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Exploring Literature Through Music: A Graduate Recital Of Nineteenth-And Twentieth- Century Vocal Literature

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EXPLORING LITERATURE THROUGH MUSIC: A GRADUATE RECITAL OF NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY VOCAL LITERATURE

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Chapter One
Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was a prominent composer in the Romantic period who was known for his operas, *Lieder,* tone poems, and other orchestral works. He was born in Munich, Germany, and also became a well-known conductor in his time. Although musically diverse, much like larger cities in Germany and Austria, Munich during Strauss's life was a difficult city to thrive in for developing musicians and composers: "[Strauss] emerged as a musician within a city where the revolution in music was a matter of public debate, especially to the extent that its progenitor Wagner directly influenced the monarch and indirectly had an impact on affairs of state" (Deaville 2010, 3). Strauss learned music from his father, Franz Strauss, who was an orchestra conductor and horn player. While public presentations of chamber music were not prominent in Munich during his time, the city did provide public venues and entertainment houses that helped popular nineteenth-century opera music thrive. For most of Strauss's upbringing, there was a polarization between the upper- and lower-class performances that were open to attendance (Deaville, 6). Most elite institutions were held by royal patronage. Franz was a member of court employment under the Wittelsbach monarchy for forty years; therefore, Strauss grew up in the domestic musical environment of the court, a fact that shaped his compositional output for the rest of his life.

Throughout his composing career, Strauss favored the soprano voice. His capacity for composing for this voice type was due to his marriage to soprano Pauline de Ahna,

who had a long performance career. He composed over 200 *Lieder* for the voice and piano, and about forty for voice and orchestra (Parsons and Cross 2004, 261). Lorraine Gorrell defines *Lieder* in her book *The Nineteenth-Century German Lied* as:

> A genre that melded poetry and music into a unique relationship in which the piano and voice were closely linked to the poetic phrase, and melody, harmony, and rhythm of the music were crafted to reflect the meaning and mood of the poems they interpreted. (Gorrell 1993, 15)

In *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, James Parsons suggests that the development of *Lieder* is due to the pastime of communication and entertainment through song amongst the growing German middle class during this time. Parsons explains that it also "played a considerable part in giving voice . . . to a burgeoning German national identity, so much so that by the second half of the nineteenth century the *Lied* had become a kind of sounding manifestation of cultural hegemony" (2004, 4). The genre of *Lieder* is built upon the foundation of the German language and the inspiration that Strauss and his contemporaries found in the poetry. As Parsons points out, "beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing for almost two centuries, poetry played a fundamental role in individual and collective life . . .verse dressed in song was an essential means by which this rich body of literature was disseminated" (2004, 4). Composers like Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) were among the significant composers of *Lieder*, following the model of setting German poetry mostly for piano and voice. Schubert wrote over 600 *Lieder* and his influence on these later composers, including Strauss, is undeniable. From the origins of *Lied* in the 1740s until Strauss's final collection of *Vier letzte Lieder* (Four Last Songs) in 1948, *Lieder* was at the forefront of German compositional works and the bond between music and poetry.

As demonstrated in the four pieces chosen for this program, Strauss's art songs are useful learning tools for a singer's introduction to the technical demands required to learn and perform in his operas. According to Gorrell, "Strauss blurred the lines between art song and opera with his expansive vocal lines, frequent reliance on coloratura, and dramatic demands of the voice" (2004, 321). For instance, the role of Zerbinetta in Strauss's 1912 opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* requires the agility, technical efficiency, and stamina that a young lyric-coloratura must be able to access in order to perform this role. In addition to technical challenges, Strauss used a considerable amount of word painting in Zerbinetta's aria "Groβmächtige Prinzessin," which means "Great powerful princess." Word painting is a prominent characteristic of *lieder* and other Romantic art songs. Irving Godt defines word painting as "the representation, through purely musical (sonorous) means, of some object, activity, or idea that lies outside of the music itself" (1984, 119). Like a poet might describe an inanimate object as a living and breathing being, so must a composer give personality and movement to words that are inherently unrelated to music. In addition to the technical similarities that a singer encounters in Strauss's vocal works, understanding how he composed to aid a performer's interpretation is essential for learning roles like Zerbinetta.

When studying *Lieder,* a student must focus on the particular stresses of spoken German language, the intense emotions portrayed, and the composer's intentional subtleties that lend themselves to artistic interpretation. The singer is not only responsible for memorizing the melodic and structural organization of a piece, but also for creating a unique and personal interpretation of the work of art. Incorporating artistry and musicianship is often the most difficult final step in studying and performing this genre;

however, Strauss's music undoubtedly lends itself to musicality that reflects the emotion of the piece and effortlessly aids the performer in their interpretation:

> The outstanding characteristic of [Strauss's] songs is the simplicity and directness with which he expresses every mood. The musical phrase seems to pour out of him as soon as the poem takes a hold of him . . . He masters the German language to such an extent that it would be impossible to find a word wrongly accented. (Gerhardt 1949, 10)

The four songs chosen to open this program will be musically analyzed along with the technical challenges that each piece presents to a developing soprano. Further research on Strauss's selected poets and poetry for this song literature will also be provided.

The opener of this four-song set of Strauss's *Lieder* is Op. 29, no. 2, "Schlagende Herzen." This song, translated as "Longing Hearts," was composed by Strauss in 1895 to a poem by German poet and journalist Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865-1910). Bierbaum wrote poetry and novels of various genres, but was known for his fiction works and for publishing in magazines, journals, and newspapers. "Schlagende Herzen" and the other two pieces of Strauss's Opus 29 ("Traum durch die Dämmerung" no.1, and "Nachtgang" no.3) were all set to Bierbaum's poetry. The poem tells the tale of a young boy walking merrily through meadows, fields, and forests. The significance of the German language is demonstrated in this piece, as Strauss was deliberate in his presentation of the rhythmic character of the consonants. The piece takes the structure of binary form, without the traditional tonic-dominant relationship. The "A" section begins in G-major while the "B" section modulates into B-major. As the narrator of the story begins to describe the maiden that stands and waits for the boy between meadows and fields, the B section begins. Additionally, the use of arpeggiated patterns, tremolos, and driving sixteenth notes give the music a feeling of growing anticipation in the B section. The contrast of

syncopated chords underneath the "kling, klang" that are scattered throughout the melodic line represents the interjection of the beating heart. The rhythmic syncopation, changing tonality, and frequent leaps in the singer's range provide the lighthearted and innocent mood of the piece, but are deceptively challenging. Although these elements are technically demanding for the performer, they are also what make "Schlagende Herzen" the perfect opener for a song recital. The joyful energy that Strauss provided in the accompaniment of this song and youthful spirit of the ever-moving melody grabs the audience's attention in an inviting manner.

The second piece in this set is Strauss's "Ich schwebe" Op. 48, no. 2, composed in 1800 to a poem by Karl Friedrich Henckell (1864-1929). Strauss was very fond of Henckell's poetry and set nine of his poems between 1894 and 1901 (Schuh and Whittall 1982, 450). Three other songs in opus 48 were set to text by Henckell, with only "Freundliche Vision" (no.1) being written by Bierbaum instead. Henckell was a supporter of Strauss and his careful settings of his poetry as well, saying "it seems to me that you have transcribed the verse, or absorbed it . . . quite magnificently" (Youens 2011, 153). Youens describes Henckell's works and the poet's ability to "establish a contrast between zones of joy and beauty on the one hand, horror on the other; it is an inspired reminiscence, whether or not Strauss was aware of it" (Youens 2011, 155). "Ich schwebe" translates to "I float," an image that is reflected in this short composition. In contrast to the lighthearted young lovers in "Schlagende Herzen," this song depicts a lament in which the narrator reflects upon their "love's farewell greeting." The floating melody line over the delicate piano accompaniment gives the bittersweet lilt of a lullaby

with echoes of its melody in the fluid vocal line. The poem by Henckell is translated below:

Ich schwebe wie auf Engelsschwingen,	I float as if on angels' wings,
Die Erde kaum berührt mein Fuß,	My foot hardly touches the earth,
In meinen Ohren hör' ich's klingen	In my ears I hear a sound
Wie der Geliebten Scheidegruß.	Like my love's farewell greeting.
Das tönt so lieblich, mild und leise,	It sounds so sweetly, gently, softly,
Das spricht so zage, zart und rein,	It speaks such tender, timid, pure words,
Leicht lullt die nachgeklung'ne Weise	The tune still sounds and lulls me gently
In wonneschweren Traum mich ein.	Into bliss-laden dreams.
Mein schimmernd Aug' –	My glistening eyes—
indeß mich füllen	while I'm filled
Die süßesten der Melodien, --	By the sweetest of melodies—
Sieht ohne Falten, ohne Hüllen	See my love, without clothes or veil,
Mein lächelnd Lieb' vorüberziehn.	Pass smiling by. (Stokes 2011)

Although there is no rhyme scheme in the English translation, the German poem offers a rhyme scheme of alternate rhyming, or abab/cdcd/efef, etc. This common rhyming scheme is symmetrical to the listener's ear, making the lulling tune of this gentle song even more aesthetically pleasing to the audience. With this built-in literary form by Henckell, a young singer can more easily memorize this short but descriptive piece. Despite the simplicity of the song structure, the delicate and elusive melody is deceptively difficult. The high tessitura and the long, lyric phrases can be taxing on a developing singer. The song's 3/4 meter gives the feeling of a waltz, but Strauss's consistent syncopation in the accompaniment causes the singer to feel certain phrases in two. This metric dissonance between the piano and voice can prove to be challenging to coordinate with an accompanist. The intertwining phrases that result from this two-against-three feeling gives constant momentum through every beat of each measure, and reflects the bittersweet feeling of losing a loved one.

The program will continue with one of Strauss's more popular songs, "Ständchen" Op. 17, no. 2. In contrast to the lulling lyrical line of "Ich schwebe," this piece's tempo is marked *vivace e dolce* in a lively and uplifting 6/8 meter.

Strauss composed opus 17 in 1886, as a set of six *Lieder*. Adolf Friedrich von Shack (1815-1894) wrote the text of "Ständchen," which in English means "serenade." Strauss set many of von Schack's works to music, including the final piece of this set, "Breit' über mein Haupt." There are many settings of different "Ständchen" poems, including Brahms's setting of Franz Theodore Kugler's (1808-1858) text and Schubert's "Ständchen" composed in 1826 to text by poet Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860) (Sobaskie 2016, 102). The poem depicts a man speaking to his beloved, describing a dreamscape of elves skipping over the flowers, sleeping flowers around a trickling brook, a moonlit scene in the garden, and the roses awakening with a high glow. The opening melodic line contains a repetitive octave leap as the piano continues the animated pattern of arpeggiated chords underneath. Strauss syncopates the melodic line, demonstrating his ability to convey youthful love through short and unpredictable vocal phrasing. The harmonic support of the piano seamlessly fits into the shimmering vocal line that is almost operatic in nature. The momentum of the piece grows and builds throughout, a feature that is common in vocal music of this time. The singer climbs into the last line "hoch glühn von den Wonneschauern der Nacht," which translates to "(the rose) will glow sublimely from the delights of the night." Here, the music gradually *crescendos* and is broadened by extending the note values and lengthening the phrase, which in turn adds more lyricism to the vocal line. In traditional performance practice, "Strauss was known to insert an extra measure after bar 81 . . . the voice sustains the high note [three] further

beats, and the pianist plays measure 81 twice under the held note" (Leonard 1995, 26). By adding this extra measure and broadening the final passage, the music climaxes and reflects the heightened joy that the narrator expresses through the "high glow." This example of word painting is highly characteristic of Strauss and a prominent feature found in *Lieder*.

Strauss chose another text by von Shack to set the final song in this programmed set, "Breit' über mein Haupt" op. 19, no. 2. This piece was "Dedicated to Emilie Herzog, a soprano of the Munich Opera . . . The text is from a large collection of poems entitled "*Lotusblätter"* (Lotus Leaves)" (Leonard 1995, 36). In addition to opuses seventeen and nineteen, Strauss also set opus fifteen entirely to texts by von Shack. This short love poem reflects the vivid imagery that inspired Strauss:

Breit' über mein Haupt dein schwarzes Haar, Neig' zu mir dein Angesicht, Da strömt in die Seele so hell und klar Mir deiner Augen Licht.	Unbind your black hair right over my head, Incline to me your face! Then clearly and brightly into my soul The light of your eyes will stream.
Ich will nicht droben der Sonne Pracht, Noch der Sterne leuchtenden Kranz, Ich will nur deiner Locken Nacht Und deiner Blicke Glanz.	I want neither the glory of the sun above Nor the gleaming garland of stars, All I want are your black tresses And the radiance of your eyes. (Stokes 2005)

Strauss depicted this intimate scene with a dramatic range of dynamics, chromaticism, and sustained chords. These musical elements give the singer artistic freedom to interpret von Shack's poetry through Strauss's carefully composed melody. Unlike the movement of arpeggiation demonstrated in "Ständchen," Strauss used diatonic block chords underneath the first stanza of text. For the second half of the piece, the piano outlines the chords with simple eighth- and quarter-note values so as not to distract the listener from

the delicate vocal line. The entire piece is only nineteen measures long, but contains elements of word painting throughout. When the poem describes the woman's hair and eyes, the melody ascends in pitch and stretches rhythmically to heighten the image of her. This traditional example of word painting helps the audience to visualize the beauty of the person being described. It is evident that the narrator thinks so highly of them that the phrase must climax each time they are mentioned. The main dynamic in the song is marked *piano,* with the exception of the *fortissimo* indicated during "*ich will nur deiner Locken Nacht."* This phrase is describing what the narrator wishes for and images when he thinks of the woman: "only for the night of your locks." This declamation of love is the climax of the piece and precedes a descending melisma on the word "Blicke" or "shine," with a final authentic cadence in G-flat major.

Richard Strauss was known for his mastery of setting German poetry. His exemplary ability to write for the soprano voice is demonstrated through the four songs chosen to open this program. Due to the nature of the texts, interpretation by the singer will be equally as important as the music itself. Being mindful of every artistic nuance that is included in the score will help the performer create a unique conveyance of each song. Additionally, careful attention to the translation of the text is essential to develop this interpretation.

Chapter 2
Joaquin Rodrigo

At the turn of the twentieth century, Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999) was born in Sagunto, Spain, and grew to become one of the most prominent composers of the century. His music is considered one of the best representations of romantic and impressionistic trends of twentieth-century music in Spain. Rodrigo was one of ten children and lost his sight at the age of three due to a diphtheria epidemic. Despite this disability, he began his studies at a young age under the direction of Paul Dukas (1865-1935) and was mentored by Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). "Along with Turina and Falla, he created a substantial body of work which invariably derived its inspiration from the rhythms, textures, and thematic material of the heartland of Spanish identity" (Wade 1999, 1). His most famous work is undoubtedly his guitar concerto titled *Concierto de Aranjuez* that premiered in 1939. This concerto launched his career into international recognition and is still one of his most performed works in concert and recital settings.

In addition to being a virtuoso pianist, Rodrigo composed chamber music as well as numerous works for voice, guitar, choir, and piano. The set chosen for this recital is one of his most well-known vocal sets, *Cuatro madrigales amatorios.* Composed in 1947, this set was heavily influenced by early music and folk poetry. He selected these four Spanish madrigals from the 1560 collection *Recopilación de sonetos y villancicos a quatro y a cinco* by composer Juan Vasquez (c.1500- c.1560). Rodrigo preserved the cultural distinction of the folk poetry in these songs as well as the unmistakable influence

of the *vihuela,* a stringed Spanish Renaissance instrument. According to Grove Music, *villancicos* originated in the fifteenth century by Renaissance pieces that were modelled on popular songs and eventually associated with poetry: "this form, in its various patterns, already existed in medieval monophonic songs such as the French *virelai*, Italian *lauda, ballata* and Hispanic *cantiga*. All display with some consistency the curious 'asymmetry' between verse and music of the *vuelta*" (Russell 1931).

Although not much is known about Vasquez's life, it is important to note that he was a well-known priest and composer of the Renaissance era. As polyphony grew more prevalent in this genre, Vasquez was able to expand the form and create through-composed works. Unlike most *villancicos* at the later part of the sixteenth century, none of the 48 pieces in Vasquez's *Recopilación* were set to religious texts. This genre became the majority of Vasquez's works as he "achieved greatest fame with his secular music. Although a few settings are of Italianate poetic forms . . . three-quarters of the contents . . . are villancicos. They include poetry by leading Spaniards, and Vasquez himself may have glossed traditional refrains" (Russell 1931). With the evolution of the *villancico* came the Spanish madrigal form and style in which Rodrigo set these texts. In this genre, "the subjects tended to be pastoral and amatory . . . This later style of madrigal influenced the Spanish *villancico* and was adopted by composers in Germany, Poland, Denmark, and the Netherlands" (Cushman et al. 2012, 838). Vasquez was able to inspire future composers such as Rodrigo to modernize these sixteenth-century songs.

Rodrigo heard these poems set to the music of the *vihuelas* and composed his own version for soprano and piano. He set four of the pieces from Vasquez's original collection of forty-eight sonnets and called them *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios.*

This song collection explores the various emotions associated with love and imagery that are characteristic of early folk poetry. Each poem reflects various emotions including despair, admiration, excitement, and wonder. The first poem is titled "¿Con qué la lavaré?" or "What will I wash it with?" This poem, written by anonymous, outlines the lonesome and sorrowful thoughts of the narrator:

¿Con qué la lavaré	With what shall I wash
la tez de la mi cara?	the skin of my face?
¿Con qué la lavaré,	With what shall I wash it?
Que vivo mal penada?	I live in such sorrow.
Lávanse las casadas	Married women
con agua de limones:	wash in lemon water:
lávome yo, cuitada,	in my grief I wash
con penas y dolores.	in pain and sorrow.
¿Con qué la lavaré?	With what shall I wash it?
que vivo mal penada	I live in such sorrow (Wade 2007).

"¿Con qué la lavaré?" is a reflection of sorrow, as the narrator observes women who are surrounded by love and luxury as she is left feeling hopeless and alone: "whereas wives and mothers bathe in lemon water, the poet's face is washed only in tears of grief and sorrow" (Wade 2007). Similarly, the second piece, titled "Vos me matàsteis" (You have slain me), reflects the devastation that the narrator feels after seeing a beautiful girl on the banks of a river.

Vos me matásteis,	You killed me,
niña en cabello,	girl with hair hanging loose,
vos me habéis muerto.	you have slain me.
Riberas de un río	By the river bank
ví moza vírgo,	I saw a young maiden.
Niña en cabello,	Girl with hair hanging loose,
vos me habéis muerto.	you have slain me.
Niña en cabello	Girl with hair hanging loose,
vos me matásteis,	you have killed me,
vos me habéis muerto.	you have slain me (Wade 2007).

The meaning of this text can be interpreted positively as being metaphorically "slain by" and in awe of the beauty of the girl on the river; however, the minor key and *andantino* tempo marking imply that the narrator is experiencing devastation and loss. The theme of love and loss continues and is overlapped with the imagery of the riverbank and the purity of the woman that is seen. These themes of unrequited love and nature are highly characteristic of madrigals and of folk poetry.

In a sharp contrast, songs three and four are marked *allegretto grazioso* and *allegro molto,* respectively. "¿De dónde venís, amore?" (Where have you been, my love?) and "De los álamos vengo, madre" (I come from the poplars, mother) both reflect a different side of love. The excitement and assurance reflected in these two poems offers a contrast to the solemn first half of the set. The *staccato* leaps in the piano entrance of the "De dónde venís, amore?" set the singer up for a flirtatious and lighthearted interpretation of the text.

¿De dónde venís, amore?	Where hast thou been, my love?
Bien sé yo de dónde.	I know well where.
¿De dónde venís, amigo?	Where hast thou been, my friend?
Fuere yo testigo!	Were I a witness
¡Ah! Bien sé yo de dónde.	ah! I know well where (Wade 2007).

Rodrigo repeats the phrases of these short poems in various structure, to emphasize the meaning of each. For example, "bien sé yo de dónde" occurs frequently throughout. Each time it is repeated, the phrase moves between *legato* and *staccato,* shifts between various dynamics, or emphasizes certain words in the phrase through repetition. Overall, the tessitura of this piece is the highest of the four songs, reaching a high C6 in the final measures.

Paired with “De los álamos vengo, madre,” the final two pieces end the song cycle with a more positive outlook on love than which it began. “De los álamos” contains refrains of the title phrase throughout, modulating or adding more grace notes each time. The structured block chords in the piano accompaniment give a more regal and declarative setting to the text. Since it is stated that the narrator is speaking to their mother, this song seems to represent yet another form of love; between a mother and child.

De los álamos vengo, madre, de ver cómo los menea el aire. De los álamos de Sevilla,	I come from the poplars, mother, from seeing the breezes stir them. From the poplars of Seville,
de ver a mi linda amiga, de ver cómo los menea el aire. De los álamos vengo, madre, der ver cómo los menea el aire.	from seeing my sweet love, from seeing the breezes stir them.I come from the poplars, mother,from seeing the breezes stir them (Wade 2007).

Additionally, the narrator reflects on seeing their sweet friend, or lover. The eagerness to spread this news is reflected in the grace notes and turns added by Rodrigo, symbolizing a giddy and fluttering heart. According to Wade, Rodrigo took melodies from Vasquez’s old settings of this poetry for the other three songs. “De los álamos vengo, madre” is the only piece in the set in which Rodrigo composed a completely original melody.

In order to analyze the significance of Rodrigo’s compositions, it is important to note that Rodrigo was considered a Spanish nationalist icon through his work. In a memorial article published by *The Guardian*, Graham Wade writes:

> “In the cultural rebuilding of Spain after the civil war the composer became a national symbol of hope and renewal . . . Rodrigo became a representative to the Spanish people of the dilemma they, too, faced. He had suffered deeply and permanently within his own personal experience, had faced exile and poverty, loss and displacement, yet through the creative power of his music could achieve integration, renewal, and inner peace.” (1999)

The significance of these texts is the reason behind Rodrigo's legacy as a Spanish icon. Folk poetry is culturally significant in the way that it reflects national identity through the eyes of the lower class. For many countries this means the peasants, slaves, and outcasts; much like Rodrigo, who spent the years of the Spanish civil war in exile in Paris and Germany. Spanish art song settings of folk poetry provide an opportunity to focus on the importance of these texts as a tool for cultural understanding (deLapp-Culver 2016). Studying these literary trends and how they relate to music around the world can create a cultural awareness for the singer and influence how they portray these pieces.

Chapter 3
Reynaldo Hahn

Reynaldo Hahn (1847-1974) was a Venezuelan-born composer, conductor, and writer. Hahn was the youngest of twelve siblings, and his family moved to France when he was four years old. His musical inclination was evident at a young age, entering the Paris Conservatoire when he was only eleven. It was there that Hahn met Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) and was taught by Jules Massenet (1842-1912), both of whom greatly impacted his compositional style. In addition to composing various instrumental compositions, operas, *mélodies,* and song cycles, Hahn was a gifted singer and often accompanied his own baritone voice during performances. This experience as a vocalist is evident in his compositions for the voice. The two selected Hahn songs demonstrate his consistent use of vocal restraint and simplicity in his songs, allowing the music to serve the text. According to Joseph Rawlins, "One of the most noticeable features of Hahn's songwriting is the absolute simplicity of the piano accompaniments . . . it is enhancement of the poem, not musical elaboration, that Hahn is after" (Rawlins 2009, 23-24).

In order to establish historical and literary context for the music that Hahn composed, it is important to understand the development of French vocal music. Hahn drew his inspiration from poetry of the time, and elements from these literary movements are reflected in both *mélodies* of this set. According to Thea Sikora Engelson,

> The roots of the French *mélodie* can be traced to the *romance,* a sweet (often insipid), strophic, eighteenth-century song with romantic or pastoral subjects . . . With its simple accompaniment and vocal line, the *romance* avoided the trappings of the operatic style, relying on charming lyricism and musical sensitivity. (2006, 1)

The *romance* was a song form rooted in simplicity and symmetry, and after 1830 it began to take the form of a more dramatic style: *mélodie.* With the introduction of *lieder* in Germany, the *romances* of France began to similarly emphasize more harmonic texture, warmth, and complexity. "Si mes vers avaient des ailes" and "L'heure exquise" were composed in the Romantic era; however, the content of both is simple in structure and texture, like a *romance.* Despite Hahn's prominence in developing this genre, he is often overshadowed by the innovative compositional works of Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), and Erik Satie (1866-1925). Despite this, "[Hahn] composed over one hundred songs in three languages (French, English, Italian), which include seven song cycles . . . twenty-three works for the stage" (Engelson 2006, 8), as well as works for orchestra, solo piano, and chamber music. Unlike an operatic aria, the *mélodies* composed by Hahn relied more on lyrical sensitivity than on ornamentation or virtuosic performance.

The two Hahn songs included on this program reflect the literary inspiration and lyrical significance found in French *mélodies*. Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote the poem that inspired the first piece, "Si mes vers avaient des ailes." Hugo was a prolific dramatic and literary figure in France at the time of the Romantic Movement, writing beloved novels such as *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre-Dame) that themselves inspired other works of art. Hugo followed conventions of Romanticism in literature, which include emphasis on emotion, individuality, and themes

of nature and love. “Si mes vers avaient des ailes,” translated below, contains these elements of Romanticism:

Mes vers fuiraient, doux et frêles, Vers votre jardin si beau, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Comme l’oiseau.	My verses would flee, sweet and frail, To your garden so fair, If my verses had wings, Like a bird.
Ils voleraient, étincelles, Vers votre foyer qui rit, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Comme l’esprit.	They would fly, like sparks, To your smiling hearth, If my verses had wings, Like the mind.
Près de vous, purs et fidèles, Ils accourraient nuit et jour, Si mes vers avaient des ailes, Comme l’amour.	Pure and faithful, to your side They’d hasten night and day, If my verses had wings, Like love! (Stokes 2000)

The poetic metaphor stated in the title compares the narrator’s thoughts to wings that will fly “like a bird” to his beloved. The mention of birds, gardens, the contrast of night and day, and the overall theme of love reflect imagery of the Romantic Movement. As Paul Hawkins states:

> Hahn was sensitive to the demands of the text and only chose poetry that complemented his intimate, calm musical style. Vocal lines in his songs are speech-like . . . piano accompaniments make use of ostinato figures, usually one or two measures in length. (2016, 11-12)

The fourteen year-old Hahn dedicated the composition to his sister in 1888, and set the poetry with elegant simplicity. It is written in E-major with no modulations, but with contrasting tempo markings for each verse, ranging from *doux et expressif* (soft and expressive) to *plus lent et en ralentissant jusqu’a a la fin* (more slowly and slowing until the end). Reminiscent of Hahn’s education, the undulating piano pattern underneath a lyrical vocal line is often compared to Massenet’s “Ouvre tes yeux bleus,” composed ten years earlier.

The program continues with “L’heure exquise,” the fifth song of Hahn’s song cycle entitled *Chansons Grises* (Gray Songs). This set of seven songs was composed in 1893, when Hahn was only nineteen years old, to poems by Paul Marie Verlaine (1844-1896). Verlaine was a prominent writer of the Symbolist and Decadent movements. The English Decadent movement was associated with French symbolism and according to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, “was applied in the English *fin-de-siécle* to literature, art, and culture characterized by extreme aestheticism and perversity in style or subject matter” (Birch 2009). The Symbolist Movement (1886-1930) in literature, characterized by expressing emotion through symbolic and figurative language, began shortly after Verlaine published “L’heure exquise” in 1870; Hahn set it to music in 1890.

La lune blanche	The white moon
Luit dans les bois;	Gleams in the woods;
De chaque branche	From every branch
Part une voix	There comes a voice
Sous la ramée...	Beneath the boughs...
Ô bien aimée.	O my beloved.
L'étang reflète,	The pool reflects,
Profond miroir,	Deep mirror,
La silhouette	The silhouette
Du saule noir	Of the black willow
Où le vent pleure...	Where the wind is weeping...
Rêvons, c'est l'heure.	Let us dream, it is the hour.
Un vaste et tendre	A vast and tender
Apaisement	Consolation
Semble descendre	Seems to fall
Du firmament	From the sky
Que l'astre irise...	The moon illumines...
C'est l'heure exquise.	Exquisite hour. (Stokes 2000)

In Edward Arthur Lippman’s article “Symbolism in Music,” he describes the complexity of representing these literary nuances within musical limitations:

> In imitating the sounds of the external world, music symbolizes by presenting the auditory part of events, but it is evidently incapable of becoming this kind of symbol for objects that make no sound . . . Music is forced back upon relatively indirect means in representing non-audible things. Such symbolism is less spontaneous than the imitation of sound; it is apprehended by a conscious act of intellect. (1953, 559)

The Symbolism that characterizes Verlaine's poetry is demonstrated particularly in his use of figures to represent an idea or feeling that the reader typically associates with them. For example, the moon typically symbolizes mystery and serenity; the willow is often chosen to represent protection and harmony; and the pool is a symbol of self-reflection and awareness.

As *Lied* was becoming prominent with its association with German literature, so was the *mélodie* growing increasingly popular as composers continued to benefit from the many poetic movements in France. Reynaldo Hahn's music, although often overlooked by music historians, is essential when acknowledging the influence of literature on music. The two pieces selected for this recital allow the performer to demonstrate the many subtleties within Hahn's compositions. Successfully developing one's ability to accentuate these elements is vital to a singer's career and their growth as a well-rounded performer.

Chapter 4
Dominick Argento

In the fourth and longest set of this recital, the singer will explore the various interpretations and influences of Dominick Argento's (1927-2019) *Six Elizabethan Songs.* Argento is the only American composer featured in this recital and the most recently active. This song cycle, set in 1957, was his first work composed after he finished graduate school (Argento 2004a, 26). The cycle includes six songs set to poetry by various literary figures from the Elizabethan era (1558-1603). This era, considered a golden era of English literature, marks a period of English history in which the arts thrived. Argento's compositions are highly reflective of his early love for literature. When asked about his inspiration to set certain text to music, he stated, " . . . as a musician I'm aware of the fact that it's a much richer world than we musicians have, that the literature of music is more limited than the world of literature, and so it's just a wonderful place to explore" (Argento 2004b). This exploration is evident in Argento's other compositions, including the eight-part song cycle inspired by a condensed version of Virginia Woolf's published diary, called *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf,* written in 1974 (Woods 1996, 4). Additionally, he based his opera *Postcard from Morocco* (1971) on the collection of poetry titled *A Child's Garden of Verses* by Robert Louis Stevenson. These influences of poetry and early literature are a recurring pattern in this program as well as in Argento's discography. The songs included in *Six Elizabethan Songs* alternate between contrasting tempos and various accompaniment that ranges from sparse modal

and metric ambiguity to rich tonal textures. Most of the texts reflect common themes found in folk music, including imagery of nature, love, and death.

The opening song of the cycle, "Spring," offers a lively *allegretto piacevole*, or "fairly quick" tempo with an arpeggiated sixteenth-note staccato pattern in the accompaniment. Rather than setting a tone or mood with a piano introduction, Argento wrote only three sixteenth notes in the piano part before the voice enters with a resounding "spring!" The text is by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) and appears in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, a stage play published in 1600. The play is one of Nashe's most successful works, a comedy that represents characters as personifications of all four seasons. Spring is represented by Vertum, and enters wearing a suit of green moss and singing his song:

> Spring, the sweet Spring,
> is the year's pleasant king;
> Then blooms each thing,
> then maids dance in a ring,
> Cold doth not sting,
> the pretty birds do sing,
> Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
>
> The palm and may
> make country houses gay,
> Lambs frisk and play,
> the shepherd pipes all day,
> And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay,
> Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
>
> The fields breathe sweet,
> the daisies kiss our feet,
> Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,
> In every street these tunes our ears do greet,
> Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
> Spring! The sweet Spring!

Although the text is taken from a play written in the late sixteenth century, the imagery is unmistakably vivid and descriptive. While conveying and relating to Elizabethan-era poetry may be difficult for a singer, Argento provides a musical setting that provides the natural inflection of the text and shaping of the phrases. The entirety of the piece reflects the rebirth and growth that is felt with the changing of the seasons. Spring is represented by the imagery of blooming flowers, "the daisies kiss our feet," and of young, playful love, "young lovers meet . . . lambs frisk and play." These typical symbols of springtime are met with the repetition of the singing birds, "cuckoo, to-witta-woo!" These descriptor words give the singer a great deal of guidance in terms of personal interpretation. Each stanza tells its own story, and every line ends in a rhyme, until the songbird comes in to conclude that complete thought. Though the phrases are short, the natural rhythmic inflection proves to be even more emphasized by Argento's cheerful melody. As Wagner stated in an article titled "Interpretation in Singing," "in poetry, the feeling element usually predominates through its appeal to the imagination and sense of rhythm, for rhythm creates a sort of emotion of its own" (1928, 69). While the piano continues the running sixteenth-note pattern throughout the two-minute song, the voice has slight variances during each repetition. Argento only makes short shifts in tonality during the third line of each stanza. This first song is dynamically and emotionally exciting and gives the performer room to interpret and grab the audience's attention for the rest of the cycle.

In stark contrast to "Spring," the second song of this set is titled "Sleep." Unlike Spring's lively, dancing 2/4 meter, "Sleep" is composed in a *lentamente* 8/8 time signature with a rolled D-flat major chord preceding the vocal entrance. The text, by

Samuel Daniel (1562-1619), is from his collection of fifty sonnets titled *Delia*. It is full of metaphors glorifying the concept of sleep, including relief from sorrow and anguish, and "embracing the clouds." In contrast, the narrator consistently compares the consciousness of the daytime as a time to mourn the regrets of their past, as if the day is full of contempt:

> Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night,
> Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,
> Relieve my anguish and restore thy light,
> With dark forgetting of my cares, return;
>
> And let the day be time enough to mourn
> The shipwreck of my ill-adventur'd youth:
> Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn,
> Without the torment of the night's untruth.
>
> Cease, dreams, the images of day-desires
> To model forth the passions of the morrow;
> Never let rising sun approve you liars,
> To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow.
> Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain;
> And never wake to feel the day's disdain.

Samuel Daniel was born in England, and was getting his education in poetry and philosophy at Oxford University when he began publishing his works. He was also known for writing *masques*, a form entertainment in sixteenth- and seventeenth- century European courts. This particular piece that inspired "Sleep" follows the ABAB rhyme scheme that helps the singer memorize and shape each phrase. Daniel added a fifth line at the end of the piece, resulting in an asymmetric final stanza. Although the text is easy to relate to, the language is dated in the Elizabethan style and can be challenging to portray in performance. Additionally, the singer may struggle with finding a tonal center in this song. Each phrase is highly chromatic and includes unpredictable intervals such as recurring tritones. The second stanza ventures into a time signature of 4/8 where the

piano creates metric ambiguity with syncopated triplet arpeggiations. Despite the shifting chromaticism throughout the piece, Argento gives the audience a sense of tonality in the final measure with a D-flat major chord into a B-flat major chord in the accompaniment, suggesting a tonal center of D-flat. This unconventional resolution does not give the sense of finality, but rather the end of this particular thought. Argento masterfully tells the audience with this ending that there is more to come after this song.

The third song in the set is another lively contrast to the *lentamente* of "Sleep." "Winter" is marked *allegro vivace con slancio*, or "fast and lively with enthusiasm," with a tempo indication at almost twice the speed of the previous song. The key signature does not indicate a key, but Argento suggests a tonality of E major in the majority of the vocal line. The composition offers dramatic changes in dynamic level, meter shifts within phrases, and contrast of texture ranging from sharp textual emphasis to rich and *legato* accompaniment. These indications in the score make artistic personalization more difficult for the singer, but clarify the intent of the composer. The text is taken from Act V Scene ii of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Love's Labour's Lost* (1598). This comedy by Shakespeare "is about artificiality of behavior, and its language, too, is often full of artifice . . . Its design is eminently theatrical, and its disturbingly original final episodes can be profoundly moving in performance" (Wells 2013). The play follows Ferdinand, the King of Navarre, and his three companions as they take an oath to swear off the company of women for three years. The "simplicity of the setting makes it suitable for an open-air performance, and it has often been given in the Open-Air Theatre" (Wells 2013). This play is still one of Shakespeare's most well-known works and was even adapted into a film by Kenneth Branagh in 1999. Unlike the first two songs

of the cycle, which offer three contrasting stanzas, Shakespeare's text consists of two symmetrical stanzas:

> When icicles hang by the wall
> And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
> And Tom bears logs into the hall,
> And milk comes frozen home in pail;
> When blood is nipt and ways be foul,
> Then nightly sings the staring owl:
> Tu-who! Tu-whit! Tu-who! A merry note!
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.
>
> When all aloud the wind doth blow,
> And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
> And birds sit brooding in the snow,
> And Marian's nose looks red and raw;
> When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl
> Then nightly sings the staring owl:
> Tu-who! Tu-whit! Tu-who! A merry note!
> While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

Much like the text by Nashe in "Spring," this aside in *Love's Labour's Lost* is spoken by the character that embodies Winter, Heims.

"Winter" and the next song, titled "Dirge," are both from the works of William Shakespeare. Unlike "Winter's" effervescent arrangement, "Dirge" is simple and dignified. The score indicates a beginning tempo marking of *largo e semplice* or "slow and simple." "Dirge" begins with a six-measure introduction, giving the singer a break from the immediate vocal entrances that the previous three songs featured. Another contrast is the stagnant dynamic level, only ranging between *mezzo-piano, piano,* and *pianissimo.* This adds another layer of solemn sweetness to the simplicity. The simple chords formed in the accompaniment are reminiscent of church bells and Argento uses the tritone relationship again between the voice and the piano. The music reflects mysteriousness with the sparse accompaniment and rhythmic minimalism that is

uncharacteristic of the song cycle thus far. This text by Shakespeare also offers a dark contrast to the previous song:

> Come away, Come away, Death,
> And in sad cypress let me be laid;
> Fly away, Fly away, breath;
> I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
> My shroud of white stuck all with yew,
> O prepare it!
> My part of death no one so true
> Did share it.
>
> Not a flower, not a flower sweet
> On my black coffin let there be strown;
> Not a friend, Not a friend greet
> My poor corpse, where by bones shall be thrown:
> A thousand thousand sighs to save,
> Lay me, O where
> Sad true lover never find my grave
> To weep there!

Shakespeare was unmistakably one of the world's most well-known playwrights, poets, and authors. This influence did not escape Argento's passion for literature. This particular piece comes from Act II Scene iv of Shakespeare's *The Twelfth Night* (1623). Also one of Shakespeare's most popular works, this poem alone inspired settings by Gerald Finzi (1901-1956), Douglas Moore (1893-1969), Roger Quilter (1877-1953), Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), and other composers from around the world. The somber disposition of the text is intriguing, personifying death as if the narrator was having a conversation with it. The poetry suggests that a beautiful woman causes the narrator's death, which gives the singer a greater sense of direction and imagery in which to interpret the text. A statement of selfless love occurs in the second stanza, as the narrator hopes and pleads that no friends or true lovers will be there to mourn or weep for his death. The stoic nature of this piece can be the most challenging aspect of the

performance. While it is an easy piece to perform passively, an artistically advanced singer must be mindful of every gesture, breath, and shift of gaze. Additionally, the tessitura is not challenging for a developing soprano, but the voice remains highly exposed throughout due to the minimal accompaniment, making the dynamic simplicity and balance between each phrase the most difficult aspect of this piece.

After "Dirge," the *allegro brillante* tempo of "Diaphenia" shifts the audience again into a joyful new atmosphere. The fifth song of the set opens with a brisk piano introduction that contains the vivacious staccato eighth notes, similar to "Spring." The fast, sequential patterns are present throughout "Spring," "Winter," and "Diaphenia," which can be a challenge for the singer to establish contrast. Similar to the first piece of the set in compound meter, the time signature suggests a childlike playfulness through a 9/8 dance-like lilt. The text is by Henry Constable (1562-1613), an English poet. His most notable work is *Diana,* a collection of sonnets published in 1594. His poetry also appeared in *Englands Helicon*, a significant "miscellany of lyrical and pastoral poetry of the Elizabethan age published in 1600" (Birch and Hooper, 2012). The imagery in "Diaphenia" presents a vivid array of emotions for a singer to express, between the excitement of confessing a narrator's love for the title figure, to a declamatory "in requite, sweet virgin, love me!" The performer must picture the figure with the fairness of a lily and the sweetness of the spreading roses. In the first stanza, the narrator describes Diaphenia as if speaking in an aside. The next two stanzas speak directly to Diaphenia and use similes and imagery to convey his deep admiration for her. Much like "Spring" and "Winter," this poem reflects symbols of hope, love, and rebirth through the images of nature:

Diaphenia, like the daffadowndilly
White as the sun, fair as the lily,
Heigh ho, how I do love thee!
I do love thee as my lamb
Are beloved of their dams;
How blest were I If thou wouldst prove me.

Diaphenia, like the spreading roses,
That in thy sweets all sweets encloses,
Fair sweet, how I do love thee!
I do love thee as each flower Loves the sun's life-giving power;
For dead, thy breath to life might move me.

Diaphenia, like to all things blessed,
When all thy praises are expressed,
Dear joy, how I do love thee!
As the birds to love the spring,
Or the bees their careful king,
Then in requite, sweet virgin, love me!

Argento sets these three stanzas almost identically, with only slight differentiation in the final lines of each. For the first, he continues the movement of the previous phrases, a playful laugh-like syncopation as the narrator states the blessing it would be to receive the same statement of love from Diaphenia. For the second ending, Argento places emphasis on the words "dead" and "life" through rhythmic extension and ascending pitch. This contrast to the otherwise frantic movement of the piece gives the singer more freedom to shape the phrase. However, when the phrase states ". . . might move me," the tempo resumes, implying that Diaphenia's life gives the narrator a purpose to live, or "move," as well. In the third and final stanza, Argento sets "then in requite, sweet virgin, love me" with another ascending line, and a break from the running eighth notes in the accompaniment. Instead, while the singer holds the word "love," the accompanist plays block chords on every beat under the vocal line. This dramatic ending gives more emphasis to this proclamation of love. After singing praises to Diaphenia, the narrator

pleads for her to love him, too. With a *fortississimo* C-sharp minor chord to close the piece, there is a more assured finality to the piece than the previous songs in the cycle.

The sixth and final piece of this cycle is titled "Hymn." Argento selected a text by Ben Jonson (1572-1637) for this song. Jonson was an English dramatist and poet who was known for his *masque* writing and plays. His first successful play was titled *Every Man in His Humour* and premiered in 1598 with William Shakespeare as a cast member. This particular poem, "Queen and Huntress," was taken from Jonson's satirical stage play *Cynthia's Revels* from 1600 (Birch, 2009). This representation of the Queen as "Diana" was a common portrayal in art and literature:

> Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
> Now the sun is laid to sleep,
> Seated in thy silver chair,
> State in wonted manner keep:
> Hesperus entreats thy light,
> Goddess, excellently bright.
>
> Earth, let not an envious shade
> Dare itself to interpose;
> Cynthia's shining orb was made
> Heaven to clear when day did close:
> Bless us then with wished sight,
> Goddess, excellently bright.
>
> Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
> And thy crystal-shining quiver;
> Give unto the flying hart
> Space to breathe, how short soever;
> Thou that mak'st a day of night,
> Goddess, excellently bright.

This song is the first and only of the six to address supernatural or mythological beings; however, the imagery of nature and earthly occurrences links all six songs. Constable's text is addressed to Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, who is equivalent to the Greek goddess Artemis. She is also known as the goddess of the moon and of fertility. The

reference to “Cynthia” in the second stanza refers to a common surname of Diana. The first stanza reflects images of the sun as a male figure and the goddess seated in “thy silver chair,” implying that she is the moon and has power above him as he is laid to sleep. Jonson based the character of Criticus on himself, while the character of Cynthia represents Queen Elizabeth I: “The Courtiers and ladies assemble for revels . . . They perform in *masques,* devised by the wise poet Crites, in which each character impersonates his complementary virtue” (Birch 2009). This particular poem is one of Jonson’s most famous, and makes reference to “Hesperus,” surname for the “western star,” Venus.

The verse is set in trochaic tetrameter, meaning it has four lines, and four accented syllables per line. Argento plays with Jonson’s trochaic tetrameter by placing stressed syllables on longer note values. The piano provides scarce opportunity for the singer to develop a rhythmic or tonal center; with some only being one chord at the beginning of the measures, while the rest are simple two-measure chordal phrases or pedal tones. These chords, underneath the highly chromatic vocal line, create a majestic and ominous atmosphere. Argento’s setting is much like the others in this set, with a similar melodic outline in the first and third stanzas, while the second one is a contrasting tempo or style. The tempo is marked *andante maestoso,* or dignified. Possibly the most difficult aspect of this song to master is the syncopated accents that change with every phrase, as well as the continuous growth and decay of each phrase individually. The dynamics range from *pianississimo* to *forte,* but with very specific indications of where to *crescendo, trattenuto,* and *diminuendo*. “Hymn” ends with six measures of slow, soft piano accompaniment. Almost reflecting the natural decay of sound that comes from the

instrument, the final notes of the cycle slowly fade into a D major chord. In turn, this song creates the cadential conclusion that the previous songs failed to.

Argento's passion for literature becomes evident when analyzing works such as *Six Elizabethan Songs.* At first glance, the songs featured in *Six Elizabethan Songs* may not have much in common other than the text rooted in the Elizabethan era; however, with deeper insight, a performer of this song cycle can recognize the pattern that Argento saw when he encountered multiple texts like these. In an interview on NPR from 2004, he describes the process of being a featured composer at the centennial ceremony for Eastman School of Music's Sibley Library:

> Among my favorite writers were these four that I'm using in this composition. That would be Melville, Mark Twain, Henry James and Thornton Wilder. The problem became, well, you have four different writers. You want to write a piece that's organic and I went the next step, which was to think of a subject that they all had in common or some theme that they all spoke about somewhere . . ." (Argento 2004b)

Much like the composition referenced in this interview, Argento was able to join themes from all five literary figures in his *Six Elizabethan Songs*. Not only was the time period a source of inspiration, but themes of the changing seasons, love, and nature all play a roll in these six pieces. Musically, Argento features the common pattern of alternating between livelier tempos to more subdued ones. Additionally, he never indicates a key signature. This presents the songs as more tonally ambiguous than the early Baroque sound that would have been present in the Elizabethan era. *Six Elizabethan Songs* offers the same literary influence as the rest of this graduate recital, but in a musically modern setting. This song cycle will enable the performer to further research literary influences, explore the context of each text as part of a larger work, and to apply a personal artistic

conveyance to each piece, putting into practice the artistry and musicianship that will set her apart for the rest of her career.

Chapter 5
Jacques Offenbach

To close this graduate recital for soprano, the singer will perform "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" or as it is commonly known, "The Doll's Aria," by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880). This piece is from Offenbach's most well-known opera, *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (*The Tales of Hoffmann*). This German-born composer "can be considered the father of the operetta because his lighthearted works conquered the world and found imitators everywhere" ("Jacques Offenbach" 2004, 478). The rapidly growing popularity of the operetta was wide-reaching throughout Europe during the mid-1800s. *Les contes d'Hoffmann,* with a libretto by Jules Barbier (1825-1901), was the only grand opera that Offenbach composed, and is described as an *opéra-fantastique.* Becoming familiar with the evolution of genres throughout opera history is important for a performer, especially when preparing a role such as Olympia, the character who sings "Les oiseaux dans la charmille." This role is notorious for this single aria; what she lacks in time on stage, Olympia makes up for in virtuoso coloratura ornamentation. This feature has made her a memorable character in opera literature, especially for a developing soprano to aspire to portray. Contextualizing the placement of an opera in music history can help a singer understand some of the musical nuances that the composer intended. Additionally, a performer must thoroughly research the overall plot of the opera, and how their singular part contributes to the whole.

Jacques Offenbach was born in Cologne, Germany, in 1819 and was one of ten children. He moved to Paris at a young age with his father and one of his brothers, and by 1833 was enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire as a cello student. He became an accomplished cellist and composer, and was hired as the conductor of the *Théâtre Français* in 1849. It was during this time that he opened the *Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens,* a theatre of his own that he directed from 1855 until 1862. The theatre still operates today, showcasing local performances of plays and musicals just blocks away from the *Musée du Louvre.* Offenbach produced and composed over one hundred operettas in this theatre, where "he satirized political figures of the day and pretentious snobbery in the arts. There was nothing sentimental about Offenbach's operettas . . . only wit and high spirits" (Gale, 478). According to the *Oxford Companion to Music,* an operetta is a nineteenth-century term that is used to "describe a form of light opera in which spoken dialogue replaced recitative and the musical numbers were memorably tuneful" (Latham 2011). The works of Offenbach influenced the works of later composers such as Johann Strauss's (1825-1899) *Die Fledermaus* (1874) and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885). Conversely, *Les contes d'Hoffmann* has been deemed an *opéra fantastique* due to the focus on artistic content versus entertainment. The term *fantastique* describes a genre of French literature that refers to worlds of fantasy and imagination, and in the world of opera describes a full work of art brought to life on the stage; elaborate costumes, sets, and music set to a dramatic storyline that includes symbolism and surrealism.

Les contes d'Hoffmann is based on three tales by E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), a significant figure in German literature. The stories included in the storyline include

"Der Sandmann," ("The Sandman"), "Rath Krespel" ("The Cremona Violin"), and "Der verlorene Spiegelbild" (The Lost Reflection). The opera takes place in Italy in the early nineteenth century. The Muse of Hoffmann declares that he must make the choice between her and an opera singer named Stella. She discloses that her purpose is to make Hoffmann renounce all of his other passions so that he can be devoted to only his poetry. To watch him, she disguises herself as Nicklausse, a friend of Hoffmann's. Hoffmann then tells the story of his three loves in as many acts: Olympia, Giulietta, and Antonia. Olympia's aria occurs in act one during a party at the house of the inventor Spalanzani. Coppélius is Spalazani's accomplice, and together they have created a life-sized mechanical doll that he named Olympia. When Coppélius arrives to the party, he sells Hoffman a pair of glasses that make Olympia appear human to him. As Spalanzani proudly introduces his guests to his creation, Olympia sings "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" and Hoffmann is smitten with her. He refuses to listen to and denies all protests by Nicklausse that Olympia is not human. Hoffmann dances with her, believing his affections to be returned, until he falls and breaks his glasses. As this occurs, Coppélius appears, furious with Spalazani for taking the credit for Olympia's creation, and destroys the doll. This portion of the opera is based on Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann," a short story published in 1816 that depicts folklore and symbolism. Offenbach places Hoffmann at the center of his creation, reflecting the protagonist's struggle between hallucinations versus reality. He spent almost five years composing *Les contes d'Hoffmann,* his most successful opera. Unfortunately, he was not able to witness his final creation—he died four months before its premiere in 1880.

Olympia's aria depicts generic images of love, sweetness, and beauty. The minimal elaboration in the text and the symmetry of the phrasing allows the music to similarly reflect a robotic character.

Les oiseaux dans la charmille, Dans les cieux l'astre du jour, Tout parle à la jeune fille d'amour! Ah! Voilà la chanson gentille Ah! La chanson d'Olympia, Ah!	The birds in the bower, The sun in the sky, To a maiden everything speaks of love! This is the sweet song, Ah! The song of Olympia, Ah!
Tout ce qui chante et résonne Et soupire, tour à tour, Emeut son Coeur, qui frissonne d'amour! Voilà la chanson mignonne, La chanson d'Olympia.	Everything that sings and echoes And sighs, in turn, Stirs a maiden's heart, which trembles with love! This is the sweet song, The song of Olympia (Burton, 2016).

To balance the simplicity and repetition of the text, the technical requirements within this aria are divergently, but equally as, demanding. The tessitura requires a strong and flexible coloratura or lyric-coloratura soprano, with the ability to comfortably ornament and offer extension in the range and phrasing in the second verse:

> By the second verse she's in full exhibitionist mode, decorating her melody with as many trills, flourishes, roulades and stratospherically high notes as any coloratura soprano could wish for . . . during both refrains her mechanics run down, causing her collapse until Spalanzani winds her up again. The second time, he clearly does his job rather too well, as Olympia soars to new heights in the hyperactive closing cadenza. (Hopkins 2016)

Offenbach's flawless depiction of a mechanical doll is characterized by the waltzing meter, and the accompaniment of flute and harp that mimic the sound of a music box. A singer's ability to successfully interpret these theatrical elements while meeting the vocal demands is what makes this aria so famously difficult.

By researching various performances of this piece, a singer can develop a stronger foundation on which to build a performance that is individual and personal. Some noteworthy performances include Joan Sutherland's performance with the Metropolitan Opera in 1974, Natalie Dessay at the *Ópera de Paris* in 2005, Diana Damrau performing with the Bavarian State Opera in 2011, and Kathleen Kim at the Metropolitan Opera in 2009, among many others. These performances spread across multiple generations, and exemplify evolving trends and performance practices. Sutherland's performance for the first color broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House is still a standard for cadenzas, ornamentation, and phrasing. Her stance remains mostly stoic, standing wide-eyed with elbows bent robotically at her side. She chooses to move more on the second verse to emphasize Olympia's power after Spalazani winds her up a second time. Similarly, Diana Damrau's staging utilizes prop legs, a toy harp, and more choreographed physicality. In Daniel Helfgot's book *The Third Line,* he discusses the importance of building a believable connection with your audience, and choosing movement that only serves a singer technically and artistically:

> Movement must be integral to a well-developed notion of performing . . . first getting the vocal mode working and then adding on movement as a kind of icing on the cake . . . Every word that a singer sings implies a decision about movement, and this should be a part of a singer's conscious preparation from the earliest stages of rehearsal. Otherwise, once the singing mode has "jelled," there is hardly any "space" left to incorporate the rest of the ingredients as an afterthought." (1993, 65)

This responsibility falls to the performer to choose a personal interpretation, commit to their character, and "sell" the peculiar character to their audience.

The mechanical physicality of this character interpretation—coupled with the vocal demands of the aria—can potentially create extraneous muscular tension for a

developing singer. It is important to integrate both technical and artistic aspects of a performance together slowly so as not to overwhelm the learning process. Helfgot writes, “being faced with the task of performing a complicated stage action causes many singers to lose control of breath and vocal support . . . In opera the difficulty of managing these diverse physical tasks is a serious matter . . . they realize that they are not prepared to do these things and maintain vocal quality” (1993, 86). To prepare for a physically and vocally demanding role or aria also requires immense preparation in researching the role and in commitment to interpretation. Both of these aspects will help the singer be as comfortable as possible to communicate these elements, which leads to an entertaining and meaningful performance.

Conclusion

The process of preparing a recital involves many layers of preparation. At the base level, one must learn the notes, text, and dynamics accurately. The next step involves memorization of all of these aspects. Finally, the singer must apply the interpretation and personalization of these elements. In *Power Performance for Singers* Shirlee Emmons outlines what sets an elite performer apart:

> It is not only the superior talent and skills that separate the very high achiever from the also-ran but also the ability to respond in pressure situations, still sing your best, and do it with nerve, verve, and even risk, if need be . . . To be consistently good, elite performers plan assiduously and prepare in depth before, during, and after their performances." (Emmons and Thomas 1998, 3)

A singer must rely on all three levels of preparation in order to give the most beneficial performance. As this document reflects the literary and historical significance of each individual piece, the recital will present the artistic value. It is the performer's responsibility to convey as much as she can through her performance, providing a meaningful and moving program for her audience. For Daniel Helfgot, this includes three aspects: the thought, the focus implied by the thought, and the text that is the outgrowth of the thought and the focus (1993, 74). The thought and intention will become evident through literal translation and researching the context of a chosen piece. For example, *Les oiseaux dans la charmille* is the only aria included on this recital. The chosen piece provides the character and setting, but the performer's conveyance of Olympia's intention and purpose is dependent on the research. A song cycle like Argento's *Six Elizabethan Songs* presents thoughts in less evident context. Upon further research, the singer will

discover the literary history of each piece and Argento's intention behind placing them in this setting.

The singer's establishment of the groundwork behind memorization and direction of the score is to build the artistry and interpretation. Emmons writes in *The Art of Song Recital*, "assuming that the artist does his or her job well, by the end of the program a rapport has been established that has naturally broken down the natural barriers that were present at the beginning of the recital" (Emmons and Sonntag 1979, 24). This recital is an example of what Emmons describes as a "specialized" program with music from two specific periods (1979, 26). The song and opera literature presented in this recital were all composed in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Prior knowledge of music history, specifically in the Romantic and Modern eras, is essential to developing a well-rounded performance. While literature is the focus of the recital, it is important to establish a program order that introduces each piece in an exciting and comprehensive way to the audience. While chronological order is a common choice, this recital focuses on contrast of language, style, and literature.

The performer has the ability to create a moving and captivating recital through vocal and technical virtuosity, and entertainment through interpretation; however, a meaningful performance also captures the essence of each piece in a personal way. The character study and historical relevance of a piece plays only a small part in what creates an artistic recital. Musicianship and artistry will present themselves only after this groundwork has been laid, and the singer can relate this knowledge to each composition.

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