic at least four times and twice officially), a very important piece of the puzzle had not been solved just yet—*what would I sing?*

This very question remained with me throughout the following summer as I compiled a list of pieces that I wanted to study and perform. I had a few pieces in mind and had actually begun to work on several new pieces that would appear on my capstone recital. But, as I began to evolve vocally, naturally, my repertoire followed suit. An event happened in July of 2017 that helped expedite this process. I spent a month in Wichita Falls, Texas — learning my first Baroque opera role. I was preparing to perform the role of Bradamante in G.F. Händel’s *Alcina*. This was a full production of *Alcina*, complete with costumes, orchestra, and staging. This production of *Alcina* was a part of Red River Lyric Opera’s Summer Festival series. The role of Bradamante challenged me musically, as I had never sang a Baroque aria, let alone an entire role. During the month of July, with endless rehearsals and coachings, I felt my voice move through coloratura-filled passages for the first time. According The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, coloratura is defined as “florid figuration or ornamentation, particularly in vocal music. Coloratura and melismas were techniques I previously associated with light

and high voices, which at the time, were not two adjectives I would have used to described my own voice. Most of my repertoire fell into the “slow and legato” category, with common themes including unrequited love, betrayal, and the ever-optimistic topic of death. In fact, this interest in tormented characters helped frame the recital and guide repertoire selection.

Although the process of gaining the technical ability to sing those melismas with ease and clarity was quite arduous and discouraging, I found that I was drawn to the vocal color and nuance that could be applied to those exciting phrases. I reasoned that if I could apply nuance to sixteenth notes spiraling by at a spritely 126 beats per minute, I could apply those same skills to my beloved “slow and low” phrases in my other repertoire.

By the following August, I knew that some of my earlier repertoire would not work for me any longer, for reasons of new vocal developments. This repertoire change is common, and is necessary for proper vocal success. Davies and Jahn describe this flexibility to change as a positive quality, stating, "Part of a singer's aptitude lies in his ability to cover his areas of relative weakness... by choosing appropriate roles... and recognizing that changes in the voice over the years demand a change in the repertoire" (*Care of the Professional Voice*, 25). In favor of vocal growth, I put certain “dream arias” away in favor of music that fit my current vocal identity. With the *Alcina* arias I had worked so hard to perfect in mind, I began to craft a program featuring other arias that I was drawn to. I found myself picking repertoire based upon the character who sings the particular aria or piece. I was drawn to the character's story. Using my new

knowledge of vocal and dramatic nuance and color, I longed to have a “Bradamante-esque” immersive experience with new characters. A few arias that were on my original list remained, including Jules Massenet’s *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* (from *Werther*) and Francesco Cilea’s *Acerba voluttà* (from *Adriana Lecouvreur*). *L’amour est un oiseau rebelle*, better known as the *Habañera* from Georges Bizet’s iconic opera *Carmen*, was also included in this pre-*Alcina* list. During high school, I always had the desire to sing the *Habañera*, so I was quick to mention this to Professor Balach during our first meetings in fall of 2013. Naturally, this aria had to be included in my final recital under her tutelage. The role of Carmen is often seen as a “rite of passage” in the mezzo soprano realm. Many singers in this voice type sing the full role before moving onto more demanding roles. Davies and Jahn discuss this exact step-by step process by stating, “A common phenomena among opera singers today is to push young voices, or smaller voices into heavier roles... For mezzos, Carmen typically precedes Amneris” (*Care of the Professional Voice*, 23). Continuing the French theme, I searched for a companion aria to *Va! laisse couler mes larmes*, and discovered two more of Charlotte’s arias in *Werther*. After listening to both the *Letter Aria*, and *Ah! mon courage m’abandonne*, I chose to program the latter for timing’s sake. Besides, *Ah! mon courage m’abandonne* offered an overt and reactionary mood that would contrast well with the restrained mourning of *Va! laisse couler mes larmes*.

With almost thirty minutes of the fifty minute recital requirement filled with aria, I began to search for other genres that could fill the remaining twenty minutes. In many of the vocal recitals I had attended over my time at Ole Miss, I noticed how many of the

performers would program a high-energy oratorio work as the opening of their recitals. Beginning the program with an exciting piece, one that would instantly capture the ears of the audience members, became a programmatic priority. During a perusal in a mezzo-soprano/alto oratorio anthology during spring of 2017, I discovered *Laudamus te*, from W.A. Mozart's *Mass in C minor*. Before studying this work, there was a distinct lack of coloratura-infused pieces in my repertoire. Wanting to expand my boundaries with Mozart and explore new vocal techniques, I began studying this aria. It quickly became a part of the recital repertoire, not only for its energy but for its stylistic variance from other pieces in the recital.

After discovering Johannes Brahms' vivacious *Zigeunerlieder*, or *Gypsy Songs*, during the Mus 303 Recital project, I knew I wanted to study this song cycle. The cycle offered a musical style I had not been able to explore in my studies up until this program. After Mus 303, I began to learn the cycle, and chose to program four of the eight pieces in the cycle: *He! Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein*, *Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb*, *Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab'*, and *Brauner bursche führt zum Tanze*.

While choosing repertoire for this recital, I noticed a distinct lack of English on the program. Whilst filing through ideas to fill both the language and art song categories, Samuel Barber's piece, *The Crucifixion*, came to mind. I had studied this piece during the fall semester of 2016, at the suggestion of my voice teacher, Professor Nancy Maria Balach. Regarding programming, *The Crucifixion* was a recently-learned option—free of out-dated technical habits that plagued other English art songs I had performed much

earlier in my collegiate career. At the recommendation of Professor Amanda Johnston, my vocal coach and collaborative pianist, I paired *The Crucifixion* with another song from Barber's cycle, *Hermit Songs— St. Ita's Vision*. After listening and a quick score study of *St. Ita's Vision*, the song was added to the recital program. The piece provided a stunning contrast to its set-mate.

Much like the *Carmen* aria, *You'll Never Walk Alone* from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* was a piece I had always wanted to be on my final recital of undergraduate studies. I have a personal and familial connection to this song, and knew it would be a lovely piece to end the evening. Its expansive and soaring lines in combination with the simplicity of the English language offer the listener a "break" from the complexity of earlier repertoire in the recital. Thus, ending the recital with a piece in a recognizable and familiar language allows the listeners to have a moment of pause and respite. This respite allows true reflection and synthesis to occur, and operates as a lovely "double bar line" for a program packed with technically dense and emotionally intense musical selections.

The Journey: Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

At this level of my studies, a song recital, would be considered the traditional route. A song recital is a recital that features art songs, or “songs intended for the concert repertory, as opposed to traditional or popular songs. The term is applied to solo songs” (The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians). But with the repertoire selected for the recital and the over-arching goal of this capstone being planning and executing a program that illustrates a journey, I wanted to provide my audience members with a themed recital. Andrew J Pelleiter discusses the possibilities of a themed recital in his article, “Thoughts On Recital Programming.” He states, “A recital can be a significant learning opportunity for the performer, as well as a compelling musical experience for the audience...Although a program containing the "Top 40" of horn recital music may be interesting to you, your colleagues, and your teacher, it might not be as satisfying to the audience as a recital containing cohesion and unity. One of the most successful ways of programming is to utilize a unifying theme” (“Thoughts On Recital Programming,” 1). Regarding my own repertoire, a common theme emerged with further character and musical analysis of the repertoire chosen. What began as an exploration into mezzo-soprano archetypes in opera (an earlier capstone project idea), blossomed into a musical celebration of love and all of its many forms. The overarching theme of love and love’s role in human interactions connected all the repertoire into a single column, regardless of musical period, style, or language. This theme excited me as love is a

common human experience. Persons who did not have much experience in opera could still come to the recital and leave with a new experience, despite all the foreign languages and unfamiliar pieces.

With this theme in place, the question of organizing repertoire into an order was addressed. In her book, *The Performer's Voice*, Meribeth Bunch Dayme, encourages the performer to have an exact vision of their performance (157). I asked myself the question: *In what order do I want the audience to absorb these works and their individual messages about love? What is my vision for this experience?* Inspired by the parallel between the winter setting and emotional isolation in Act Three of Massenet's *Werther*, the idea of crafting a recital based on seasons of love was born. Under this train of thought, pieces that featured a fiery passionate love would fit best underneath the "season" of summer, and pieces declaring a new, blossoming love would belong best in the "season" of spring. Categorizing each piece into a calendar season, whilst an interesting concept, proved to be too limiting for programming. Among the four seasons, there was not an even number for each season, i.e. too many pieces fit the summer set, where not as many fit the thematic requirements of spring. Perhaps the season idea never came to full fruition, but the idea of having a cyclic narrative and journey inspired the final product.

This final product occurred on December 3, 2017 at three o'clock in the afternoon. Titled "L'amour! An Exploration of Love and Loss," after Bizet's sizzling *Habañera* aria, this program reflected the cycle of a relationship, and featured occasional detours (the maternal love/Barber set, for example). This program explored many

emotions one can experience while in a romantic partnership. From butterfly-filled beginnings to a bitter ending, through this program, I sought to portray as many shades and nuances of love as possible.

A recital program was distributed before the concert began to each of the audience members. This program contained the recital order and notes, which provided basic information about the pieces performed, and the overall structure of program. Simple program notes came by the recommendation of Dayme, who states, “By keeping information simple, you make it easy for your audience to absorb what you are saying. Put complicated subject matter in simple form on handouts where people will have a chance to read it over and over when they do not understand it, or to think about it more carefully at a later time” (*The Performer’s Voice*, 146). As a personal challenge, I decided against including translations in the program. By only providing a brief guideline and explanation of what is occurring in the piece, I truly allowed my acting and singing onstage to tell the story of this relationship. Without the exact explanation of every piece on display, I had to resort to utilizing what Dayme refers to as “optimal awareness.” Dayme continues further with “optimal awareness” by explaining it as, “...You are on top of the situation in every way and are at your natural best. You are comfortable and in command of your space. Treat your audience this way [like a host or hostess in your own home], and you will find your performance dramatically changed for the better. Become the gracious host for your whole audience... and welcome everyone to your performance” (*The Performer’s Voice*, 173).

Each set of the recital represented a phase in a relationship, and explored the ranges of emotion one might experience whilst in this particular phase. The phases explored during the recital include: Declaration, Tenderness, Growth, Passion, Jealousy, Torment, Winter, and Dawn. I knew these sets and the acting within each had to be polarized and colorful, as to draw each member of the audience in. This idea of focused communication and “optimal perception” colored my musical and dramatic choices. Davies and Jahn explain the importance of a clear and effective performance in regards to the audience’s expectations in their book, *Care of the Professional Voice*. “The performer’s personality in response to the mood and receptiveness of each audience is also important. All members of the audience have now been exposed to radio, television, and electronically enhanced recordings, and they expect much more of the performer than they did years ago,” (Davies and Jahn, 24).

Whilst clear and colorful choices are effective, a transparent and honest portrayal of the performer is required for a successful, transcendent performance. Through my studies, I learned this skill of authentic performance through a particular song. This song, “Waitin’” by American composer, William Bolcom, was simple and devoid of any extraneous distractions— both vocal and dramatic. For the piece to come across as authentic to the audience, the performer utilizes a degree of vulnerability to the audience. This transparency starkly contrasts with the florid and dramatic arias I had studied. Perhaps this piece was not included in the December recital, but it served as a vital part of the journey to “L’amour.”

Personal Preparation: Becoming the Performer

As a student at the University, I have held many roles. Some of these roles include: singer, saxophonist, student, marching band member, choir member, and future educator, among others. I have always possessed an unbridled passion and curiosity regarding music and music education, so I never found it strange that I had so many “hats” available to wear. With all of these interests, balance was a topic Professor Balach and I had discussed numerous times. Because of my demanding, full schedule, I suffered from vocal fatigue during my freshman year. This fatigue came about from self-imposed stress, dehydration, and poor time management skills. Davies and Jahn delineate a performer’s self-imposed stress by stating, “Vocalists and actors are generally hard-working, ambitious, conscientious professionals who are particularly prone to self-imposed stress... Lack of stability in a performer’s life can also be disconcerting. The result is not only physical fatigue, but also a state of nervous exhaustion” (*Care of the Professional Voice*, 51). This description of self-imposed stress matched my state of affairs, so I began to make changes to ensure success.

In order to perform at a healthy and high artistic level, I had to make a few decisions. These decisions, which ultimately resulted in ending my tenure with the Pride of the South and with any other instrumental ensembles, allowed for more focused time studying voice and opera. After ten years in an instrumental ensemble of some sort, this

change was jarring. But, with the future of my vocal health and studies on the line, I gladly made the sacrifice.

During the 2017 fall semester, even though I was no longer a part of the band program, I still had many roles to fill. Student teaching was on the horizon, so classes involving music education required more time and effort, as expected. With my still demanding schedule and a large recital on the calendar, I made other choices to preserve my voice and sanity as I prepared for this program. Choosing not to audition for a role in the department that intrigued me was one decision. Even with these positive decisions, I began to have issues with acid reflux, which stemmed from residual stress. Davies and Jahn explain this connection of stress and reflux by saying, “As the stress increases, muscle tension also increases, and hyper-function causes neck, shoulder and tongue tension, and increase in gastric acidity and also a higher incidence of reflux oesophagitis” (*Care of the Professional Voice*, 51). Choosing a more reclusive lifestyle to allow rest on the weekends proved to be helpful. I began medicating for my newly diagnosed acid reflux, which could have devastating effects on the voice if not monitored. I am convinced that these adjustments, if ignored, could have usurped any musical or dramatic preparation made.

THE PERFORMANCE

L'amour: A Narrative

In any professional discipline or skill, superior performances appear to be effortless to the onlooker. The multi-disciplinary ideology applies to vocal performance. As an audience member, much of the program is behind the scenes, and remains that way in order to preserve the dynamic and overall atmospheres created during time on stage. This following section will provide insight into the events that occurred the hours before, during, and just after the recital. With this narrative, one should be able to see beyond the polished product, and into the mind of the performer during the recital. Included on the following pages for reference are the recital poster, program, and program notes from my Capstone Recital. The program and program notes were distributed prior to the performance to audience members.

L'AMOUR!

AN EXPLORATION OF LOVE AND LOSS



A CAPSTONE CONCERT
ASHLEY ASHMORE, MEZZO-SOPRANO
AMANDA JOHNSTON, PIANO
DECEMBER 3, 2017
NUTT AUDITORIUM
3:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION

SALLY McDONNELL BARKSDALE HONORS COLLEGE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

PROGRAM

I. Declaration

Mass in C minor
Laudamus te

W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

II. Tenderness

Hermit Songs
St. Ita's Vision
The Crucifixion

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

III. Growth

Zigeunerlieder, Op. 103
1. He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein!
2. Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb
4. Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab'
5. Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

IV. Passion

Carmen
L'amour est un oiseau rebelle

Georges Bizet (1838-1873)

INTERMISSION

V. Jealousy

Alcina
È gelosia
Vorrei vendicarmi

G.F. Händel (1685-1759)

VI. Torment

Adriana Lecouvreur
Acerba voluttà

Francesco Cilea (1866-1950)

VII. Winter

Werther

Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

Ah! mon courage m'abandonne

Va! laisse couler mes larmes

VIII. Dawn

Carousel

Richard Rodgers (1902-1979)

You'll Never Walk Alone

Oscar Hammerstein (1895-1960)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Tonight is an exploration of an intriguing and elusive phenomena of the human experience — love. “Amour! An Exploration of Love and Loss” is my musical exploration of love, and the differing types of love one can experience. When designing this program, many questions came to mind: *How is love and all its forms expressed in music? What clues regarding literal meaning and subtext are given to us from the composer? How does love effect the trajectory of a character's arc through an aria and/or an entire work?*

On the next few pages you will find notes that can guide your experience. I've included information that reveals my personal thoughts regarding these pieces and the possible answers to my questions. It is my hope that you will ponder and arrive to your own conclusions, and even have questions of your own. Thank you for joining me on this journey!

PROGRAM NOTES

I. Declaration - jubilant, novel, bold

W.A. Mozart's *Laudamus te* (from his *Mass in B minor*) possesses a bright and exciting character. Evidence of its vivacious quality is evident in the fast coloratura and larges leaps of the vocal line, which is echoed in the piano line. The florid lines express the joyful and declamatory statement of adoration and laud boldly ("*Laudamus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te*"). *Laudamus te* exhibits an unashamed confidence, which mirrors the exciting atmosphere of a new relationship, full of declamatory statements of adoration.

II. Tenderness - warm, maternal, sincere

Both *St. Ita's Vision* and *The Crucifixion* from Samuel Barber's *Hermit Songs* have a distinctive depth and complexity. Both pieces display a maternal instinct within their texts. *St. Ita's Vision* addresses the initial maternal behavior in nursing a child—more specifically, the infant Jesus Christ. The lullaby-like vocal line combined with the lush and flowing piano lines create warmth and a dreamy atmosphere.

In comparison to the lush and vibrant texture previously established in *St. Ita's Vision*, the opening piano prelude of *The Crucifixion* is stark and isolated. This change paints a picture of desolation and loss experienced by the maternal figure of Jesus during his crucifixion. The vocal narrative is simple and mournful, only blossoming to show the deep sorrow of Jesus's maternal figure. The juxtaposition of these two pieces documents the bookends of a mother's experience.

III. Growth- maturing, shifting, deepening

This selection of four songs from Johannes Brahms' *Zigeunerlieder* (or *Gypsy Songs*) explores different aspects of gypsy life and addresses topics such as unfaithful lovers, first meetings, and expressions of growing love. The following pieces, with their folk-like tunes and Hungarian *Volkslieder* text, capture multiple views of a simple, yet strong love. The emotional intensity is often underscored in the piano's driving rhythms and wide-set chords.

The first selection, *He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein!* creates the intense atmosphere as aforementioned. The poet asks a gypsy to play a song as he laments his unfaithful lover. In *Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb*, the poet involves nature in his ode to loss of love — upon the banks of the river Rima.

The next two pieces of this selection offer a contrasting tone. In *Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab,*' the poet reflects upon his love— remembering their first kiss, and declaring his faithfulness. The set closes with the jubilant *Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze*, which recollects a joyful dance scene between two lovers.

IV. Passion - thrilling, sensual, alluring

During Bizet's *Carmen*, the title character, a fiery gypsy, sings one of the most famous arias and melodies in all of opera. In the sizzling *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*, more commonly known as the *Habañera*, Carmen paints an intriguing picture of love — as an infuriating chase. The descending chromatic line and sigh-like leaps pepper the French text, lulling it's listener under an intoxicating spell. In this aria, love is personified as a disobedient entity who acts upon it's own free will. The saucy aria embodies a torrid love affair — full of passion, excitement, and energy.

V. Jealousy - confusing, frustrating, infuriating

During the course of Händel's *Alcina*, Bradamante, a strong-willed and brave warrior set out to save Ruggiero (her betrothed), experiences extreme anguish as she witnesses Ruggiero's torrid affair with Alcina. *È gelosia*, Bradamante's first aria, expresses her disdain of her current state of affairs. She describes the power of both jealousy and love, whilst explaining the own tyranny she feels in her heart. The coloratura of Bradamante's vocal lines operates as a sort of emotional barometer throughout the opera.

È gelosia describes the power of these emotions, but her rage aria in Act II, *Vorrei vendicarmi*, is an athletic display of the aforementioned emotions. The quick, reeling coloratura spans pages of the vocal score, showing the sheer fury Bradamante feels towards her unfaithful lover. Eventually, the plot works in Bradamante's favor, but these moments of vengeful coloratura provide a sense of her emotional investment and devotion to her lover— the defining traits of this warrior and their relationship.

VI. Torment - conflicted, turbulent, obsessive

In Act II of Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, the Princess of Bouillon has found herself in a bind. As a married woman who has taken a lover, she is in a conflicting position- questioning the fidelity of her lover. In *Acerba voluttà*, the princess ironically complains about her compromised state— caught betwixt “doubt and desire” in this relationship. The piano brilliantly captures her almost bi-polar mood shifts, creating a “stream of consciousness” effect for the listener. Her internal conflict and turmoil are expressed via soaring vocal lines, obsessive recitative-like moments, and the juxtaposition of opposites in the text (“fire and ice, slow agony and rapid offense”).

VII. Winter - frigid, mortal, dim

In Act III of Massenet's *Werther*, Charlotte has reached her breaking point. It is Christmas Day, a day she has been dreading as Werther, a poet she loves, has declared to be his day of death. She chastises herself for her lack of courage in *Ah! mon courage m'abandonne*. Charlotte is faced with the concept of her loved one's mortality, even though she believes she has done nothing wrong.

Charlotte accepts her fate in *Va! laisse couler mes larmes*, and even explains that external mourning is cathartic for the soul. After this, *Werther* takes a dark turn, leaving both Charlotte and the audience member with a desolate, hopeless attitude towards the outcome of this relationship.

VIII. Dawn - expectant, optimistic, hopeful

After the darkest hour, the light of a new day arrives. In Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Carousel*, Nettie Fowler comforts an inconsolable Julie Jordan with a message of hope, found in *You'll Never Walk Alone*. Nettie utilizes the simple, yet inspiring text to remind Julie to keep moving forward and keep finding joy and love in life. Out of the musical's context, this piece operates in the same fashion— as a hopeful reminder of an upcoming dawn. There can always be a new opportunity for a new beginning—both in life and in love.

Before the First Note

Unlike other music instruments, the voice is housed within the body. Therefore, the environment around a person— be it physical, mental, or emotional— has a direct effect on one’s performance. Pedagogue Richard Miller describes this relationship of body as instrument in his book, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*.

“The musician who is a singer has an instrument that does not have to be tuned in public, needs no carrying case...and is in no danger of being stolen. Advantages beyond those points are somewhat negligible. The singer cannot purchase a finely constructed instrument...major reparations on the structure... are not possible. Further more heat, cold, precipitation, digestion, toothache...and especially respiratory ailments, may be totally incapacitating” (218).

Preparing for such a challenging program begins long before the first note is played or sung. Whilst musical and dramatic preparation are paramount to the success of a performance, how time is spent hours before the performance influences the overall delivery. Therefore, a performer must take care in the hours before a performance. On the day of my recital, after an evening of physical and mental rest, I awoke and sang at a church service. Whilst this was not the most ideal situation, the early singing did not sabotage my performance. The recital was not until three o’clock that afternoon, so I had

time to decompress both mentally and vocally. After taking time to get dressed and ready, I met with Professor Balach to warm up and focus the in hour before the program. Not only did that time with her serve as a moment to prepare vocally, but it also served as a cathartic release. After drying a few nostalgic tears, I knew I was ready to go on this exploration. Interestingly enough, a wardrobe malfunction derailed my focus minutes before stepping onstage. With my focus and worries elsewhere, I ignored the nerves, and stepped on stage after fixing the malfunction. Performance anxiety would not strike until intermission.

The Performance: A Set-by-Set Reflective Analysis

During a performance, I feel as if I go into a different dimension. Time slows down, with every second passing feeling like an hour. Every small shift and movement I make on stage is perceived in my mind as a large gesture. In order to provide a fully developed commentary on the performance given, a degree of personal transparency is needed. Recognizing the augmented sense of reality experienced by the performer, and an analysis of the performance from the audience members' perspective is required as well. This narrative will include both a personal reflection from the day of the performance and an analysis of the performance from the recorded recital.

I. DECLARATION



Figure 1 *Laudamus te*, Mood captured, nuance amiss

The first set, “Declaration,” was a stand-alone piece, *Laudamus te* from Mozart’s *Mass in C minor*. This oratorio aria qualifies as one of the most technically difficult pieces on the program. *Laudamus te* is in the key of F major, which demands the performer to sing a good amount of C5s (the note C one octave above middle C). In my voice, a C5 tends to be a problematic note in terms of head voice to chest voice registration ratio. Proper head-to-chest ratio of the ascending opening phrases determines the success of the rest of the melodic line. The piece lies in a tessitura, or overall register, that is higher than usual mezzo soprano repertoire. In addition to these registration considerations, *Laudamus te* is littered with rapid coloratura and challenging melismatic

sections. As the piece is high energy, one can give into the mood, not relax fully into supportive, low breaths. By taking shallow breaths, vocal tension ensues and tone quality suffers from this unsupported singing. Even with all of these challenges and special considerations, *Laudamus te* was a success. The high energy provided an exciting opening to the program. Reviewing the recording, even though the performer captured the overall mood of the piece, a degree of dramatic nuance was lacking from the performance. As this piece is not attached to a character or plot, assigning an arc proved to be difficult. A clearer sense of character, or even constructing a character would assist in creating nuance and dramatic shifts. In the next set, dramatic shifts were not lacking from the performance. In fact, those very shifts defined the following set.

II. TENDERNESS



Figure 2 *The Crucifixion*; Mother recounts the story of her son's death

The next set of the recital, “Tenderness,” consisted of two English pieces, *St. Ita's Vision* and *The Crucifixion*. These two pieces were composed by Samuel Barber, and belong to a larger work for solo voice and piano, *Hermit Songs*. Like *Laudamus te*, a special technical consideration of this set involves registration. *St. Ita's Vision*, often sung by sopranos, lies in a higher tessitura. The opening recitative section of *St. Ita's Vision* is exposed in a way, and demands a sort of controlled freedom and declamatory energy. With ample energy remaining from the prior Mozart piece, harnessing energy needed for *St. Ita's Vision* proved to be a simple task. The difficulty came in the nuance of the aria section, which mimics a mother's lullaby to a sleeping babe. One of the most significant

dramatic moments of the program occurred during the transition between *St. Ita's Vision* and *The Crucifixion*. Timing this transition proved to be more challenging, especially regarding a performer's sense of time and motion during the performance. Making the dramatic shift organic and clear to the audience was paramount, so every motion and facial expression was crucial to this portrayal. The two moods created by these pieces could not be more opposite from one another. *St. Ita's Vision* paints a picture of maternal joy, as the mother in this piece is nursing her son, Jesus Christ. This vision of joy is starkly contrasted with the isolated, bleak mood created in the opening phrases of *The Crucifixion*. In this short, yet moving piece, the mother, who had just sung of her joy and love of her son, recounts the day of his death— of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. The text in *The Crucifixion* was the centerpiece of the performance, so I kept my movements isolated. This simplicity allowed the audience to focus on the mournful and haunting narrative provided, rather than be distracted by overt gestures and facial expressions. In contrast to *Laudamus te*, I was able to keep a low, supported breath, provided full access to my vocal capacity. This deep, supported sensation would characterize the rest of the first half, and continue on for most of the second half of the program.

III. GROWTH



Figure 3 *Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb*; Longing for one's lost lover

The following set, "Growth," consisted of four selections from Johannes Brahms' song cycle, *Zigeunerlieder*, or *Gypsy Songs*. The selections performed were *He! Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein*, *Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du trüb*, *Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab'*, and *Brauner bursche führt zum Tanze*. These pieces, although very short in length, leave nothing to be desired. Each piece contains a distinct character and unmistakable gypsy flavor. In *He, Ziguener*, the character is declamatory and bold, much like the opening of the recital. A major difference in the Brahms selections versus the Mozart piece lies in the degree of refinement of the overall melodic content and tone quality. The Gypsy Songs possess a casual attitude and a rustic sound, which is elevated

by the written melodic ornaments. These ornaments often create sigh-like sounds from the singer. These unique ornaments, combined with the lower tessitura of the set adds to the overall tonal color, and creates an earthy, folk-infused sound. Speaking from experience, these feisty vocal vignettes are a pleasure to sing, and provide opportunities to explore differing shades of a passionate love. The second piece, *Hochgetürmte Rimaflut*, has a lamenting quality, a brief break from the passionate throws of the other pieces from this set. *Lieber Gott, du weißt*, is a quick, upbeat homage to the joys of young love. The jubilant, yet coy character displayed in this piece is the closest comparison to the next set. The final piece of the set, *Brauner bursche führt zum Tanze* explores the colors of jubilant love even further. This piece depicts a tavern, focusing on a couple who is dancing— celebrating their love. These different characters presented in each of the pieces share a common thread— passion. Whether the character was telling of his lover’s unfaithfulness to recalling his first love, all actions and pieces are infused with an unmistakable gypsy flair and passion. It was during this set that I felt myself fully relax into character, and, for lack of a better term, “let go.” Perhaps it was the nature of the music being played and sung, but each dramatic choice was well-executed. This bold passion is easily perceived on the recordings, with clear body language and facial expressions. This relaxation into character would not only be a necessity for the the Brahms set, but for the iconic aria that followed.

IV. PASSION



Figure 4 *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*; Carmen's warning

Of all the pieces on the recital program, the most recognizable was sung just before intermission. The namesake of the recital, *L'amour: An Exploration of Love and Loss*, stems from this aria. This aria was the centerpiece of the whole experience. *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*, better known as the *Habañera* from Georges Bizet's sizzling opera *Carmen*, was the stand-alone aria in the set appropriately entitled "Passion." The tessitura is neither high nor low in this aria, making for a comfortable experience. What is challenging about this aria can be depicted in three words: language, phrasing, and character. The aria is in French, and provides some of the most difficult

diction combinations I have come across in my studies. The strophic nature of the song provides many opportunities to forget a phrase or accidentally switch words around. This blunder occurred during the recital in this aria, in the second verse, to be exact. In terms of phrasing, this aria demands effortless, often long leaping lines after chromatic descents. Breathing is necessary, of course, but oftentimes I found myself avoiding a quick breath in favor of a smoother descent in the phrases. The final difficulty presented may not a commonly shared difficulty among singers. This difficulty, regarding characterization, is one of a more personal nature. As a singer with plenty of experience playing the antagonist or comedic relief, portraying the iconic, overt seductress was a trying experience. Striking a balance between coy, sexy, and mysterious to create the title character was a long process, but yielded a successful result during the recital. With the freeing experience provided earlier in the Brahms set, that same unbridled passion continued on in the . After reviewing the recording, I was able to confirm my perception as a performer with the recorded results. A few unpredicted dramatic moments occurring during the performance, included the much conversed-about finger point pictured in figure four. This performance provided a strong ending to the first half, and set up the contrasting second half of the program well.

During the fifteen minute intermission, I allowed myself a small celebration in acknowledgment of a successful first half. Offstage, I conversed with both Professor Balach and Professor Johnston briefly about the low, successful breaths and the exciting aria that had just happened moments before. It was during this respite, though, that performance anxiety finally began to sink in. Perhaps the anxiety stemmed from the

impending sets that were to come in the second half but thankfully, the anxieties wore off just as I took the stage after intermission.

V. JEALOUSY



Figure 5 *Vorrei vendicarmi*; Bradamante gives a visceral reaction to her faithless lover

The second half opened with a thrilling, high energy pair of arias, *È gelosia* and *Vorrei vendicarmi*. These two arias can be found in G.F. Händel's opera, *Alcina*. The difficulty of these pieces can be easily summarized into one term—coloratura. Coloratura, or melismatic passages consisting of many rapid notes on a single sung syllable, litters the score of these two arias. Coloratura is evident in the first aria, *È gelosia*, but the second aria, *Vorrei vendicarmi* is defined by its melismatic phrases. Breath energy and vowel placement are the keys to successful coloratura, and the performance was not lacking in either requirement. Allowing each phrase to have a planned shift in color was integral to the performance of these two arias, bringing to life

each repeated note, melodic turn, and each repeated word. The difficulty in regards to dramatic presentation lies in nuance. Both arias are rooted in the same negative emotions betrayal and despair, but each aria contains variants of each emotion. Looking back at the performance, this phrasal nuance was very clear in *È gelosia*, but was not as evident in *Vorrei vendicarmi*. Some degree of dramatic nuance was sacrificed because of the sheer demands from the aria, but overall the rage and distaste were conveyed in a clear fashion. Like the Mozart, there was a temptation to sacrifice breath support, as the arias were very high energy. This temptation of losing oneself entirely in the aria emotionally, therefore forgoing the proper breath support needed to sustain such demanding passages, is a defining factor of the second half.

VI. TORMENT



Figure 6 *Acerba voluttà*; The Principessa finds a fleeting moment of hope in her turbulent aria

This aria-dominated stretch of the program is full of desperate, love-stricken women with compelling arcs. One such character comes to life in the next set, a stand alone aria from Francesco Cilea's opera *Adrianna Lecouvreur*. What was deemed as the marathon aria of the evening, *Acerba voluttà* explores the inner conflict of the main antagonist of *Adriana Lecouvreur*, the Princess de Bouillon. The difficulty in this aria lies in the amount of stamina needed to successfully sing such a lengthy and vocally demanding aria. Each section, on its own merit, has its own musical challenges, such as recitative-like (speech-like) moments encased by soaring melodic lines and miniature musical climaxes. The key to singing this aria successfully is in preserving the interest,

and not over-singing any of the miniature musical climaxes, leaving energy for the soaring finale. The explosive opening, followed three by contrasting sections, not only provides a challenge in a musical capacity, but also provides an opportunity for an electrifying dramatic performance. Each section has its own mood, and explores a different shade of the overarching expression of turmoil. The opening section is dynamic and declamatory, but is followed by a section that casts a darker shadow and mood. The second section concludes with a large moment—hallmarked by a long G5 pitch. The third section follows quickly, and is characterized by an underlying sense of anxiety for the character. This is expressed in the quick, recitative-like vocal line. The piece finally ends with a *sostenuto* section, or in other words, a sustained section. The aria ends with a triumphant, soaring line crowned with an A5 pitch at the holistic climax. When reviewing the performance, I noticed the importance of not only clear dramatic choices within the sections, but the importance of clear choices regarding transitions. With the very contrasting moods provided in each section, the transitions between each dramatic beat were crucial in depicting an authentic, believable performance. Planning physical shifts during the piano interludes between each section offered continuity of the previous mood's expression, but allowed the new emotion of the new section to become apparent.

VII. WINTER



Figure 7 *Ah! mon courage m'abandonne*, Charlotte's desperate climactic moment

Perhaps *Acerba voluttà* provided clear sections for musical and dramatic nuance, but this trend would not continue with the penultimate set of the recital. The last two arias of the recital were *Ah! mon courage m'abandonne* and *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* from Jules Massenet's opera, *Werther*. These two short, yet thrilling arias offer a glimpse into the tortured psyche of Charlotte, a woman who loves the poet she is destined to lose, Werther. Both arias' dramatic foundations lie in the same emotions— sheer desolation and desperation. Two factors separate these arias dramatically: whom she is talking to in the aria, and the severity of what is at stake for Charlotte in these moments. In *Ah! mon*

courage m'abandonne, Charlotte is speaking to God, asking Him for strength as her own courage is failing. The stakes are high in this aria, as Werther has just declared that he will kill himself. Her panicked state is musically documented in the aria via a higher tessitura, and a frantic underscoring in the piano. What makes this aria challenging musically lies in the relentlessness of tempo. Avoidance of the earlier mentioned temptation to lose breath support in favor of an emotional reaction is crucial in this aria. There is not much respite between the demanding phrases, unlike in *Acerba voluttà*, which has longer piano interludes between each section. The aria is furious and short, but deserves a nuanced and authentic approach regarding theatrics. This aria could easily be sung at one emotional state, but building to the climax on the A5 pitch allows for those notes to be more effective. After that turbulent musical and theatrical climax comes a much needed denouement.



Figure 8 *Va! laisse couler mes larmes*; Charlotte accepts her fate

The transition between *Ah! mon courage m'abandonne* and *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* is a production in and of itself. The waning energy of the previous aria gives way to one final opening outbreak of emotion, as Charlotte shifts her focus from speaking with God to addressing her own fate. A clear shift between the two must be present for this dramatic opening to be effective to the audience member. In fact, the most technically difficult portion of *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* lies in the opening phrase, which not only sits on a transitional seam, or *pasaggio*, in the mezzo soprano voice, but is exposed and unsupported by the piano. This final outburst, which functions as a form of acceptance on Charlotte's behalf, gives way to a slow lament, full of emotional heartbreak and shifting vocal colors. After further reflection and reviewing the recording, I can confidently confirm what I experienced that evening on stage. Of all the pieces performed, this performance of *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* achieved my initial goal of story telling through visual theatricals and timbral shifts. The end of this aria is bleak, and provides a perfect precursor to the hope-filled finale of the recital.

VIII. DAWN



Figure 9 *You'll Never Walk Alone*; Glancing towards the horizon, expectant

In a true optimistic fashion, I programmed the last piece to point to a more positive emotion—hope. While leaving the audience with a bleak ending in *Va! laisse couler mes larmes* would have been intriguing (and perhaps an option for a future recital), closing the recital with *You'll Never Walk Alone* from Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway classic, *Carousel*, seemed to be a more fitting option. The song is deceptively difficult with its long phrases and higher tessitura. In terms of theatrics, this piece was most transparent of all the repertoire sung that evening. Instead of singing from the stage-accurate perspective of Nettie Fowler, who is comforting an inconsolable Julie Jordan after the death of Billy Bigelow, I chose to sing it from my own perspective.

You'll Never Walk Alone functioned as a sort of “swan song,” and as an expression of gratitude to those who have never allowed me to walk alone in my musical journey. After refusing to give into my own personal emotion for fifty minutes, I allowed myself the liberty to truly emote as Ashley Ashmore. This personal transparency was terrifying. Dayme articulates this reaction by stating, “Performers are used to being onstage and playing roles. When you speak for yourself, though, rather than for a character, it can become nerve wracking” (*The Performer's Voice*, 125). I had to remember Dayme's words— “Audiences do not expect perfection; they have to hear your message. They deserve an enthusiastic, energetic person who is dedicated to and consistent with his or her message— a person who really wants to be there,” (125). With this sincere and authentic expression, the song's role in the program would be clear. Naturally, tears effected the singing portion at the very end, but the emotional authenticity out-weighed the possibility of a bobbled note. The authenticity of the performance of this piece closed the recital in a poetic way, setting a seal of optimism upon this exploration into love and loss.

After the Bows

Sticking to traditional recital format, there was a reception in the Choir Room after the end of the program. The reception functioned as a conversational hour, as I visited with all the attendees of my recital. Several attendees spoke with me about the program and their thoughts on the repertoire and its presentation. Naturally, laughs were shared and photographs were taken during this time of post-recital communion. If I had been thinking about this written portion, I would have recorded some of the reactions and comments I received about the program. But in true performer fashion, I only felt elation, adrenaline, and relief that follows such a demanding performance. I enjoyed every moment of the program, as it was finished all-too quickly for my taste. It was my last hurrah as a performer before preparing to shift roles into that of which I would occupy the following month— the role of a student teacher.

THE PRODUCT

Beyond the Stage: Commentary and Application

This capstone project, by design, launches me into graduate studies, where I will further research and study characters in opera, my own voice, and other areas of performance. Not only did this body of work prepare me for the future later in the calendar year, the recital and musical preparation transitioned me perfectly into auditions for these graduate programs. Almost every piece I presented at an audition in February of 2018 came from this recital repertoire. My intensive study of this repertoire allowed for an authentic, well-informed performance during the recital, and later during other performance opportunities of the same literature.

This project not only added to performance experience, but also informed me of my potential regarding independent preparation. Of course, I received weekly voice lessons and voice coachings, along with external voice coaching and master classes in the semesters leading up to December 2017, but to insure success, I had to take the responsibility of learning the music upon myself. Richard Miller outlines the importance of musical independency by stating, “Only the singer can put together physical and artistic information in such a fashion that it can be personally experienced again and again. The work of the teacher can only be to point the way” (*The Structure of Singing*, 214). The process of learning music well requires this aforementioned independency,

something I had learned by my second year of studies at the University. This musical independency is a hallmark of a successful musical professional.

During the planning, pre-performance research, and musical preparation of this capstone concert, doubts of the relevancy of this topic in regards to my immediate studies plagued my thoughts. Perhaps, graduate studies revolving around performance loomed, but what about the next semester for the duration of undergraduate studies? How would this project allow me to become a better educator?

The knowledge gained, not only about the repertoire performed, but about myself as a musician and story-teller transcends the question of relevancy. Constructing a recital focused around such a personal and possibly intimate topic, such as love, allowed me to explore new types of characters I had never been exposed to. Exploring a whole new set of characters forced me as an actor to try new mannerisms and gestures.

In fact, the gradient of characters on this program forced me to make quick shifts into each character. These characters spanned a mourning maternal figure to the daring and electrifying Carmen, so some of these shifts in between characters required quick mental reflexes to achieve. Each character had her own set of mannerisms, so stark changes were necessary to create these changes in character.

This flexibility learned and utilized in my recital has translated into my approach of teaching. Even in preparing lesson and rehearsal plans, sense of flexibility in delivery must be kept. One cannot predict a student's reaction or needs regarding the information that will be presented and taught. In order to be effective as an educator, one must be adaptable to the given environment. This adaptability was challenged and strengthened

by this capstone project, therefore strengthening an aspect of my approach to music and students in the classroom.

Overall, this concert enriched my experience as a musician, therefore, enhancing both content and knowledge I share with my students. In the article, “Connections Between Performer and Teacher Identities in Music Teachers: Setting an Agenda for Research” Kristen Pellegrino shares this idea, “...Music teachers are, ideally, integrated people who bring meaningful musical experiences with them into the classrooms. These experiences may inform and influence teachers personally and professionally and their students’ learning,” (*Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 50).

For this concert, I created my own program and poster, which allowed me to gain knowledge in terms of formatting, PDF documents, and printing. Even though I learned the skill of crafting a recital program centered on a theme, actually bringing the program to fruition required a different set of planning skills and knowledge entirely. I also had to promote my own recital in free ways. Even though high attendance and reach was not an objective of this project, the skill of event promotion was utilized.

Upon reflection after the December recital, I discovered further evidence that showcases both vocal and dramatic growth in communication of ideas gained during this process. In three video recordings of the aria, *Va! laisse couler mes larmes*, which date from February 24, 2017, to October 20, 2017, to the final recital on December 3, 2017, evidence of this development is extremely noticeable. I am much clearer and dynamic in my physical gestures in the December recording than in the other two recordings.

Vocally, I improve markedly from recording to recording, peaking in the December

rendition. What is different from the October to December recording, though, is transparency. In the October recording, there is a degree of restraint in my presentation. In the December recording, though, all restraint is (tastefully) abandoned, both vocally and dramatically. There is no wall between performer and audience, and a new degree of sincerity and authenticity is achieved.

With this capstone project as the crown jewel of my undergraduate studies, I can graduate, confident that my musical event planning, presentation, and performance skills will serve me superbly as I continue my own journey to becoming a sincere and authentic performer. Dayme articulates the most desirable situation of a complete singing performer poetically in her epilogue of *The Performer's Voice*. "If one could venture an anatomical and molecular definition of a complete performer, it might be as follows: a mass of vibrating atoms all with adequate space for movement, each contributing to physical balance and alignment, coordinated respiratory rhythm and vocal fold vibration, a tuned and responsive resonance structure and spontaneous articulation, coupled with the imagination and spirit of the individual" (211). Whilst that picture of ultimate performing and vocal perfection is tantalizing, and at times, intimidating, it only inspires me to continue making improvements. The vocal and dramatic freedom I experienced during this recital, as described in the quote above, has only encouraged me to keep experimenting. Now that I have experienced this freedom of expression and communication in a classical voice context, my approach to performing any genre will conform to this experience and share the goal of this project— to communicate a story and emotion effectively and clearly. As this double bar line signals the end of my journey

here at the University of Mississippi, this capstone only foreshadows the authentic, communicative performances yet to come.

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