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## Visions Infernales: Characteristics of Style and Interpretation

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VISIONS INFERNALES: CHARACTERISTICS  
OF STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
George F. Skipworth  
May 1970

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performed on May 3, 1970 as part of the require-  
ment for the completion of this thesis.

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CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

presents in

*Graduate Recital*

GEORGE SKIPWORTH, Bass  
\*Vivienne W. Rowley, Pianist  
Assisted by \*Charles Fuller, Cellist

PROGRAM

I

Jubilate Domino ..... Buxtehude  
Charles Fuller, Cello

II

Visions Infernales ..... Henri Sauguet  
Voyage  
Voisinage  
Le Petit Paysan  
Exhortation

Intermission

III

Il lacerato spirito ..... Verdi  
from "Simon Boccanegra"

IV

Der Tod und das Mädchen ..... Schubert  
Der Doppelgänger ..... Schubert  
Im wunderschönen Monat Mai ..... Schumann  
Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' ..... Schumann

V

Arise, Ye Subterranean Winds, ..... Purcell  
from "The Tempest"  
Myself When Young, ..... Lehmann  
from "In A Persian Garden"  
Do Not Go, My Love ..... Hageman  
Preach Not Me Your Musty Rules, ..... Arne  
from "Comus"

HERTZ RECITAL HALL  
May 3, 1970  
4:00 P.M.

\* Faculty Member

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master  
of Arts Degree in Music*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Visions Infernales by the French composer Henri Sauguet is a song cycle for the bass voice with piano accompaniment set to a text by the twentieth-century poet, Max Jacob. This composition, published in France in 1950, is contemporary in style with considerable dissonance, and therefore is probably not well known in this country. However, student and professional should become more familiar with the style characteristics and performance of modern repertoire.

#### I. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

As Vision Infernales is representative of much contemporary vocal literature, an investigation into its style characteristics and performance techniques would seem to have value.

While authoritative material concerning the performance style of traditional vocal music is abundant, sources disclose little information about contemporary music for the voice. It is therefore possible to apply the results of this study to the performance of other music of the same general type. This investigation, helpful to this writer for more effective interpretation, may contribute to performance of other contemporary models.

#### II. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to style characteristics and interpretation

of the song cycle, Visions Infernales. Because each of the six songs in the cycle follows a similar pattern, the investigation is confined to those four songs which were performed, with special emphasis on numbers one, Voyage, and five, Le Petit Paysan.

### III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Bitonality. The simultaneous use of two (occasionally three or four) different keys in different parts of the musical fabric (1:96).

Chromaticism. The use of pitches not present in the diatonic scale but resulting from the subdivision of a diatonic whole tone into two semitonal intervals (1:164).

Diatonic. The natural scale, consisting of five whole tones and two semitones, as it is produced on the white keys of the keyboard (1:231).

Sforzando. Forcing, with a sudden strong accent on a single note or chord (1:773).

Song Cycle. A group of related songs designed to form a musical entity (1:795).

Syllabic. One note sung to each syllable of the text; occasionally a group of two or three notes will be sung to one syllable (1:355).

Tessitura. The general "lie" of a vocal part, whether high or low in its average pitch. It differs from range in that it does not take into account a few isolated notes of extraordinarily high or low pitch (1:839).

## CHAPTER II

### HENRI SAUGUET: HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

Henri Sauguet was born in Bordeaux, France on May 18, 1901. He became acquainted very early with Darius Milhaud through whose influence he met Erik Satie and the group of Les Six (3:419).

His music is identified with neo-romanticism, and he is "linked to earliest leadership within that school of thought in France, perhaps even elsewhere" (5:117). Sauguet developed a style that is satisfying to contemporary demands, and still contains the elements of tonality in which many composers and listeners still believe (5:118).

Sauguet has written music for almost all media, including the cinema and the theater. His first success was La Chatte, a ballet, which was followed by the opera La Chartreuse de Parme (4:332). His output of vocal music was considerable, either with or without instruments, and his works include six song cycles.

Although his compositions were certainly influenced by Milhaud, Satie, and Les Six, he never belonged to any clique or group. He remained independent both in his ideas as well as in his style of writing. He has described himself as "a traditionalist, though strongly anti-academic" (3:420).

Sauguet set several songs and song cycles to poems of Max Jacob, one of his favorite poets. Jacob was writing surrealist poetry even

before the beginnings of surrealism (2:510). While Sauguet was not a surrealist composer, he had the capacity to take heterogeneous materials and to integrate them "without disturbing the aesthetic equilibrium of either substance or form" (5:120).

Aside from his large output of vocal music, Sauguet has written film and radio music, church music, choral and orchestral works, two piano concertos, chamber music, piano, and organ music (4:332). His popularity is considerable in France and his works deserve more performances in the United States (5:121).

## CHAPTER III

### CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE IN VISIONS INFERNALES

This song cycle, employing vocal melody, text and piano accompaniment on a generally equal basis, has style characteristics quite unlike more traditional models. Inasmuch as an art song composer attempts to bring out the meaning of the text, some unusual musical characteristics are correlated with an unusual text.

#### I. THE TEXT

The text of Visions Infernales, in French, has its own particular form of articulation. In French poetry certain vowels in certain words are sustained a longer period of time than others, a device known in English as time extension. The careful composer to a French text will adapt his musical line to this French idiosyncrasy, which Sauguet obviously does. Those syllables with time extension are placed on either the longer notes or those with stress. Those syllables without time extension are placed on shorter notes or weak beats. This is illustrated in the following example.

Example 1 (6:5)



The image shows a musical score for a vocal line. The notation is on a single staff with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff: "-vait sur la couverture à griffes un bol de por-ce - - laine où la lu - ne mettait un". There are horizontal lines above the staff, likely indicating a continuation of the melody on the next page. The lyrics are aligned with the notes: "a" is under a quarter note, "sur" under a quarter note, "la" under a quarter note, "cou" under a quarter note, "ver" under a quarter note, "ture" under a quarter note, "à" under a quarter note, "griffes" under a quarter note, "un" under a quarter note, "bol" under a quarter note, "de" under a quarter note, "por" under a quarter note, "ce" under a quarter note, "laine" under a quarter note, "où" under a quarter note, "la" under a quarter note, "lu" under a quarter note, "ne" under a quarter note, "met" under a quarter note, "tait" under a quarter note, "un" under a quarter note.

The French language is particularly suited to expressing a sensual mood rather than an intensely dramatic or emotional situation. Jacob's text, while certainly of a dramatic character, expresses the

dramatic intensity through this sort of "mood painting". This is found in such passages as the following.

Example 2 (6:7)

The musical score consists of several systems. The first system shows a vocal line with lyrics "plus sur ter - re." and "Plus de lu - ne!". Above the vocal line are markings "rit." and "Meno mosso". The piano accompaniment includes a bass line with notes like  $(b)\bar{p}$ ,  $\bar{p}$ ,  $\bar{p}$ , and  $pp$ , and a treble line with chords. A marking "col 8<sup>a</sup> b<sup>a</sup>" is present below the piano part. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics "O nuit des chemins!" and "O che-min des nuits:". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with chords and a treble line with a melodic line. A marking "Ritorno al T<sup>o</sup> I<sup>o</sup> agitato poco a poco" is placed above the piano part. The score includes various dynamic markings such as  $pp$ ,  $p$ , and  $pp$ , and performance instructions like "simile".

In some instances both the text and the music may appear to be of purely dramatic character while they may actually be in lyric style. The singer must examine them both carefully in order to determine their true style. The last song in the cycle, Exhortation, is a good example.

Finally, and most important, the text, not translated into English, must be understood by the vocalist for a clear understanding



of how the musical features enhance the text. Though translations of the text appear in Chapter IV in detail, here it may be said that musical style characteristics must elaborate and describe visions suffered by an alcoholic in a state of "delirium tremens". Therefore the music must be symbolic of tension and distortion.

This symbolism, quite frequently graphic, is amply brought out through musical media, element, devices, and styles. The accompaniment, being difficult in performance, quite frequently overshadows the voice in descriptive annotation. Dissonance, a musical effect causing tension, is evident throughout the cycle, so that harmonies and rhythms are frequently complex and unconventional in creating the effect of a "drunk" having hallucinations. The following illustration suffices for the complete cycle.

Example 3 (6:12)

The musical score consists of three systems. The top system is the vocal line, starting with a 2/4 time signature and a *p* dynamic marking. The lyrics are: "- ni - me; cha-que fleur sur le pa - pier a du sang sur les A - ni - man - do poco -". The middle system is the piano accompaniment, featuring complex, dissonant chords and a dense texture. The bottom system continues the piano accompaniment with further dissonant harmonies. The score is written in a style that emphasizes tension and distortion through complex harmonies and rhythms.

ai - les, chaque a - ni - mal a du sang sur ses pé - ta - les. Tout ce - la s'anime  
 - a - poco - -

*pp* *mp* **Animando**

More specific aspects of various media and style characteristics follow.

## II. THE ACCOMPANIMENT

The performer, in order to understand this work, must examine the accompaniment and analyze its structure. In general it performs independently of the singer, frequently symbolizing style characteristics of its own and enhancing the textual meaning. Coloration of this sort implies complexities in harmony and rhythm as in the following example.

Example 4 (6:15)

l'in - fi - ni des mon - ta - - gnes, de la for - me

*p* *mp*

However, occasionally one part in the accompaniment is consonant with the melodic line while the other parts are dissonant. These sections serve as anchor points for the singer so that he not only preserves a tonal feeling but also resolves some tension.

Example 5 (6:1)

The musical score for Example 5 (6:1) is presented in three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, with lyrics: "nuit, nuit du che - min! la". The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef, featuring a complex, chromatic arpeggiated texture. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, featuring a simpler, diatonic line. The piece is in 6/8 time.

Quite frequently the accompaniment proceeds chromatically while the melody employs a diatonic line. Obviously, the singer must possess good intonation to produce the overall effect.

The technical demands of the accompaniment are enormous. A successful performance of this work depends to a large degree upon a very proficient pianist.

### III. HARMONY AND TONALITY

While the harmonic structure is not traditional, it does not exceed the concept of tonalities, though these become obscure at times through the course of the composition. One of the main features, however, in creating tension, thus enhancing an unusual text, is through the use of dissonant harmony. Bitonality, for example, is evident in

this passage employing a B-seven chord against an a minor seven chord.

Example 6 (6:7)

Chromatic harmonies throughout the cycle also tend to obscure the tonality. However, these devices generally resolve in a key feeling, as in the following.

Example 7 (6:25)

This is evident in Voyage, beginning in d minor and ending in the relative major F. The fifth song, Le Petit Paysan, begins in d minor, moving through considerable dissonance, but ending in d minor, with definite tonal feeling.

Dissonance occurs in all of the songs, between the accompaniment parts and the voice which frequently provides its own dissonance. In the following example dissonant intervals of a semitone between voice

and piano make intonation a problem of considerable proportion. The singer must memorize the sequence of intervals so that they may be sung independently of the piano.

Example 8 (6:5)

The musical score for Example 8 (6:5) is presented in three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, with lyrics: "-gie ar - chi - tec - tu - ra - - le au su - jet de". The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom staff is another piano accompaniment in treble clef. The music is in 6/5 time and features complex intervals and phrasing.

#### IV. RHYTHM

Though prosody is evident in rhythmic patterns, there is considerable rhythmical variety. Voyage is mostly in six-eight, two-four, and four-four meter, with one measure of five-four inserted due to the demands of the text. Le Petit Paysan has a contrasting tempo of fast and slower, alternating between six-eight and four-four meter. Considerable rhythmic variety is employed in metric patterns. The most complicated rhythmic figures are one note against two and two against three.

Equally important in creating tension, the rhythms constantly carry the dramatic situations forward and add considerably to the effectiveness of the cycle.

## V. MELODY

The text setting of the melodic line is syllabic throughout. This style indicates that poetic-dramatic concepts over-shadow the melodic line so it is frequently subordinate to other elements. Though short melodic fragments are employed, frequent broad, horizontal phrases also fulfill textual demands.

While melodic intervals are mostly conjunct with smooth voice leading, disjunct intervals appear in adequate places.

## Example 9 (6:6)

- mi - som-meil de mi la voi - tu - - re -

Frequent chromatic writing occurs ostensibly in enhancing the concept of tone painting through melodic contours.

## Example 10 (6:28)

du ciel ou de l'en - fer?

Although the range and tessitura are not excessive for the bass voice, vocal technical difficulties are encountered in dramatic demands requiring excellent breath control.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERPRETATION

Visions Infernales has been described as "nocturnal nightmares" or "day hallucinations" in which the "devil appears insistently familiar and menacing under masques of unexpected characters placed in prosaic or fantastic scenes" (7:416). It is obviously descriptive of the visions suffered by an alcoholic in a state of "delirium-tremens".

Because the meaning of the poetry must be understood before the songs can be adequately interpreted, a free translation of the first, second, fifth and sixth songs are given.

#### I. TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

Voyage (Journey). The subject of this poem is having a dream about a journey at night with a friend with the moon on the lake and the lake reflected in her eyes. They are being driven in a carriage. When the carriage driver quits his singing he will tell his thoughts. They concern the architectural geography of the infinity of the mountains. On the bed cover he sees a porcelain bowl on which there is reflected a spot of moonlight. In the half sleep of the carriage the driver sings. He believes that the moon is the bowl, the bedcover the mountains and that they were no longer on earth. It is thus that they travel toward a near country which he does not wish to remember, and where a certain agony shows him that the driver is taking him while singing. Now, it is fear!

Voisinage (Nearness). The door opens! Someone speaks! There is no one! I feel that there is something there. I light the lamp and the wall becomes alive. Each flower on the wallpaper has blood on its wings, each animal has blood on its petals. Everything quickens and advances, comes to the center of the rug; and the shadow of the fireplace is a cone. In this state my servants will find me in the morning. My fingers which grope in the shadows have found the corner of the saving bed, if it doesn't carry me somewhere else: now one no longer finds the bed but in its place a slimy beast.

Le Petit Paysan (The Little Peasant). Under the elms older than my father or grandfather, under the chestnut trees on the banks of the Odet where I was born, I saw the little sick peasant pass by. Don't look at me as if I were going to die, for you are myself and I know you. Child, do you come from heaven or from hell? Smile, for I will know you by your smile.

Exhortation (Encouragement). You, so beautiful who passes by! You, so good who loves me! You so great whom one admires! I weep for you. Yes, my eyes will be full of tears and when you will have passed, my tears will not cease for I know toward which gaps you are walking! I know better than anyone the one you watch for at the turning.

## II. DRAMATIC REQUIREMENTS

Most of the songs in Vision Infernales are dramatic in style, and require a voice possessing a variety of color and intensity. As



can be seen from the translations in the preceding section the dramatic situation many times changes very suddenly and the singer must be prepared to adjust his style accordingly. For example, in the second song, Voisinage, there is a shift from a smooth legato to an agitated, almost parlando style in just two beats; then returning to the legato.

Example 11 (6:13)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line in bass clef and piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The vocal line has lyrics: "de la che-mi - née est un cô - ne. Dans quel é - tat mon". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings *f*, *p*, *rall.*, and *sfz*. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "do - mes - ti - que me trou-ve-ra-t-il de - main!". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings *pp* and *pp furtivamente*. The score also includes performance instructions such as "Più vivo" and "a T<sup>o</sup> I<sup>o</sup>".

The only song not requiring dramatic ability is number five, Le Petit Paysan. With an almost traditional melody and accompaniment, lyricism provides excellent contrast to the other songs.

In none of the songs of the cycle should the melody become more

important than either the text or the accompaniment. They are all at least equal, and frequently the text takes precedence over the melody. Interpretation in this respect, requires an excellent command of good diction.

### III. DYNAMICS

In spite of dramatic implications, the dynamic range is not as great as one might expect. While the dynamics range does go between pianissimo and fortissimo, most of the dynamic level is to be found between piano and mezzo forte. This demands a great deal of controlled and evenly restrained singing with the ability to differentiate between the more subtle degrees of dynamics, as shown in the following example.

Example 12 (6:6)

The musical score is in 2/4 time and consists of three systems. The top system is the vocal line in bass clef, starting with a rest followed by a melodic phrase. The lyrics are: "le pos - til - lon chan - - te, chan - te pos - til -". The middle system is the piano accompaniment in treble clef, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment in bass clef, providing harmonic support with chords and single notes. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo piano) and *p* (piano).

- lon je croy - ais que la  
*p*  
*p sub.*

There is considerable use of the sforzando for the climaxes and special dramatic effects. In fact, one effect in Le Petit Paysan shows both the sfz sign and the sforzato symbol on the same note. Pains must be taken to sing these passages correctly if the intended effects are to be realized.

Example 13 (6:27)

es moi - mé - me et je te con - nais.  
*sfz*

In Voyage the principal dynamic climax occurs on the last page of this section with a gradual increase of dynamics to fortissimo. This is immediately followed by a sforzando sign at pianissimo in the piano. The song ends softly, but with still another sforzando in the voice part.

Example 14 (6:10)

- gois - - se m'in - - di - - que

*f*

This system contains the first three measures of the piece. The vocal line consists of half notes with a slur over the first two measures. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present at the beginning of the third measure.

que le pos - til - - lon ac - - ce - - le - - ran - - do - -

*f*

This system contains measures 4 through 7. Measure 4 begins with a four-measure rest. The key signature changes from one flat to one sharp (F#) starting in measure 5. The tempo is marked *ac - - ce - - le - - ran - - do - -*. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern, and the vocal line has a slur over the final two measures.

*ff* *p*

*ff* *pp* *p*

*T<sup>o</sup> meno poco* *Mainte -*

This system contains measures 8 through 11. It features a dynamic shift from *ff* to *p* in measure 8. The tempo is marked *T<sup>o</sup> meno poco*. The piano accompaniment includes a *pp* marking in measure 9 and a *p* marking in measure 10. The vocal line has a slur over the final two measures, which end with the word *Mainte -*.

## IV. PHRASING

Although some phrases are in long horizontal lines, more frequently they are in short motives or fragments, thus enhancing the dramatic effects of the cycle as a whole.

The most elongated of the phrases occurs in the last song, Exhortation. If the correct andante con moto tempo is maintained, these phrases are very difficult to sing. However, if the tempo is quickened the phrases lose their effectiveness and the words lose their meaning.

To interpret this cycle effectively, the singer must have an excellent command of breath control, legato, and textual understanding of the phrase.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

Visions Infernales, traditional in some ways, is at the same time a significant representative of contemporary vocal repertoire. Unusual characteristics of style are found in the composer's settings of unusual texts.

Requiring descriptive and dramatic music to enhance this French text with its singular type of articulation, the composer employs frequent dissonance in all parts, at times providing tonal obscurity, though generally resolving to a tonal feeling.

Other complexities are found in rhythms and technical difficulties, particularly in the accompaniment.

The cycle, extremely dramatic, requires a singer able to meet its interpretive demands.

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