## **Central Washington University**

# ScholarWorks@CWU

All Master's Theses

Master's Theses

Spring 1970

# Visions Infernales: Characteristics of Style and Interpretation

George F. Skipworth Central Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd



Part of the Music Education Commons, and the Music Performance Commons

#### **Recommended Citation**

Skipworth, George F., "Visions Infernales: Characteristics of Style and Interpretation" (1970). All Master's Theses. 1523.

https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd/1523

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@cwu.edu.

# VISIONS INFERNALES: CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE AND INTERPRETATION

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

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

by

George F. Skipworth
May 1970

L D 577/,31 5546 SPECIAL COULDINA

0248840

Library Central Washington State College Ellensburg, Washington An integral part of this thesis (covering paper) is a tape recording of a graduate recital performed on May 3, 1970 as part of the requirement for the completion of this thesis.

APPROVED FO	K INE (	GRADUATE F	ACOLII
Joseph S. H	aruda,	COMMITTEE	CHAIRMAN
Lynn B. Dup	in		
John DeMercl	nant		

# CENTRAL WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

presents in

# Graduate Recital

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

### **PROGRAM**

<b>I</b> .					
Jubilate Domino					
Visions Infernales					
Voyage Voisinage					
Le Petit Paysan Exhortation					
Intermission					
ш					
Il lacerato spirite					
IV					
Der Tod und das Madchen Schubert Der Doppelgänger Schubert Im wunderschönen Monat Mai Schumann Wenn ich in deine Augen seh' Schumann					
v					
Arise, Ye Subterranean Winds,					
Myself When Young, Lehmann from "In A Persian Garden"					
Do Not Go, My Love					
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					

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPT	ER P	AGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Importance of the Study	1
	Limitation of the Study	1
	Definitions of Terms Used	2
II.	HENRI SAUGUET: HIS LIFE AND MUSIC	3
III.	CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE IN <u>VISIONS</u> <u>INFERNALES</u>	5
	The Text	5
	The Accompaniment	8
	Harmony and Tonality	9
	Rhythm	11
	Melody	12
IV.	INTERPRETATION	13
	Translation of the Text	13
	Dramatic Requirements	14
	Dynamics	16
	Phrasing	19
V.	SUMMARY	20
RTRIT	OCR I PHY	27

#### 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 <u>Vision Infernales</u> 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, <u>Visions Infernales</u>. 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, <u>Voyage</u>, and five, <u>Le Petit Paysan</u>.

#### 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).

<u>Diatonic</u>. 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 antiacademic" (3:420).

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

before the beginnings of surrealism (2:510). While Sauguet was not a surrealistic 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 <u>Visions Infernales</u>, 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.

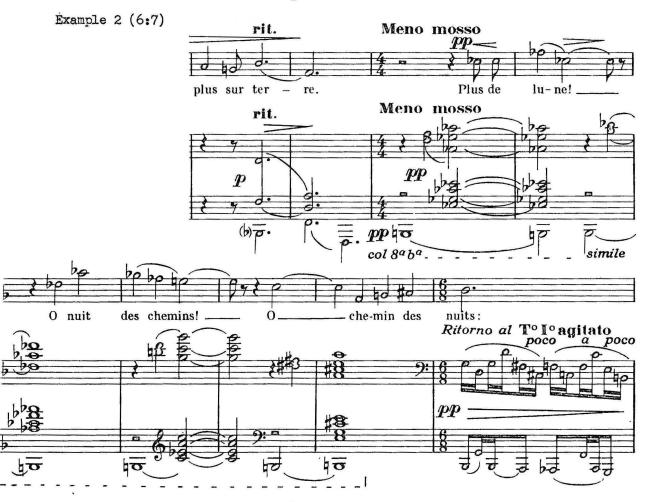
Example 1 (6:5)



The 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.

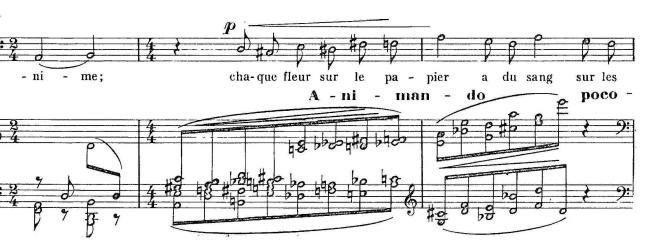


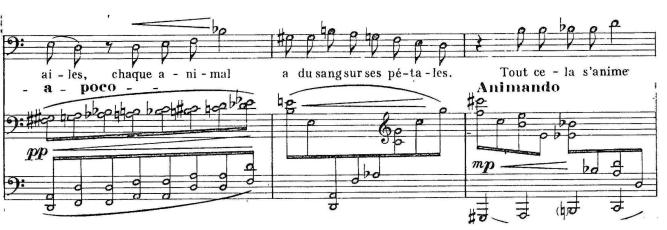
In some instances both the text and the music may appear to be of purely dramatic character while they may actually be in lyric style. The singer must examine them both carefully in order to determine their true style. The last song in the cycle, <u>Exhortation</u>, is a good example.

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)





More specific aspects of various media and style characteristics follow.

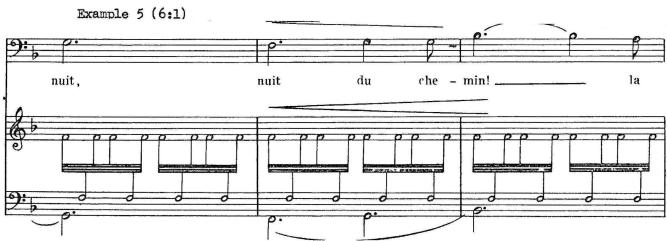
#### II. THE ACCOMPANIMENT

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)



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.



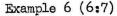
Quite frequently the accompaniment proceeds chromatically while the melody employs a diatonic line. Obviously, the singer must possess good intonation to produce the overall effect.

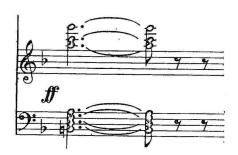
The technical demands of the accompaniment are enormous. A successful performance of this work depends to a large degree upon a very proficient pianist.

#### 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.





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



This is evident in <u>Voyage</u>, beginning in d minor and ending in the relative major F. The fifth song, <u>Le Petit Paysan</u>, 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)



#### IV. RHYTHM

Though prosody is evident in rhythmic patterns, there is considerable rhythmical variety. <u>Voyage</u> 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. <u>Le Petit Paysan</u> 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.



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

### Example 10 (6:28)



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

<u>Visions Infernales</u> 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!

<u>Voisinage</u> (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 fire-place 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 <u>Petit Paysan</u> (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.

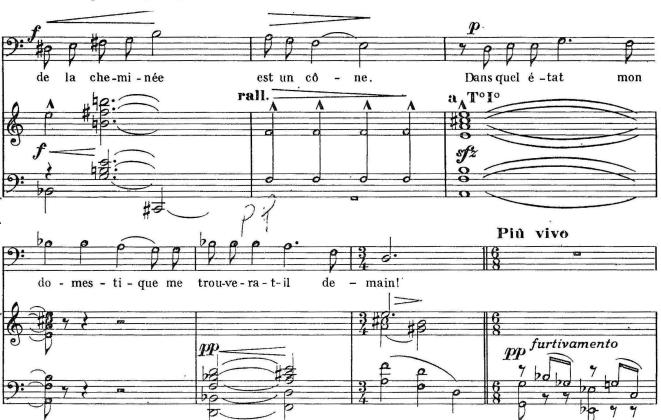
Exhortation (Encouragement). You, so beautiful who passes by!
You, so good who loves me! You so great whom one admires! I weep for
you. Yes, my eyes will be full of tears and when you will have passed,
my tears will not cease for I know toward which gaps you are walking!
I know better than anyone the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

#### II. DRAMATIC REQUIREMENTS

Most of the songs in <u>Vision Infernales</u> 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 <u>legato</u> to an agitated, almost <u>parlando</u> style in just two beats; then returning to the <u>legato</u>.

Example 11 (6:13)



The only song not requiring dramatic ability is number five,

Le Petit Paysan. With an almost traditional melody and accompaniment,

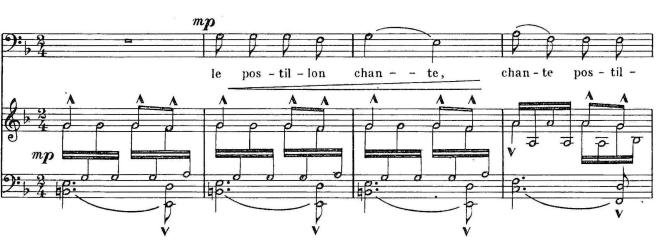
lyricism provides excellent contrast to the other songs.

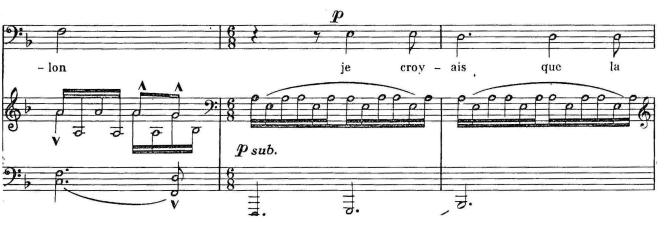
In none of the songs of the cycle should the melody become more

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)





There is considerable use of the <u>sforzando</u> for the climaxes and special dramatic effects. In fact, one effect in <u>Le Petit Paysan</u> shows both the <u>sFz</u> sign and the <u>sforzato</u> symbol on the same note.

Pains must be taken to sing these passages correctly if the intended effects are to be realized.



In <u>Voyage</u> the principal dynamic climax occurs on the last page of this section with a gradual increase of dynamics to <u>fortissimo</u>.

This is immediately followed by a <u>sforzando</u> sign at <u>pianissimo</u> in the piano. The song ends softly, but with still another <u>sforzando</u> in the voice part.

Example 14 (6:10)



#### 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

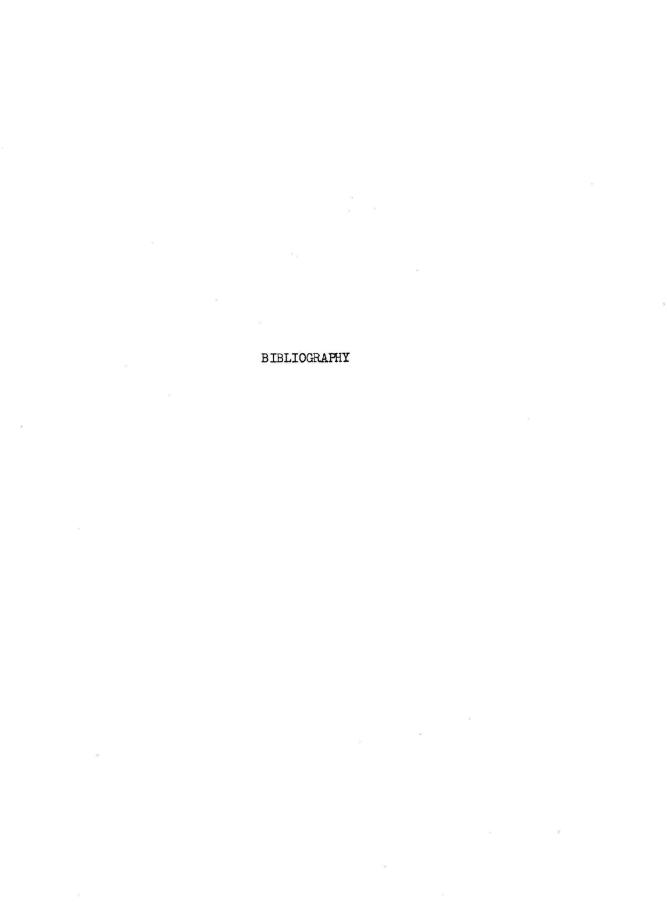
Visions Infernales, traditional in some ways, is at the same time a significant representative of contemporary vocal repertoire.

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.



#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1. Appel, Willi, <u>Harvard Dictionary of Music</u>, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Benet, William Rose, <u>The Reader's Encyclopedia</u>, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1965.
- 3. Grove, Sir George, <u>Dictionary of Music and Musicians</u>, ed. Eric Blom, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1954.
- 4. Machlis, Joseph, <u>Introduction</u> to <u>Contemporary Music</u>, New York: W. W. Norton, 1961.
- 5. Menasce, Jacques de, "Henri Sauguet", <u>Musical Quarterly</u>, Vol. 36: 114-121, January, 1950.
- 6. Sauguet, Henri, Visions Infernales, Paris: Heuguel et Cie, 1950.
- 7. Smith, Horatio, <u>Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature</u>, New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.