

“Blooming” and “Echoes”

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Mary Douglas

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for helping me get to this point. Firstly, I would like to thank my parents who always believed that whatever I played sounded beautiful. I would like to thank my teachers Blair McMillen and Renée Louprette for all of the guidance, musical and emotional support, and endless opportunities to make music. These concerts would not have been possible without the amazing musicians who agreed to work with me: Ella Menees, Oga Li, Niall Ransford, Alice Baum, Will Suggs, Tinaz Kotval, Grace Trenouth, Mara Zaki, and Annie French. I would also like to thank James Mongan and Tom Mark, without whom none of this would have happened.

Artist's Statement

My two senior concerts were born of very different impulses. As a double major with the biology department, I am always looking for ways to connect these two equally important parts of myself. After discovering a love for plants in my Junior year, I began to find much artistic and emotional inspiration in plant life. I was not only interested in the biology of plants, but also how human and plant lives intersect. We often fail to see them, yet we give each other life. We move constantly, but they remain in the same location for their whole lives. Without even knowing it, we are often tied to places of comfort by the plants that live with us. In addition to this interest in plants, I have also become interested in expanding my art beyond the medium of music.

However, I am limited in that music is one of the only arts I have ever studied. These two lines of discovery came together in my first concert, "Blooming". In this concert, I programmed piano music written about or inspired by plants. I collaborated with composition student Oga Li to include their piece "THROUGH" on the program. I also worked with photography student Riley Truchel to pair her photographs of or inspired by plant life with the music that I played. The result was a multisensory exploration of plants and their depiction by humans.

For my second concert, I was initially driven to create a concert solely of chamber music. I always find music most enjoyable and rewarding when I am making it with other people. Though I have had opportunities to grow in my chamber music at Bard, I haven't been able to take on large works or work with the same group of people for an extended period of time. I was hoping to more deeply explore working with other musicians by programming my whole concert around this kind of music. However, as my interests in baroque music and organ playing expanded, my concert began to change shape to accommodate these interests. Simultaneously, I

experienced a loss that made me think more deeply about all of the previous losses in my life. As I spent my time contemplating this, my project became more philosophically focused.

The final product, “Echoes”, is a conglomeration of all of these themes. Framing the concert at the beginning, middle, and end are three baroque songs, which I programmed both due to my love of the music and to acknowledge the time I have spent over the last two years learning about continuo playing. These songs, along with a set of piano trios, allowed me to collaborate with other musicians, as was the original plan for this concert. They also allowed me to include organ music on the program (in addition to a solo organ piece), representing my passion for this new instrument that I have learned while at Bard. The solo piano works are united only by my deep love for them. Each one took me in new directions that music had not taken me before. In putting this program together, I began contemplating how I may make music both for the people who are here to listen and for those who are gone. My focus when performing or constructing a program is always offering the listener opportunities to walk with the music in whatever direction they would like. For this concert, this ideal expanded into an attempt to create music that makes space for the listener to sit for a moment with those people in their lives who are gone. I hoped to offer a space of contemplation of not only the absence of those who have left, but also a renewed recognition of what they have left behind with us.

The experience of creating these two concerts has taught me innumerable lessons. I learned basic skills like how to lead rehearsals, how to coordinate with musicians, how to have an artistic vision and communicate that to others. I also learned that even if I am playing music written by other people, the music that I make can be whatever I want it to be. While I would like to say that the completion of these concerts bolstered my confidence as a musician and pianist, that was not always true. I am coming to learn that my musical confidence is an ever-expanding

project, and that perhaps self-acceptance is more powerful than confidence alone. These projects have invigorated me to continue expanding my understanding of how I can use music to express larger questions, interests, and contemplations. I want to keep using music-making as a vessel for offering space for others' thoughts, questions, and contemplations that connect people to the past, to the present, and to the world around them.



Blooming

Mary Douglas' Senior Concert I

7pm May 13th, 2022

Bard Hall

Sonata in A Major, D. 784 Op. 143

I. Allegro giusto

II. Andante

III. Allegro vivace

Franz Schubert

(1797 - 1828)

Short Break

Through

OGA

Trois morceaux en forme de poire

I. Manière de commencement

III. Morceaux 1

IV. Morceaux 2

VII. Redite

Erik Satie

(1866 - 1925)

Piano - Ella Menees

Preludes, Book II

II. Feuilles mortes

Claude Debussy

(1862 - 1918)

Five Pieces, Op. 75

II. Den ensamma furan

IV. Björken

V. Granen

Jean Sibelius

(1865 - 1957)

Program Notes

The project of this concert was to explore connections between my two majors, biology and music. In Fall 2021, I took a biology class on plant ecology, where I discovered a strong interest both in studying plant communities and in plants in general. The original vision for this program was to depict the general life cycle of a plant – germination, growth, seed dispersal, and eventually death and decomposition. These impulses are still visible in the pieces I chose, however, the various steps of the cycle may not be in order or the foremost feature of a piece. To pair with the plant-themed pieces I also wanted to feature a Schubert sonata that I began working on last semester. These two foci make up the two halves of my program.

I was also interested in including a multi-disciplinary element to the concert, as I have become increasingly interested in the spaces where different arts overlap. Riley Truchel was generous enough to agree to share some of her photos, both taken for this project and independently, that we felt connected visually to the music. Interacting with plants for me is a highly visual experience. Yet, plants often remain overlooked by humans, despite making up a majority of the biomass on Earth. This concert offers the opportunity to engage with plants auditorily, visually, and perhaps somewhere in the convergence of the two. I hope you enjoy the next hour of sitting with plants and experiencing what they have to offer.

Sonata in A Minor, D. 784 Op. 143 (1823) – Franz Schubert

Infrequently performed in concert, this sonata is a chilling creation. At the end of 1822 Schubert began experiencing the symptoms of syphilis, the disease from which he would ultimately die six years later [1]. In January 1823, just a month prior to writing this sonata, he was completely bedridden. Certainly, by February 1823, when the sonata was written, he was forced to begin to face both this illness and his mortality [2].

The first movement of the sonata was softly revolutionary at the time of its composition [3]. Greatly stripped down, Schubert constructed the movement using rhythmic and harmonic gestures rather than the usual ornamented pianistic style or strong melodic ideas. One of the few clear melodies in the movement is the first theme, a clear reminder of Schubert's new proximity to death. The theme appears in A minor and is built around a falling minor third - a particularly somber interval.

Central to the entire movement is a plagal chord progression - a subdominant to a tonic chord. This progression is commonly found at the end of church hymns, forming the harmonic basis for the "amen". Strikingly, Schubert further expands the possibilities of piano composition in his experimentation with silence. Each harmonic gesture is separated by rests, creating a sighing effect, and entire measures of rests connect the movement's major sections.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful moments in this program is Schubert's second theme of the first movement. Appearing twice, first in double then in triple rhythm, this simple chordal section has a achingly sweet character that is just as drastic in its longing as the opening is in its despair. After the return of the opening theme, Schubert chose to end suddenly in A major, rather than the minor the movement began in. Yet, despite this shift to a brighter key, the extreme sparseness of the ending - simply tonic and dominant chordal gestures repeated several times and separated by rests - hardly gives the listener any sense of comfort as the music becomes even more alienated from a recognizable pianistic style.

In contrast, the sonata's second movement (*Andante*) begins in F Major with a beautiful and almost soothing melody. The movement's opening theme suggests a lyrical response to the despair and fragmented development of the first. However, right from the opening line, Schubert also establishes a short pianissimo motif that quietly interrupts his singing melody. As the lush harmonies of this movement expand, Schubert transitions rhythmically into triplets, and the melody moves to the bass. However, he does not abandon the interrupting motif, causing the music to switch back and forth between double and triple meters. These shifts subtly augment the instability created by the interruptions, preventing the listener from relaxing completely. Even as the movement comfortably returns to the F Major lullaby that it began with, the music remains unsettled and doesn't quite provide the comfort that the listener expects.

The third movement, marked *Allegro assai*, recalls the memory of the first with a rapid triplet figure in A minor. Unlike the first with its overwhelming awareness of space and the second with its fragmentary melodies, this third movement seems to move constantly. The music is winding, yet directional, as if simultaneously searching for something and evading capture. Each repetition of the initial intense, serpentine theme is paired with a melodic section of a completely different character. These melodies soar with simple arpeggiated chords in the bass. In contrast to the first theme, these sections appear in major keys before transitioning back into minor. At the recapitulation of the opening, Schubert seems to have transitioned into A Major, mirroring his harmonic shift at the end of the first movement. However, just as suddenly, he moves back to A Minor for a final resolute statement of the opening, now intensified with octaves. Thus, abandoning any hopeful turn to major, Schubert ends his devastating sonata in the same tragic language in which he began it.

Through (2020/2022) - OGA

Composing is like growing a garden—I had this idea when I started my own garden during the 2020 lockdown. The "seed" for this piece was also planted around then. Over the past two years, it has grown into

many versions, including a version for sextet which was performed by the Da Capo Chamber player in April. Once I was browsing online, an ad popped up: a very hippie looking sweatshirt. A closer look: some text printed next to some cartoonish images. It reads: The Only Way Out Is Through. I did not buy that sweatshirt. Somehow.

- Oga

Trois morceaux en forme de poire (1911) - Erik Satie

The least botanical piece on the program, Satie's *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (Three pieces in the form of a pear) has very little to do with its titular fruit. Instead, the title for the work supposedly came from a joke Satie aimed at Debussy in response to the latter's criticism that Satie's music had no form. This "pear" can also be read as a play on a French insult where the word *poire* is used to describe the shape of someone's head, implying that they are a fool [4]. Satie and Debussy in fact shared correspondence about the piece, with Satie humorously writing in 1903:

"Monsieur Erik Satie travaille en ce moment à une oeuvre plaisante, laquelle est appelée '2 Morceaux en forme de poire'. Monsieur Erik Satie est fou de cette nouvelle invention de son esprit. Il en parle beaucoup et en dit grand bien. Il la croit supdriéure à tout ce qui a été écrit jusqu'à ce jour; peut-être se trompe-t-il; mais il ne faut le lui dire : il ne le croirait pas" [5].

"Mr. Erik Satie works at the moment at a pleasant work, which is called '2 Pieces in the form of a pear'. Mr. Erik Satie is crazy about this new invention of his mind. He talks about it a lot and says a lot about it. He believes it to be superior to anything that has been written up to this day; maybe he is he mistaken; but you mustn't tell him: he wouldn't believe it".

This "2 Morceaux" would later become "Trois". Yet, true to the dada musician's style, the piece contains seven rather than three pieces. Surrounding three larger movements, simply titled *Morceaux 1, 2, and 3* (Pieces 1, 2, and 3), are two introductory and concluding movements. The movements featured here are the first opening movement, *Manière*

de commencement, the first two *Morceaux*, and the last closing movement, *Redite*. The opening and closing movements translate to "A way of beginning" and "A gratuitous repetition", in line with Satie's tongue in cheek style. The musical material for the work draws strongly on Satie's previous compositions, especially from his *Le Chat Noir* days. In the 1890s Satie had to take work as a cabaret pianist and composer, and many of the themes used in *Trois Morceaux* come from his unpublished cabaret songs and incidental music for plays. The only movement that was original at the time of its composition is *Morceaux 1* [4].

I became interested in this piece nominally for the pear, representing fruits that many plants use to contain their seeds. These fruits are not just food for humans, but are extremely important dispersal vectors for plants. When fruits are consumed by a wide variety of animals, the seeds inside can be deposited in wastes varying distances from the mother plant. These dispersal vectors are very important factors in the structure of plant communities, influencing the range of species as well as reducing competition between individuals of the same species by moving offspring away from the parent plant. While pears themselves or the trees that produce them are not referenced by Satie, I was enthralled by the humor of this piece, and felt that despite the lack of explicit botanical connections, it would make an excellent addition to the program.

Preludes, Book II, II. Feuilles mortes (1913) - Claude Debussy

This prelude was composed as a part of his second *Book of Preludes*. Like Schubert's sonata, it was written around the same time that Debussy received a cancer diagnosis [6]. This colon cancer is the same disease he would ultimately die from five years later. This prelude is marked *Lent et melancholic* - slow and melancholy - perhaps reflecting Debussy's own mood as he struggled with this new reality. This work utilizes the whole range of the piano, creating an unique challenge for the pianist in exploring the nuances of soft (piano) sounds that Debussy calls for. The piece is constructed in a quite loose ABA structure, with a

slightly faster middle section introducing new material before returning to the chords from the opening, though now displaced an octave higher. The middle section also features the loudest dynamic marking in the piece - a mezzo-forte achieved not by any main melodic material, but instead by what seems to be an ornamental interjection. While Debussy's evocative title, "Dead leaves", is likely a connection to his newly present mortality, it also invokes the biological processes of decomposition and senescence. Senescence is the process by which deciduous trees drop their leaves in the fall in response to cooling temperatures. Once these leaves fall, they become part of the leaf litter on the ground, a hotbed of decomposition. Decomposition is a vital process in the life cycle of plants, breaking down dead plant material into basic nutrients. These nutrients are then released into the soil for uptake by nearby plants. Without decomposition nutrient cycling in the forest would come to a halt. *Feuillies mortes* certainly ends with an ominous and unsettled feeling, suggesting a uncertain but inevitable finality. Yet, perhaps understanding the role of these "dead leaves" in a forest ecosystem can give a new outlook to Debussy's haunting final chord - perhaps a beginning lies somewhere within the gloom and uncertainty.

Five Pieces, Op. 75 (1914) – Jean Sibelius

While Sibelius is best known for his symphonic works, he also wrote by one calculation as many as 380 pieces considered "miniatures" [7]. Among these miniatures are several sets of pieces for piano. Yet, of around 220 piano pieces, only 120 have been recorded, and solo piano music is often considered one of Sibelius' weakest forms, criticized for its simplicity and use of textures not commonly considered "pianistic" [7]. The work featured on this program, known commonly as "The Trees", is one of Sibelius' most popular set of piano pieces. Each of the five pieces is titled after a deciduous tree species native to Finland: "När rönnen blommar (When the Rowan Blooms), "Den ensamma furan" (The Solitary Fir), "Aspen", "Björken" (The Birch), and "Granen" (The Spruce). While the species composition of Finnish forests today certainly differs from the early 20th century, as a representation of the landscape

Sibelius was immersed in, birches and spruces alone currently make up 17 and 30% of the total tree species in Finland, respectively [8]. Sibelius composed these pieces in a surprisingly short period of time, just a few weeks in September and October 1914 [9]. This represented a relatively stable and successful period in his life. Following several periods of excessive drinking and spending, which at one point caused his wife, Aino Sibelius, to seek treatment in a hospital for exhaustion. Following Aino's illness and Sibelius' own throat cancer scare, he decided to give up drinking and beginning in 1909 saw more stable times [10]. The pieces featured on this program are II, IV, and V in the set: "Den ensamma furan", "Björken", and "Granen".

"Den ensamma furan" is above all a stately piece, strongly invoking the age and stability of a fir. All five pieces are noted for their orchestral textures, but this feature is particularly apparent in this piece with its stately, chordal movement [9]. Beginning in C major, Sibelius moves smoothly and quickly to the relative minor, A, casting a shadow over the solitary fir. These two sonorities, C major and A minor, continue to blend seamlessly with one another, creating a bittersweet tone through the entire piece. While beautifully haunting and particularly effective in evoking the demeanor of its titular tree, this piece seems also underdeveloped. It is a survey of beautiful moments and flashes of brilliance which at times seem almost cobbled together. Just a few lines in, Sibelius jumps unexpectedly to A-flat major, a shift that is not entirely convincing. Similarly, Sibelius includes a series of rapid arpeggios adorning the final lines of the piece – a figure I imagine to be the wind blowing through the fir needles. These comprise a truly beautiful musical idea, yet they go undeveloped and feel almost out of place as the piece returns to the opening chordal character to end as it started.

The second miniature on the program, "Björken", was composed at the beginning of October 1914. Sibelius drew on water in addition to trees in his inspiration for this piece. "Björken" features a theme that Sibelius originally included in his symphonic tone poem, *The Oceanides*, which was completed in 1914, though this theme did not make it into the final version of the orchestral work [9]. The piece features open harmonic

intervals, predominantly 5ths and 4ths, giving the piece a joyful and sonorous quality. The melody tripping over the chordal ostinato is reminiscent of a folk tune. As with the quick arpeggios in “Den ensamma furan”, the opening figure of rapid chords gives the impression of wind moving through the trees’ branches, mixing up a cloud of fallen leaves. Following this quick-moving dance is a section marked *mysterioso*. Just audible above a repeating bass figure is the same theme from the first section, but now altered with a hazy character. Sibelius’ tempo markings play with time, calling on the pianist to employ a broad range of rubato in developing less a melody and more harmonic impressions.

The final piece of the set, “Granen”, is the most well-known and often played miniature in the opus. The orchestral sonorities and stately metric character of “Den ensamma furan” reappear in this piece, yet rather than a 2/4 meter, “Granen” is a waltz. This is a curious waltz, offset by syncopations and ties that allow the rhythm to be obscured or confused at times. Throughout, a lamenting melody appears in the alto. This is a less common location for a melody line, but one that grants this piece a range of orchestral timbres. For, following the opening theme, the melody moves to the soprano range, as if introducing a new instrument and inviting a new color to the sound. Perhaps most striking is the secondary section of the piece. A rolling line of arpeggios seems to appear out of nowhere, yet by the end of its development returns harmonically to the first measures of the piece, displaced to a lower octave. While the opening waltz appears once more at the end, and is practically unaltered in material, Sibelius includes fermatas (instructions to hold the note for an unspecified length of time) in the melody line. This lends the waltz an unsettled feeling and emphasizes the ending’s heightened gravity and solemnity.

Mary Douglas is a junior double majoring in Biology and Music at Bard College. She has a focus in piano performance and currently studies with Blair McMillen. Recently, she has also begun studying the organ with Renée Louprette. She plays with the Baroque Ensemble, where she was featured in Spring 2021 on Handel's *Organ Concerto in No. 4 in F Major*. She was also a winner of the 2022 Bard College Concerto Competition and performed Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major* with the Bard College and Community Orchestra. Her current focus in biology is on plant communities.

Riley Truchel is currently a junior at Bard College, where she studies photography and political science. Her photographic work is centered around the notion that there is no one singular state of being, destabilizing the belief that we exist within a fixed reality. She hopes that through her work, viewers find beauty in the realization that there is no one particular way of seeing.

Oga (they/them) is a fourth-year student at Bard College Conservatory, majoring in music composition and studio arts. Their practice is equally focused on visual art and music/sound, including drawing, sculpture, video and performance art, alongside music composition and other sound-based performances. Their work has been performed by members of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Da Capo Chamber Players and Fear No Music. They are a recipient of the Joan Tower Scholarship for composition at Bard College and their mentors include Sarah Hennies, George Tsontakis, Joan Tower and Kenji Bunch.

Ella Menees grew up in the suburbs of Kansas City, Kansas. Unknown to her at the time, there was quite the music community there, making it easy to seek out exceptional teachers and music programs. She began playing violin at the age of two and piano at the age of nine. Ella participated annually in the year round Stringendo Chamber Music Program and the Heartland Chamber Music Festival in the summer. These experiences led her to discover her love for chamber music. Before her time at Bard Ella spent two years at Simon's Rock and studied with Manon Hutton-DeWys and Ron Gorevic. Ella currently studies with Blair McMillen and Marka Gustavsson, and just completed a series of oil painted portraits for her senior project in Studio Arts.

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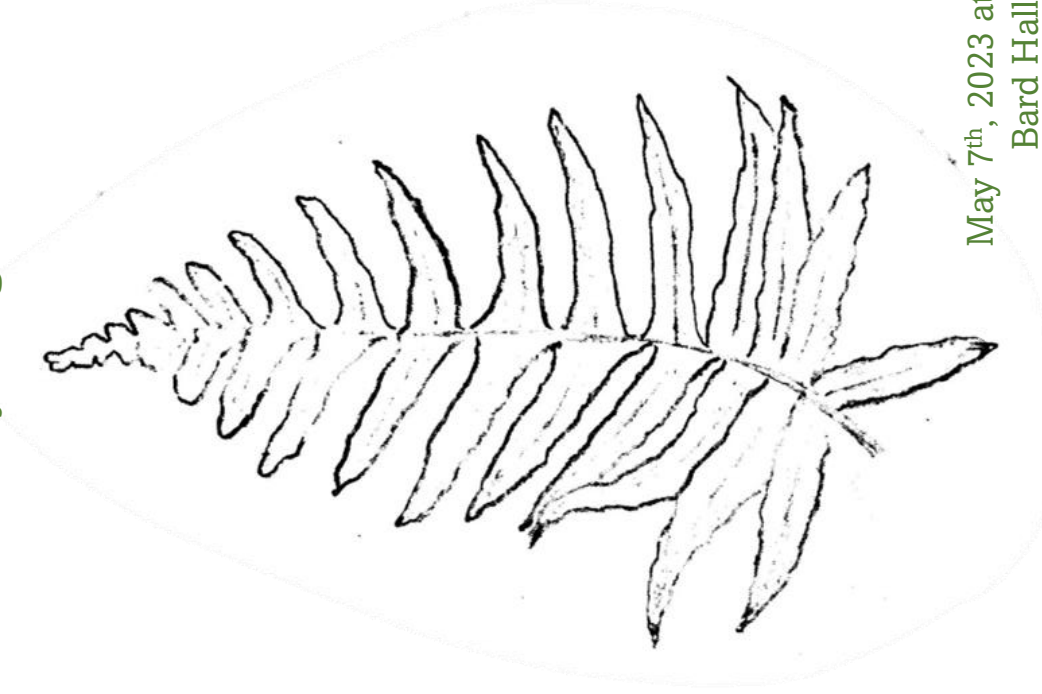


Echoes

A Senior Project

by

Mary Douglas



In collaboration with

Alice Baum

Annie French

Tinaz Kotval

Niall Ransford

Will Suggs

Grace Trenouth

Mara Zaki

May 7th, 2023 at 6pm

Bard Hall

Sonetto proemio dell'opera Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Annie French & Grace Trenouth, sopranos
Niall Ransford, guitar

Sonatina Joan Trimble (1915-2000)
i. Moderato
ii. Minuet

The Green Bough Trimble

Mara Zaki, piano

Miroirs Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

ii. Oiseaux tristes

Lasciatemi qui solo Francesca Caccini (1587-1641)

Tinaz Kotval, soprano
Niall Ransford, guitar

~ 5 min intermission ~

Canzoni alla francese et Andrea Gabrieli (1532-1585)
ricercari ariosi
Fantasia allegra

Arabesque No. 2 in G Minor Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)

Piano Sonata No. 1 George Walker (1922-2018)
ii. Theme and Six Variations

Godere e tacere Strozzi

Alice Baum & Will Suggs, sopranos
Niall Ransford, guitar

~ Texts and Translations ~

Sonetto proemio dell'opera (1644) – Barbara Strozzi

Mercé di voi, mia fortunata stella, Volo di Pindo in fra i beati chori, E coronata d'immortali allori Forse detta sarò Saffo novella.	Thanks to you, my star of good fortune, I fly from Mount Pindo among the blessed choirs, and crowned with laurels of immortality I will perhaps be considered a new Sappho.
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Così l'impresa faticosa e bella Sia felice del canto e deg'amori, Che s'unisco le voci i nostri cori Non disunisca mai voglia rubella.	Let the difficult and beautiful undertaking be joyful with song and cupids, so that our hearts united by voices may never be disjoined by conflicting desires.
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O che vaga e dolcissima armonia Fanno due alme innamorate e fide, Che quel che l'una vuol l'altra desia,	Oh what blithe and sweet harmony two faithful souls in love make, for what one wants the other desires,
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Che gioisce al gioir, ch'al rider ride, Né mai sospiran, che'l sospir non sia D'una morte che sana e non uccide.	They rejoice with each other's joy, laugh with each other's laughter, and never sigh except with the sigh of death that heals and doesn't slay.
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Text by Giulio Strozzi

Translation by Richard Kolb

Lasciatemi qui solo (1618) – Francesca Caccini

Lasciatemi qui solo
Tornate augelli al nido
Mentre l'anim'e'l duolo
Spiro su questo lido
Altri meco non voglio
Ch'un freddo scoglio,
E'l mio fatal martire.
Lasciatemi morire.

Leave me here alone,
Return, birds, to your nests,
While my soul, and my pain
I give up on these shores.
I want no one else with me
Other than a cold rock,
And my fated death.
Leave me to die

Dolcissime sirene,
Che'n si pietoso canto
Raddolcite mie pene
Fate soave il pianto
Movet' il nuoto altronde
Togliete all'onde
I crudi sdegni, e l'ire.
Lasciatemi morire

Sweetest sirens
Who with such merciful song
Sweeten my sufferings and
Soften my weeping
Go elsewhere to swim
Dampen the waves'
Cruel scorn, and their ire
Leave me to die.

Placidissimi venti
Tornate al vostro speco
Sol miei duri lamenti
Chieggo che restin meco.
Vostri sospir non chiamo
Solingo bramo
I miei dolor finire.
Lasciatemi morire.

Calme winds
Return to your cave
I ask that only my harsh laments
Remain with me
I do not call upon your sighs
Alone I wish
To end my sufferings
Leave me alone to die.

Felicissimi amanti
Tornate al bel diletto
Fere eccels'o notanti
Fuggite il mesto aspetto
Sol dolcezza di morte
Apra le porte
All'ultimo languire.
Lasciatemi morire.

Happiest lovers
Return to your beautiful pleasures
Wild beasts, whether birds or fish
Flee from this sad countenance
Only the sweetness of death
Should open its doors
To this final languishing
Leave me to die

Avarissimi lumi
Chesu'l morir versate
Amarissimi fiumi
Tard'è vostra pietate
Già mi sento mancare
O luci avar'è
Tarde al mio conforto
Già sono esangu'e smorto

Most avaricious eyes
That on point of death spill
The bitterest of rivers
Your pity comes too late
Already I feel myself fail
Oh eyes, stingy
And slow to comfort me
I am already bloodless and lifeless

Translation by Alex Burns

Godere e tacere (1644) – Barbara Strozzi

Gioisca al gioir nostro e
l'aura e l'onda,
Scherzin tra l'erbe e i fiori
I lascivetti Amori,
A nostri dolci canti eccho
risponda.
In questo lieto e fortunato
giorno*
Volin le Gratie intorno,
Vengan sul labbro i cori
E s'annodino l'alme al suon
de' baci.
Ah, non dir più, taci, mia
lingua, taci!

The breeze and streams rejoice
in our joy,
the wanton Cupids play among
the grasses and flowers,
and echo responds
to our sweet songs.
On this joyful and
auspicious day
the graces fly around us,
our hearts come to our lips,
and our souls unite to the
sound of kisses.
Ah, say nothing more, be silent,
my voice, be silent.

Text by Giulio Strozzi

Translation by Richard Kolb

~ Notes on the program ~

Over the past year I have spent a lot of time thinking about loss. While I have been grappling and reflecting, trying to understand why loss happens, mostly I have been discovering the ways in which those who are gone remain. Though their absence often feels the most present, those who are gone or who have left can't help but leave behind something with us – for better or for worse. As this exploration has come into contact with my music, I have begun wondering how I can make music that isn't just for me or for the people who are listening, but also for those who are gone. The music on tonight's program isn't united by any particular theme, except that when I first heard it, it took me somewhere that I had never been before. The music also involves collaborations with many different musicians – something that takes on new meaning in the context of contemplating what is gone and what remains. As you listen to tonight's music, I invite you to simply be here with the musicians and maybe allow someone who has gone to come back and sit with you for a moment or two.

Sonetto proemio dell'opera – Barbara Strozzi

from Opus 1: *Il Primo Libro de Madrigali*;

a due, tre, quattro, e cinque voce

In the dedication of her Opus 1 to Vittoria della Rovere, the dutchess of Tuscany, Strozzi writes:

“...I must reverently consecrate this first opus, which I, as a woman, too rashly bring to the light, to the most august Name of Your Highness, in order that under an Oak-tree of gold it rests protected from the lightning-bolts of slanders prepared for it.

The choice of the lyric verses will help me somewhat, which are all trifles of he who from my girlhood has given me his surname and material comfort. These will relieve the boredom of anyone who does not remain entirely pleased with the poor harmonies of my songs.”

Though humorous and mixed with a clear air of pomposity, Strozzi's self depreciation should not be interpreted here as insecurity, but rather the customary tone of a dedication. Despite having more works in print than any of her contemporaries, Strozzi lacked the security of consistent patronage across her career. As a result, she would often dedicate her works to members of the nobility in the hopes that she could gain their financial support. As her first published collection of music, her Opus 1 features no solo compositions, rather ensemble madrigals – secular songs – set to poems by her adoptive father, Giulio Strozzi. This is the “he” to whom she humorously refers in her dedication. Naturally, her position as a woman was at the forefront of this first publication, which she directly addresses in this dedication. Interestingly, by her last three opuses (Opus 6-8), this disclaimer seemed to be no longer necessary, as she stopped referencing it in her dedications entirely.

Sonatina for Two Pianos and The Green Bough – Joan Trimble

Joan Trimble is another composer you likely have never heard of. Yet, when I first heard her piano duets, I was completely enthralled. I can say without a doubt that playing these pieces is some of the most fun that I have ever had making music. Trimble was an Irish composer and pianist, known particularly for her performance of piano duets with her sister, Valerie.

Her “Irishness”, and thereby a level of traditionality that was not entirely welcome in the compositional world of the 20th century, was seen as one of the defining characteristics of her music. The *Sonatina* represents her efforts to escape from this characterization:

“...I tried to write a contemporary work and put in as many ‘wrong notes’ as I could, that was literally the only way I could think of it... I deliberately tried to have clashing dissonances, and I remember gritting my teeth and saying ‘I am not going to write a work that is pleasant to listen to and called charming.’ Then at a performance in the National Gallery in London, Frank Howes, the critic of The Times, gave it a nice notice and said that you could tell it was a bit Irish! In the end, I found the work had written itself in spite of me!”

The first movement, Moderato, is certainly unexpected to listen to. Even in the opening theme, the resolutions of the melody don’t follow a predictable course. What makes the piece so exciting to play is the richly entangled web of melodies, counter-melodies, and harmonies that are constantly contrasting in rhythm, texture, and range. Even single melodic lines spring across octaves and between pianos before they come to a conclusion.

This song, “Sonetto proemio dell’opera” is the first piece in the opus. Though the piece is written for two soprano voices, the poem features only one speaker. Rather than two voices describing their feelings of love, as in the later songs in the opus, “Sonetto proemio” becomes a proclamation of the speaker’s poetic skill (“I will perhaps be considered a new Sappho”) and an external narration of love in preparation for the music to come. A defining element of the style is the many contrasts between freely moving and more metrical sections. Annie, Grace, Niall, and I have spent the semester exploring the impulses and limits of this freedom. Notably, Strozzi’s works often feature a separation of text and music. You may notice as you listen that a new musical section will begin sometimes in the middle of a stanza, or even in the middle of a sentence.

For all the baroque songs on this program, I chose to pair the organ (the instrument I play) with guitar to form the basso continuo instrumentation. In the 17th century, these songs would have been accompanied by stringed instruments such as lute, baroque guitar, or theorbo, and often the singer of the song would have accompanied themselves. Strozzi was regarded as a virtuosic singer even before she became known as a composer. It is thought that her father founded the Venetian Unisoni academy at least in part to showcase Strozzi’s musical abilities. She certainly would have performed songs such as the ones on this program by accompanying herself on a stringed instrument. I chose to add the guitar to the continuo to bring in the strummed sound that traditionally accompanied these songs. Though necessarily not historically accurate, I think that the combination of the sustained organ sound and the arpeggiated guitar sound compliment each other to provide a rich basis upon which the singers can sing.

The second movement is my personal favorite of Trimble's compositions on this program. Despite her attempts to remove her music from an "Irish idiom", Trimble's melodies and harmonic accompaniments both feature harp-like motives. I particularly enjoy the exposed textures and contrasting articulations between the pianos. As Marka Gustavsson described in a coaching – "it's positively Ravel-like".

The Green Bough represents a different vein in Trimble's compositional approaches. It, like many of her two piano works and songs is based distinctly in Irish music, particularly the genre of *Goltraí* – laments. From the opening theme, the piece clearly draws on folk melodies. Just as in the *Sonatina*, harps and flutes are implied throughout. Perhaps the most breathtaking moment is the flowing scales and arpeggios that must be precisely coordinated between both pianos just before the return of the main theme.

Oiseaux tristes – Maurice Ravel

This short piece is a part of a larger work of five piano pieces – *Miroirs*. I was first properly introduced to Ravel after taking Peter Laki's class on Debussy and Ravel, and since then he has become one of my favorite composers. The title of this movement translates to "sad birds", a theme that is audible throughout. Ravel described of the piece:

"It evokes birds lost in the oppressiveness of a very dark forest during the hottest hours of summer."

This piece begins from stillness, from which a lone bird's call can be heard. The call is a two-note motive, with the second note acting as a rebound or echo of the first. As the piece increases in volume and intensity, this lone call can still be heard over all the harmonic movement below.

Rather than writing clearly harmonically, Ravel works with colors as the music traverses peaks and valleys of intensity. The final notes are in some ways the most challenging to play. They must simply dissolve away, leaving only their final resonances in the air.

Lasciatemi qui solo – Francesca Caccini

from *Il Primo Libro delle Musiche*

As with Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini's entryway to the musical world was her father, the composer Giulio Caccini. She was well-known as a performer on various instruments – lute, baroque guitar, and keyboards – but was also well-regarded for her compositional skills from a relatively young age. Almost all of the texts for her *Primo Libro*, including the one for tonight's piece cannot be attributed to an author. Interestingly, the integral phrase that ends four of the five stanzas in "Lasciatemi qui solo" – "lasciatemi morire" – is a direct reference to Monteverdi's opera *Arianna*. It is speculated that Caccini likely included some of her own writing in the texts featured in *Primo Libro*.

This aria is deeply dramatic, almost verging on melodrama. The song is constructed on a repetition of a melody in five parts. With each subsequent part, the ornamentation becomes more florid, and the singer moves into ever varied emotional spaces. Significantly, while each of the first four parts ends with the phrase "lasciatemi morire" – leave me to die, the final part diverges, ending with "già sono esangu'e smorto" – I am already bloodless and lifeless. This piece requires a large amount of freedom and connection between words, music, and emotional meaning.

Fantasia allegra – Andrea Gabrieli

from *Canzoni alla francese et ricercari ariosi*

As the earliest composer on tonight's program, much is disputed about Andrea Gabrieli's life. In fact, scholars have not even reached a consensus on his dates. During much of his life, Gabrieli was an organist at St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. It is also known that he composed many works for keyboards as well as madrigals for voice. He is particularly known for his canzoni, the style of tonight's piece. Canzona translates to song and is related to the polyphonic motet tradition. On the keyboard, a canzona is similar to the fugue, where a subject is passed between multiple voices.

In this canzona, the first theme enters at the beginning of the piece in the soprano, followed by subsequent entrances in the alto, tenor, and finally bass. As these voices expand and cadence, a new theme enters characterized by three descending notes. While the first theme is clearly a short melodic line, this second theme, though simple, creates an undulating effect as both the soprano and alto voices take it up in a round.

The complex and twisting runs as well as the declamatory nature of this piece makes it clear why it is titled "fantasia". Beyond cadential points, the music offers plenty of polyphonic intrigue that lends itself to rubato and other rhythmic liberties.

Arabesque no. 1 – Cécile Chaminade

During her life, Cécile Chaminade was one of the most popular European composers. Though she also composed large-scale works for orchestra, she was best known for her songs and piano miniatures, which she would often perform publicly. The lightness of these pieces, part of what made them so popular, was often attributed to her femininity. As one critic wrote:

"There are distinctly feminine traits about Chaminade's music. There's one word that sums it all up; Charmant. There's a feminine charm if you will about Chaminade's music that makes it individual."

Though she attracted much renown as both a composer and touring pianist, by the beginning of the 20th century her music had fallen out of style. While the supposedly "feminine" qualities of her music made it appealing to 19th century listeners, by the 20th century, these traits were considered trite and lacking depth. As a result, this composer who once was one of Europe's most famous died in relative obscurity.

I chose the piece on tonight's program after hearing it just once. Though the form of the piece is clearly in a 19th century style, I had never heard a piece from this era with such drama. The piece seemed almost cinematic to me. One of the most striking aspects of the work is its two-part theme. Beginning in a dramatic G-minor, the opening sweetly transitions to G-major, immediately offering two contrasting characters. Though the piece is certainly repetitive, I have not found these repetitions to be boring, but instead have seen them as challenges to take the music in the most unexpected and intriguing directions possible.

Piano Sonata No. 1 – George Walker

Theme and Six Variations

One of the most accomplished American pianists and composers of his time, George Walker's life was one of distinction. He attended Oberlin Conservatory to study piano at age 14, worked with famed pianist Rudolf Serkin at the Curtis Institute, became the first Black student to earn a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music, studied with Nadia Boulanger on a Fulbright Award, and of course won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1996. As Walker describes his first meeting with teacher and composer Nadia Boulanger:

“When I had my first meeting with her and showed her one of my songs, she said, ‘You are a composer.’”

The movement I chose to play tonight is a set of variations on the folk song “Bury me beneath the willow”. The theme is built on the open sounds of perfect fifths, fourths, and minor sevenths. Interestingly, Walker begins the theme on an upbeat. This in combination with rests placed throughout the phrases simultaneously complicates and enriches the rhythm of an otherwise simple melody. Each of the variations uses not only the melody of the theme, but also the fourths- and fifths-based harmony, but in ever ingenious new characters. While some of the variations are more virtuosic, others move gently and simply. Amazingly, the variations not only contrast each other, but each new character seems to retain an echo of the variations that have come before.

Godere e Tacere – Barbara Strozzi

from Opus 1: *Il Primo Libro de Madrigali*;
a due, tre, quattro, e cinque voce

Unlike “Sonetto proemio”, this madrigal from the same collection of Strozzi’s works is an energetic description of new love. Translated as “enjoy and be silent”, *Godere e Tacere* dances as the two singers describe the excitement of their love. While the other baroque songs on the program are strongly defined by their rhythmic and metrical freedom to follow the impulses of the music, this song is grounded in a more constant rhythmic pulse. As a result, the continuo part is relatively less involved than in previous songs, and the continuo serve more to encourage the music forward rather than guide it in a particular direction.

The text of this song is particularly intriguing. It begins in a straight-forward manner, abstractly describing joy, often by projecting it onto natural objects. However, the second section brings with it a new tone, one of reverence or even shyness. The suddenly slow interjection by the singers corresponds to the text “our hearts come to our lips”, bringing in a new glimpse of love that is perhaps all too real. As the piece ends, the voices take turns trading the words *baci* (kisses) and *taci* (silence), bringing the listener into a newly ecstatic, but shyly quiet love. I chose this piece to end the concert as a kind of offering to the listeners – in a world of echoes, sometimes it is best to enjoy and be silent.

~ Performer Bios ~

Mary Douglas is a senior double majoring in Biology and Music. She has a focus in piano performance and currently studies piano with Blair McMillen and organ with Renée Louprette. She plays with the Baroque Ensemble, where she was featured in Spring 2021 on Handel's *Organ Concerto in No. 4*. She is also a winner of the Bard College and Community Orchestra 2021 Concerto Competition and was featured as a soloist in Spring 2022 playing Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 25*. Her current focus in biology is on the structure of plant communities, and in Spring 2022 she performed her first senior concert, featuring plant-inspired piano music. She recently completed her senior project in biology entitled "Soil microbes drive the positive relationship between current and future evenness in old field plant communities".

Alice Baum is a graduating soprano at Bard College. She has been in the undergraduate Opera Workshop program for all four years of her college career, participating in three onstage performances. Alice has had the privilege of performing an aria, three duets, sung in multiple ensembles and has performed a handful of times on the Sosnoff stage. Alice has also performed two of her own solo shows as a non major! Alice is excited to be performing with Mary, Will, and Niall this wonderful piece for Mary's senior concert!

Annie French is a first year vocal major in the Bard Conservatory of Music. She is from Leesburg, VA and enjoys reading, watching movies, and going on adventures with friends. She performs and listens to classical, pop, and indie music. Along with her major in Vocal Performance, she plans to pursue German Studies as her second major.

Tinaz Kotval is a moderating sophomore here at Bard college. She has been a singer in many of Bard's performances, such as *The Opera Workshop (as Diana)*, *The Gauntlet*, *The Performance Class*, *Mahler's Symphony No. 2*, *The Bach Concert*, etc. She is the host of weekly open-mic nights on campus at which she performs regularly, and had performed at Taste Budds Cafe in Red Hook on the weekends throughout 2022. Outside of music, Tinaz is the founder and co-head of Bard's Archery Club, and enjoys pottery, jewelry making, skateboarding, drawing, and almost any kind of craft she discovers. Tinaz is very grateful to Mary for including her in her senior recital, as well as to all the incredible people who have guided her with love and kindness to where she is now.

Niall Ransford is a Junior music major at Bard College. Niall is interested in classical guitar performance and composition, although he continues to have many branching but related interests such as the philosophy of learning, teaching, and jazz guitar and Improvisation. He currently studies classical guitar with Greg Dinger, jazz guitar with Mike Demicco, and composition with Kyle Gann.

Will Suggs (they/them) is a graduating senior who concentrated in musicology. Their academic passion and focus of their studies is the intersectionality of music and literature, specifically exploring the themes of 19th century Romanticism. During their time at Bard, they have discovered a love of composition and vocal performance, favoring pieces that set their favorite poems to music.

Grace Trenouth is a first year vocal performance student studying in the conservatory dual degree program, and pursuing a secondary degree in literature. Grace most recently appeared in Bard College's Opera Workshop, where she had the privilege of getting to sing the role of Gretel. When not making music, Grace can be found working in the wardrobe department at the Fisher Center, working in admissions, or playing lacrosse for the Bard Women's Lacrosse team. Grace also enjoys knitting and recently finished a sweater! Many thanks to Mary for the opportunity to study such a beautiful piece of music.

Mara Zaki is a sophomore at Bard College pursuing a double degree in Music and Literature. After starting to play the piano at the age of six, Mara has endeavored to diversify herself as an artist. An alumna of the Westminster Conservatory of Music's Young Artist Program, Mara was a finalist in their annual concerto competition in 2018. At 15 years old, Mara began her classical voice studies through the program with Danielle Sinclair. She currently studies voice with Rufus Müller and Ilka LoMonaco, continuo with Renée Anne Louprette, and piano with Isabelle O'Connell. While at Bard, Mara performed in two seasons of Opera Workshop as Dorabella (Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, 2022) and Hänsel (Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, 2023). Always looking for collaborative opportunities, Mara frequently participates in student-run chamber groups both as a singer and an instrumentalist, and is a member of the Bard College Baroque Ensemble. She has also made appearances in the Clarion Society's Collegium Week, with the La Fiocco Orchestra, and in the combined New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival and the International Computer Music Conference hosted at New York University.