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SOUNDTRACK OF A LIFE: A MUSICAL NARRATION OF A MILITARY
VETERAN'S LIFE

By
CAROLINE MELCHER

A RECITAL PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Voice Performance
in the School of Music
of the College of Music and Performing Arts
Belmont University

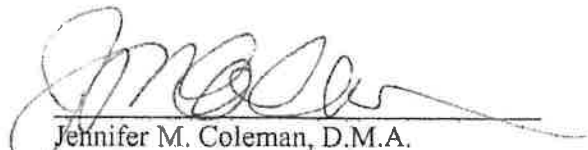
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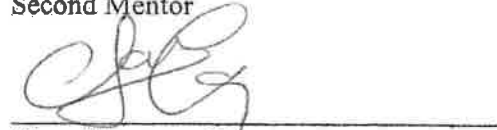
Submitted by Caroline Melcher in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Classical Voice Performance.

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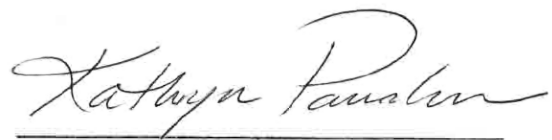

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Recital Program

Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen	Traditional Spiritual arr. H.T. Burleigh
La farfalletta	V. Bellini (1801-1835)
Ti sento, sospiri	G. Donizetti (1797-1848)
Die Soldatenbraut	R. Schumann (1810-1856)
Zigeunerlieder <i>He, Zigeuner greife in die Saiten ein!</i> <i>Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du so trüb</i> <i>Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn</i> <i>Rote Abendwolken ziehn</i>	J. Brahms (1833-1897)
Priez pour paix	F. Poulenc (1899-1963)
His Eye is on the Sparrow	C.D. Martin (1866-1948) arr. Mark Hayes
<i>Intermission</i>	
Villanelle	H. Berlioz (1803-1869)
Va! Laisse couler mes larmes from <i>Werther</i>	J. Massenet (1842-1912)
Cabaret Songs Who Could Have Known? You Are a Love Song The Luckiest Woman You Crazy Lady You and Crazy Lady	D. Argento (1927-2019)

There is a Balm in Gilead

Traditional Spiritual
arr. D. Mears

Support Musician
Jared Yoakem, piano and tenor

Chapter One: Introduction

Serving military members and veterans as a music therapist and being raised in a military family has made me aware of some of the pressing issues that surround mental health in the military. Some of these issues include combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chemical dependency as a means of coping, sexually related trauma, and untreated mental health diagnoses in the active-duty sector.

In the 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reported that in 2018, “an average of 17.6 veterans died by suicide each day” (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2020, 14). In the Pentagon’s annual suicide report, 498 active-duty troops committed suicide in 2019 (Brook 2020).

The current demographic of primary concern is the “young enlisted troop” (Brook) who makes up 43% of the military’s population, yet makes up 61% of the deaths by suicide in the military. Many institutions, organizations, and government-offered solutions have been established within the past several years whose goals have been to solve the problem that is military suicide, such as the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. Director of this office, Karin Orvis, displays concern regarding military suicide: “None of us has solved this issue... there is no quick fix” (Brook).

This recital served as a means to raise awareness to the civilian population of some of the problems military members face that can lead to mental health disorders, including tumultuous relationships, combat trauma, and certain aspects of military culture. This recital was not intended to serve as or represent music therapy in practice, but to utilize a wide variety of music to tell a story, educate the civilian population, and to exhort all Americans to consider their role in developing solutions for the ongoing crises that military members and veterans face.

The musical selections of this recital were arranged and presented as a means of narration, telling the story of a fictional combat veteran. Each set of songs was performed from the perspective of a female veteran and addressed experiences leading up to enlisting, emotions surrounding enlisting, and the struggles of adjusting post-deployment.

For each piece, I analyzed the relationship between the vocal line and piano accompaniment, how the composer paints the text musically, and how the piece contributes to the overarching narrative of the veteran character. For the pieces that are spiritual/religious in nature, I added the historical context surrounding the piece and any other relevant information that contributes to the recital theme, such as current events and social issues that appeal to the *ethos* of this narration. Resources that assisted in this process include historical information that surround the pieces, biographical information about the composers, music theory analysis, and recent scholarly articles and reports pertaining to current events and social issues.

Chapter Two: Childhood Dreams

This first section of the recital represented the childhood experiences of the veteran character. From playful vignettes to early desires to be a pilot to longing laments, this section introduced the character's personality and foreshadowed the tumultuous nature of her future relationships.

The recital began and ended with traditional African-American spirituals. The opening song, "Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen," arranged by H.T. Burleigh, served as a foreshadowing of the struggles to come in the narrative, as well as established the importance of spirituality in the character's story.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the challenges that surround me, a Caucasian person, in performing songs that are "most closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South" (Library of Congress). This is especially true in 2021, where there has been widespread unrest in the United States concerning racial injustice, particularly for African Americans. How does a Caucasian woman like myself respectfully approach the performance of an African-American spiritual?

I, by no means, claimed to portray an African-American military veteran in this recital, nor was I able to fully convey the message of the song the way a Black American could in light of their unique racial history. Nevertheless, I strived to maintain some of the integrity of H.T. Burleigh's realization of "Nobody Knows de

Trouble I've Seen" by singing the consonants that he notated on specific words. For instance, instead of writing "the," he wrote "de." And instead of ending "ground" with a "d," he chose to leave the "d" off. Since Burleigh was Black, his textual choices reflect a desire to render the pronunciation of the lyrics in a way that is authentic to the song's cultural and historical origins. I adopted Burleigh's lyrics in the same spirit, with no intent at satire or mockery, despite my different racial perspective.

Burleigh's arrangement contains a mostly simple, chordal piano accompaniment in order to highlight the vocal line. A performance challenge of this piece was finding successful variation dynamically, as it is a strophic song, yet maintaining the raw nature of the spiritual. "Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen" was an invocation of sorts, in which the character invited the listener into this journey of love, loss, hurt, and healing.

The piece that portrayed the childhood of the character is "La farfalletta" (The little butterfly), a three-verse strophic Italian art song by Vincenzo Bellini. With its vocal melody and piano accompaniment playful and jovial in nature, this song's text is about a girl attempting to catch a butterfly to give to her boyfriend as a gift.

Atypically, the first verse begins with no piano introduction; the vocal line begins as a two-note pickup on the word "farfalletta" (little butterfly), with the character addressing the butterfly. Attempting to be sly and subtle, the character tries to convince the butterfly to join her, stating that she will protect her from all danger and even house her in a crystal room.

In the second verse, the character compares the beauty of the butterfly to the beauty of her boyfriend. In the third and final verse, she finally admits to the butterfly her

fatal intentions to gift it to her beloved, while trying to convince the butterfly that its sacrifice would not be in vain.

Within the context of this narrative, the character's fascination with the butterfly not only displays a silly, playful moment in her childhood, but foreshadows her becoming a pilot in the military. Bellini's spritely musical setting of the piano accompaniment illustrates the flitting of the butterfly as it is chased by the character. Most of the notes of the vocal melody are of a short duration, many being eighth and sixteenth notes, signifying the constant motion of the butterfly. The final phrase of verse three, "Come escape from perils, don't search for more roses and lilies," is the moment in the fictional narrative that the character discovers her love for flight.

The second selection in this set, also an Italian art song, "Ti sento, sospiri" (I hear you sigh) by Gaetano Donizetti, is a song of lament and lovesickness. The character is telling her heart to stop complaining about love even though she is emotionally suffering in a relationship. This reveals the character's maladaptive tendencies surrounding relationships which will intensify upon her military deployment and become even more acute upon returning home.

This song is in ternary form and opens with a piano accompaniment comprising mostly of legato arpeggiated triplets. The vocal line enters as a pickup to measure six with a descending legato melody, text painting the sigh of the character. The descending half steps in measure nine on the word "d'amore" suggest a sense of instability. When new text is introduced in measure twenty-five, a dramatic shift occurs both theatrically and musically. A *portando la voce* (sliding from one pitch to another) occurs during a shift from the key of E major to E minor. This shift, as well as the journey through

several minor keys throughout the B section, reflects the instability and depressive nature of the text. The character returns to the introductory descending sighing melody in the pickup to measure forty-four. Although musically resolved with an authentic cadence, the character remains lovesick and unsettled.

Although many critics claim that Robert Schumann's greatest contribution to music was his piano literature, some suggest that his songs are his best works. Miller wrote, "But when his total Lieder oeuvre is examined, it can be argued that Schumann actually is at his best in the song literature, where he synthesizes personal sensitivity, strong literary orientation, and fully Romantic pianistic excursions" (Miller 1999, 8).

In the march-like musical setting of the Mörike poem, "Die Soldatenbraut" (The Soldier's Bride), Schumann "finds the right tone for combining humor and sympathy" (Miller, 145). The character of this poem is a young girl who is romantically involved with a soldier. She has a "naïve view of military life" and is not afraid to express her pride in her lover even though he is low in rank. Schumann musically realizes her happy-go-lucky nature with playful dotted rhythms in both the piano accompaniment and the vocal melody (Miller, 145).

Composed in ternary form, both the A and A' sections contrast the B section that is characterized by its legato and more sustained vocal lines that include an expanded vocal range with greater interval leaps. Despite the character's naivety and carefree concept of military life displayed in the A section, the piece ends with the character optimistically exclaiming three times in a row that "he would do the same (shed his blood) for me!"

Chapter Three: The Call to Serve

The next section of the recital portrayed a tumultuous romantic relationship during which time the character also witnesses the tragic events of September 11, 2001 that ultimately led to the character's enlistment in the military. This part closed with an American hymn just before the intermission that represented the character's deployment to the Middle East.

The songs that depicted the character's romantic relationship included four songs from Johannes Brahms' (1833-1897) *Zigeunerlieder* (Gypsy Songs) song cycle. Originally composed for piano-accompanied vocal quartet, the text of *Zigeunerlieder* is a German translation of the Hungarian folksongs, *Ungarische Volkslieder*. The translator, Hugo Conrat (1845-1906), arranged the translations into rhyming schemes. It is said that Brahms did not consult the original traditional Hungarian melodies, but drew upon some of the melodies from his Hungarian Dances that were completed in 1878 (Zhao 2020, 22).

Not only was Brahms' *Zigeunerlieder* influenced by Hungarian music, but its creation was also inspired by the political events surrounding the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence (Zhao, 24). During this time, gypsies flocked to Austria and Germany to take refuge where they would leave a legacy of their music for future generations of Austrians and Germans.

“He, Zigeuner greife in die Saiten ein!” (Hey, gypsy, sound your strings!) is the lively, inviting opening to the song cycle. The stringed instruments that the character refers to in the opening statement are heard in the piano accompaniment from measure one throughout the entire piece with eighth and sixteenth note chords mimicking guitar strums. The song maintains an *allegro agitato* tempo throughout, catching the attention of the listener and setting an energetic ambience for the remainder of the song cycle. This selection displays a sense of desperation on behalf of the character who is holding onto her relationship, no matter how toxic it may be.

The second song of *Zigeunerlieder*, “Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du so trüb” (Rima, how troubled your towering waters are), is marked *allegro molto* and begins with no piano introduction. Contrasting with the excitement in the previous song, the singer is now distraught because she cannot detect her lover through the dense fog on the banks of the Rima River, a river that runs across Nigeria. The piano accompaniment meets the character’s emotional state with disjunct leaps, reflecting the uncertainty heard in the words. By the end of the song, the character arrives at a preliminary state of acceptance that she has lost her lover and begins her grieving process, by uttering, in measures twenty-seven through thirty-four, “On the bank of the Rima, let me eternally weep for him” (see Figure 3.1).

These final words of the vocal line and the brief piano postlude maintain the grieving sentiment in the home key of B-flat minor. However, the piece ends with a major version of the tonic chord, also known as a Picardy third. This harmonic device holds its roots in the Renaissance era of Western music and is commonly heard in sacred, as well as secular music from that time on. The most common interpretation of the

Picardy third is hopefulness despite the pain or hardship that precedes it. Since Brahms composed during the Romantic era of Western music, perhaps his use of the Picardy third in this song simply pays homage to the sacred history of the harmonic device. In the context of the recital's narrative, the Picardy third is the character's turn to God in the midst of her grief and anguish.

The third song in this set, "Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn" (Do you sometimes recall, my sweetest?). This song greatly contrasts with the preceding songs in terms of tempo and style. An *andantino grazioso* tempo marking and legato in the piano accompaniment bring out the gentle, coy nature of the text.

In binary form, this song is comprised of an A and B section. The dynamic of the A section is a sustained *piano*. In measure nine, the repeated "kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn, mein süßes Lieb?" (do you sometimes recall, my sweetest?) is marked with *dolce* in the piano accompaniment, calling for an even sweeter and gentler dynamic than the first time the phrase is sung. There is a dynamic shift from *piano* in the A section to *mezzo piano* at the beginning of the B section. The B section is characterized by swells indicated by the crescendo-decrescendo markings throughout the piano accompaniment in this section. Some measures, such as seventeen and eighteen, contain their own crescendo-decrescendo markings while in measures nineteen through twenty-one, a broader crescendo swells to the climax of the entire piece in measure twenty-two: "lieb' du mich wie ich dich, dann strömt Gottes Huld auf dich herab!" (love me as I love you, and God's grace will pour down on you!).

The final song of this set is also the final song of *Zigeunerlieder*, "Rote Abendwolken zieh'n am Firmament" (Red evening clouds drift across the sky). In this

song, Brahms returns to an *allegro* tempo marking, as in his first two songs of the cycle. Setting this piece apart from the three songs preceding it in this set are the crossed-bar dotted rhythms in the piano accompaniment (see Figure 3.2) that also maintain a lyric line amidst the fast-paced tempo (Zhao, 38). These crossed-bar dotted chords literally paint the moving red clouds that are sung about in the text. The lyric line amidst the *allegro* tempo elicits a sense of hastening passion.

In the A section of this piece in binary form, the vocal phrases commence with *forte* high notes that descend mostly stepwise while decreasing in dynamic. Contrarily, the B section's first vocal phrase starting in measure eighteen begins low and gradually ascends a few steps beyond an octave while increasing dynamically. The final vocal phrase, beginning at measure twenty-nine, marries the two contrasting approaches with two low notes that leap up into a melody that resembles the two vocal phrases of the A section (see Figure 3.3).

After the selections from *Zigeunerlieder* that represent a tumultuous romantic relationship of the fictional character in my recital, the character's narrative turned to describing the catalyst responsible for her enlistment into the military. "Priez pour paix" (Pray for peace) by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) served as the character's response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Poulenc composed this piece in 1938, one year before World War II would officially begin. He set a text of Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465) that was a solemn plea for peace amidst tragedy: "begging His Highness to deign to look on His people, whom He redeemed with His blood, and to banish war which destroys all."

A piano introduction sets the somber nature of the piece with tones that ring like slow tolling church bells. The vocal line begins in measure five dynamically marked by *pianissimo* and *trés doux et confidant* (very sweet and confident). A dynamic shift begins in measure eleven with a *mezzo forte* dynamic that swells to *forte*: “Saints et Saintes et prenez vostre adresse Vers vostre Fils Requerant sa haultesse” (the saints pray too, and address your Son, begging His Highness to deign to look on His people).

In measure seventeen and eighteen, the vocal melody becomes uneasy and disjunct with a downward minor second interval leaping down a perfect fifth and leaping up an augmented fourth. This stabbing melody illustrates the text that it accompanies: “Que de son sang a voulu racheter” (whom He redeemed with His blood), referring to Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross to redeem the world from sin (see Figure 3.4).

Within the recital narrative, the character was singing this song in a church the night of September 11, 2001. After hours of watching the news and footage of the terrorist attacks, she found respite in the quiet presence of God. The *pianissimo* entrance of the voice in measure five was her respectful approach to God in prayer. The increased dynamics indicated throughout the middle section of the song were her cries of frustration, anger, and plea. These cries diminished with the return of the original melody, bringing back the sweet and confident call to the Virgin Mary to “pray for peace,” which is “the true treasure of joy.”

Closing the first half of the recital was Mark Hayes’ arrangement of the traditional American Gospel hymn, “His Eye is on the Sparrow,” composed by Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932). Hayes keeps the traditional melody while adding borrowed chords and secondary dominant chords in the piano accompaniment throughout. Hayes

also includes abundant tempo and dynamic changes throughout the piece that indicate emphasis and offer musical variety.

Civilla D. Martin, the lyricist of this hymn, was a “schoolteacher with modest musical training” (Hawn 2013). She and her husband collaborated on many songs that were used in revival meetings. Martin was inspired to pen the words to “His Eye is on the Sparrow” after visiting a couple who were friends of she and her husband. Both the husband and wife had extensive physical ailments yet maintained a “bright hopefulness.” Martin’s husband asked them what their secret was to this hope and the wife responded, “His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.” One day after composing the poem, Martin mailed it to Charles Gabriel who wrote the tune for “His Eye is on the Sparrow.”

The inclusion of this song in the recital’s narrative is inspired by the reminiscences of a real-life soldier, Benjamin Host, CE3 (ret.). Host felt the call to serve in the Armed Forces shortly after September 11, 2001, enlisted in the US Navy as a member of the Seabees, and was deployed to the Middle East in the early 2000s. One day in Iraq, he opened his Bible and read during his devotional time:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:28-31, NIV).

Following devotional time, Host walked outside and noticed a tree that appeared to have shaking leaves on its branches. He stepped towards it for a closer look and discovered that the leaves were birds, who shortly flew away. Host felt that this moment was a divine encounter with God, which sustained him through some of the most challenging periods of his deployment to come.

In 2004, Host was involved in a Humvee convoy accident in Iraq and suffered severe traumatic brain injury for which he underwent three brain surgeries. Despite a diagnosis of PTSD, short-term memory challenges, and bouts of survivor's guilt, Host went on to receive both his bachelor's and master's degrees and shared his story publicly to a variety of audiences, including a few of which I was a part. Similar to the story that inspired Civilla Martin to pen "His Eye is on the Sparrow," Benjamin Host's story of triumph through trauma highlights the hopeful and faith-filled message of the song.

Despite challenges and tragedies in the recital narrative that led up to the character's deployment, she retained a sweet confidence that comes from deep faith as she embarked on a journey of uncertainty to the battlefield.

Chapter Four: Letters Home and Returning Home

Wartime letter writing has historically been “the most important means of communication between families at home and their loved ones serving overseas.” (Burke 2005). As technology has advanced, particularly in the current conflict in the Middle East, much communication that would have occurred through the written letter has transferred to the electronic message, whether via email, text message, or chat. But whether handwritten and sent in the mail or typed out on a technological device, military members abroad continue to write messages to their loved ones at home, using such communications to keep their relationships alive despite physical distance.

The second half of the recital illustrated the toll that deployment can take on any relationship, particularly romantic ones. The section began with a vignette where the deployed character composed a longing love letter to her husband. Not presented explicitly in this recital but alluded to several times in the second half, are traumatic combat events that the character experienced. The aria ending this section represented her return home and her emotionally-charged reaction after an argument with her husband. Intentionally, no resolution was insinuated to show the grave nature of PTSD and the tendency of its symptoms to tearing families and friends apart.

“Villanelle” is a French *mélodie* composed by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) and is the first song of his *Les Nuits d’été* (Summer Nights) song cycle. The cycle utilizes the text of Théophile Gautier’s (1811-1872) poetic work, *La Comédie de la Mort* (The

Comedy of Death). A *villanelle* is a type of French verse form based on a ballad song of the same name (Kane 2003). French poetry as a whole is deeply rooted in the poetry of the medieval troubadours (Weiler 2005, 359), who were meticulous and thoughtful regarding the form of their poetry. Gautier carried on that tradition.

Gautier's *La Comédie de la Mort* revealed an obsession with not only physical death, but spiritual death as well (Weiler, 361). Even so, he did not exclusively dabble in the macabre in these poems, but rather provided occasional relief "by the celebration of art as the sole refuge from the ugly vicissitudes of life" (Weiler, 361). In fact, Weiler believes that Gautier could not escape "the essentially sentimental and wistful nature of the French *romance*" with many of his poems in *La Comédie de la Mort* reflecting these qualities. Berlioz selected these more romantic-natured poems to set his song cycle (Weiler, 361).

Berlioz was known to have severe struggles with his mental health that allegedly stemmed from the absence of a relationship with his mother (Breitenfeld et al. 2015, 156). It is well-documented that he was prone to depression and had an addiction to opium. A tumultuous romance with an Irish actress is said to have inspired the composing of arguably his most influential contribution to music: *Symphonie fantastique*. Berlioz penned letters to the actress that were interpreted as "overly passionate" (Breitenfeld et al., 157). When she initially rejected Berlioz, he attempted suicide by overdosing on opium and would continue struggling with this addiction the remainder of his life.

A strophic song that "builds in excitement" throughout each verse, "Villanelle" is the opening song of the *Les Nuits d'été* song cycle (Weiler, 363). This song in E major

begins with a two-measure piano introduction that is dominated by right hand staccato triads. The piano accompaniment throughout the piece is light in texture, its purpose to illustrate the liveliness of spring and new beginnings that are sung about in the text. While the piano accompaniment remains staccato throughout, the vocal line enters in measure three with a *dolce* dynamic marking and continues in a legato line.

Although light and jovial in nature, “Villanelle” contains surprising harmonic turns. For instance, in measure thirty during the first verse and measure 114 during the third verse, Berlioz utilized a flattened sixth scale degree. In contrast, he naturalized the sixth scale degree at the same climactic point in only the second verse, perhaps to draw greater attention to the note’s corresponding word: “amours” (love).

Another harmonic surprise presented in this song occurs in a piano interlude between verses two and three. The accompaniment journeys through the subdominant minor (Weiler, 363). The left hand plays this minor version of the introductory vocal melody, yet when the vocal line returns in the third verse in measure eighty-seven, the original E major melody is heard.

The piano postlude is similar to the piano introduction with staccato triads in the right hand and staccato arpeggiations in the left hand. An authentic cadence ends this piece, evoking a confident hope for this romantic relationship.

Within the recital narrative, “Villanelle” represented a warfront love letter from the character to her husband. Although optimistic on the surface, the song has unexpected harmonic turns that represent hesitancy and doubt within the character. “As enthralled as I am at the prospect of returning home to my love, what will have changed within our relationship? Will he still love me?” and “How will my combat-related traumas impact

our marriage? Will my PTSD symptoms rip our marriage apart?” were some questions the character asked herself within this song. These doubts foreshadow the darkness that would consume the character after she returns home, which she did in the recital narrative after “Villanelle” and before the following song. The mood shift between the two songs was stark: from mostly hopeful to completely hopeless.

The next song was “Va! Laisse couler mes larmes,” an aria from Jules Massenet’s (1842-1912) opera *Werther* that is sung by the character Charlotte in Act 3. Frustrated that she is in love with Werther after being married to Albert for years, this aria is both a response to Charlotte’s sister’s attempt to console her, as well as an attempt to come to terms with the emotional intensity surrounding her love for Werther.

This haunting aria in D minor begins with a two-measure introduction featuring a duet between a clarinet and a saxophone. Although brief, this duet sets a contemplative mood for the aria. Where the clarinet and saxophone leave off, the voice takes control in the third measure. Unaccompanied, the imperative “Va!” (Go!) is exclaimed with declamation indicated by a *forte* dynamic marking.

Massenet weaves rich sensuality with anxious desperation musically through dissonance and resolution, as well as through slow, *legato* lines that are interrupted by unexpected rhythms. Massenet also skillfully utilizes text painting through a delicate dance between the orchestra and the voice. A prime example of this is illustrated when the voice mimics heartbeats on the words “le coeur” (heart) in measure nineteen following the stringed basses’ mimicking heartbeats.

Within the recital narrative, this aria was the character’s response to an argument that took place with her husband. Her response was one that is typical of a person who

has PTSD. Because of the trauma experienced, the character was responding based on one of the four main types of PTSD symptoms: “negative changes in beliefs and feelings” (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), which includes difficulties with maintaining healthy relationships.

This section of the recital did not end with a sense of resolution or optimism in order to more realistically depict the emotional wounds of war and their impact on military members and their loved ones.

Chapter Five: Nightmares and Hope for Healing

The final section of the recital began by continuing to illustrate various symptoms of PTSD. Selections from a song cycle with lyrics and music by Dominick Argento (1927-2019) represented nightmares (a common symptom of PTSD). A contemporary arrangement of a hope-filled African-American spiritual ended the recital, shedding light on the darkness of post-deployment life and evoking a sense of hope for healing.

In Argento's self-authored memoir, he states in the preface: "...only occasionally does the actual finished work bear a strong resemblance to the work I started to compose, which is to say that most of my compositions, when completed, surprise me by being markedly different from the piece I thought I was composing" (Argento 2004, xiv). This memoir was published in 2004, seven years before his *Cabaret Songs* were published; therefore, discussion of them are not included in the memoir. In fact, very little is publicly known about the *Cabaret Songs* and the work has yet to be professionally recorded and released. Further into the preface, Argento describes technical compositional techniques such as dynamics, chord types, and melody as "purely arbitrary decisions" (Argento, xv). He explains that these "decisions" are made "by instinct because they feel correct or pleasing or inevitable, but logic has played only a small part (if any) in arriving at them" (Argento, xvi). Since Argento has not described a different compositional process in more recent writings, I will assume in the following musical and textual analyses that the approach described in Argento's memoir is relevant to *Cabaret*

Songs.

Cabaret is “a form of artistic and social activity of a kind that flourished for about half a century between the opening on 18 November 1881 of the famous ‘Chat Noir’ in Paris” (Wachsmann and O’Connor 2001). This form of entertainment includes “a wide variety of showmanship, food and drink, and often dancing both on stage and on the floor; naturally there is a great demand for music” (Wachsmann and O’Connor). Argento is not the only classical music composer who published songs of the cabaret style; Benjamin Britten, William Bolcom, Kurt Weill, among several others, did so, as well.

There are a few ways Argento’s *Cabaret Songs* are particularly unique from other composers’ cabaret song settings. One is the fact that Argento wrote both the lyrics and music for the entire cycle. Another difference is that there is not just a common theme interwoven between all the songs, but all the songs follow a narrative. Yet another unique aspect of his cycle is the inclusion of an unexpected solo for male voice who is noted by Argento to be the accompanist.

“Who Could Have Known?” is the first song of the cycle. Indicated to be sung in a “moderate” tempo and “lovingly,” this is the first impression the audience experiences of the character of this cycle. The three-bar piano introduction sets the mood for the piece with chords commonly seen in jazz such as C^{add9}. The piano accompaniment brings the vocal line in by way of an arpeggiated C^{add9} chord at the end of measure three followed by a rolled C major chord at the beginning of measure four.

The vocal melody that begins on beat two of measure four and is marked *mezzo forte*. It moves mostly stepwise throughout the piece, with occasional leaps, and has a range of just over an octave. It maintains a romantic, longing nature with long, legato

phrases. The only marked dynamic changes occur near the end of the piece. The first dynamic change is a crescendo in measure twenty-five to a *forte* dynamic. In measure twenty-seven, the *forte* fades to the original *mezzo forte* and it is maintained until a decrescendo to *mezzo piano* in measure thirty-three. Finally, in measure thirty-six, the last measure of the piece, there is a decrescendo to *pianissimo* on the voice's held G4.

In a similar tone as “Who Could Have Known?”, “You Are a Love Song” is defined by *simply and tenderly* in the tempo marking. In the four-bar piano introduction, the right hand plays a pattern of two notes that each begin with an E5 and leap down. In the left hand, there is a sense of instability with a descending line of half steps in the bass line.

The vocal melody enters on the downbeat of measure five on a IV chord in the key of C major. The chord in the piano accompaniment that leads to this first chord of the vocal line is a C Major 7 which is not native to the key. All of these diversions in the beginning of the piece elicit a sense of curiosity and suspicion, especially since the lyrics of the song do not support these harmonic oddities.

Within the lyrics of “You Are a Love Song” lies much irony. In measures twenty through twenty-eight, the character explains that “though the heart is mute it found a way through the power of music to convey, ‘I’m yours. You’re mine. What more is there to say?’” The irony lies in the fact that there are ten measures that include the vocal melody left in the piece after these measures. This song is the first glimpse the audience receives of the potential faulty nature of this character.

The third song of *Cabaret Songs* is boisterous and somewhat crass, greatly contrasting the first two songs. With a direction of “sprightly” in the tempo marking,

“The Luckiest Woman” strongly stands out in the entire cycle with its faster-pace tempo and lyrical content. There are only two measures of piano introduction before the voice enters on the pickup to measure three. Somewhat incongruous is the inclusion of legato slurs indicated on nearly every phrase of the song. With many large-interval leaps and in attempts to keeping with the sprightly nature, the *legato* lines seem out of place.

The lyrics of the song are humorous and bordering on manic. The character addresses several ways she is not lucky, yet continues to reiterate that she’s “the luckiest woman alive,” because of the love she has for a man. In measures twenty-two through thirty-two, the character reveals some information that strongly suggests there is something abnormal about her: “Get a great job Monday; Tuesday fired. Go to pay my bill; find the credit card’s expired a month ago! Oh, no! Oh, no! But damn it! I reiterate I’m as lucky as can be...”

“You” is the fifth song of the cycle. This song is a return to the sentimentality that was heard in “Who Could Have Known?” and “You Are a Love Song.” The placement of this song in the cycle promotes the notion that the character is not completely emotionally stable. The words follow a similar theme and pattern as “You Are a Love Song.” There is inclusion of irony in measures thirty-one through thirty-eight: “Mere words are unworthy to describe so dear a dream, I’ll never have my fill of you, the endless joy and thrill of you, I’ll keep right on until you too say ‘I’m in love with you!’” Not only does she continue singing after stating that “words are unworthy,” but she claims that she will continue speaking until the man tells her he loves her.

Specifically noted at the bottom of the next song’s first page, Argento explains that the first measure of the piano accompaniment should abruptly interrupt the applause

for the preceding song and continue until the bewildered singer is about to protest. At that point, the accompanist starts to sing.” For the recital, this direction was taken literally, and the accompanist sang as the protesting character of the man who was referred to up to this point.

“Crazy Lady” is the title of the song sung by the accompanist with a tempo marking *with a bounce*. This song is composed in such a way to evoke laughter, both musically and lyrically. Although the male character is attempting to convince the audience that the female character is not trustworthy, there is no proof that he is trustworthy either. And this notion is carried out in the final piece of the cycle that gives both characters one last chance to convince the audience of who is more trustworthy (if either are actually so.)

This song captures the cabaret approach with its use of casual speech such as the singing of “losin” instead of “losing” and the use of more informal grammatic sentence structure: “Doesn’t know that love is blind.” Musically, there is extensive use of syncopation in the vocal melody above an accompaniment that supports it with many non-diatonic chords and dotted rhythms.

Argento included many dynamic indications that provide emphasis, dramatic and comedic effects. In the pickup to measure sixteen through measure nineteen, the man uses a simile to describe the woman: “[She is like] ...A tone-deaf songbird; She’s part cuckoo, she’s part loon!” On the word “cuckoo” are staccato markings that musically emphasize the onomatopoeia.

Another instance of the use of dynamics to bring forth dramatic and comedic effects occurs in measure twenty-seven. Argento intended the notes that span across the

word “lyrical” in measure twenty-seven to be sung in the *falsetto* register. The inclusion of this dynamic marking is a moment for the singer to show off his vocal skills while providing a moment of irony as the vocal line mimics the word “lyrical.” The song ends with a startling, unexpected piece of information: “Crazy lady, you’ll learn in time: That thrilling moment in the sun? ‘Twas moonshine!” Musically, this part of the vocal line is drawn out across nine measures with mostly half notes prolonging the ending. Abruptly ending, the word “moonshine” is to be sung with accents on both syllables while the piano accompaniment does the same with its final chords.

The final song of Argento’s *Cabaret Songs* is the simultaneous singing of both the woman’s final solo song “You” and the man’s solo song “Crazy Lady.” Indicated is a faster tempo than both the respective solos and a marking of *saucily*. The piano accompaniment is altogether different from both solos. It includes an introduction of several non-diatonic chords in the tonic key of A-flat major.

Within the recital narrative, *Cabaret Songs* depicted a bout of nightmares experienced by the character. The experiencing of nightmares is one of the 17 symptoms of PTSD (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). The National Center for PTSD claims that, through research studies, “trauma survivors who get PTSD are even more likely to complain of nightmares” than people who have not experienced trauma. One study shows that 71% to 96% of those with PTSD may experience nightmares (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). In addition, if a person suffers with both PTSD and another mental health diagnosis, she may be at a higher risk to experience nightmares.

Although the content of the nightmares of a person with PTSD tend to either replay the traumatic event or contain similar elements of the traumatic event, this is not

always the case (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). In the case of the recital narrative's character, she was no stranger to unstable relationships. Harkening back to *Zigeunerlieder* in the first half, we were introduced to the first instance of her intense emotional response surrounding a relationship that was tumultuous in nature. Shortly after returning home from deployment, the character sang "Va! Laisse couler mes larmes," a heightened response to an argument with her husband. It was that aria that triggered memories of past relationship conflict, in addition to her traumatic experiences during deployment; and the singing of *Cabaret Songs* was the result of the triggering emotions and the content of the character's nightmare.

Bringing hope amidst turmoil and bringing the recital to a close was the African-American spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead," arranged by Douglas Mears. Marked "expressively and freely," this contemporary arrangement of the spiritual is reflective and sentimental. The piano accompaniment includes full, spread-out chords that utilize much of the keyboard. There are also a total of eight key changes throughout the song. The accompaniment not only serves as support for the voice, but is also prominent to the listener as the voice because of its virtuosity.

The vocal melody is recognizable as the original melody of the spiritual, but with moments of contemporary inflections. At times, the rhythm of the vocal line is syncopated, adding to the uniqueness of this arrangement. Mears also used abundant tempo markings to indicate areas of emphasis, such as a *ritardando* over "sin-sick" in the phrase "to heal the sin-sick soul."

The range required of the singer in this song is from B3 to D5. Although it is not demanding of the singer in that regard, the song requires the singer to pay particular

attention to dramatic intent while not sacrificing sound vocal technique in the expression. Mears includes dynamic markings in both the piano accompaniment and the vocal melody, intertwining them to create dramatic expression together.

The words of “There is a Balm in Gilead” are both an offering of hope and an exhortation. When considering this final glimpse the audience was given of the character of the narrative, this song was an illustration of what hope for healing looks like for the tormented protagonist. Occurring shortly after waking from her nightmares, the character briefly and quietly composed herself. She then recalled a song she used to hear in her childhood at church, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” and imagined an angel inviting her to sing along. The quiet dynamics in the beginning reflected the character’s timidity, but as the piece built dynamically and as the texture of the piano accompaniment thickened, she gained more and more confidence that healing is not only possible, but that perhaps one day, she will offer this same hope to someone else in need of it.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“...an important question in psychiatry shouldn't be what's wrong with you but rather what's happened to you,” challenged research psychologist Eleanor Longden in her 2013 TED Talk on mental health. Longden began hearing voices during her college years and was able to overcome a schizophrenia diagnosis to later earn a master's degree in psychology. She claims that the voices she heard were “a sane reaction to insane circumstances” (Longden 2013).


According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a common myth regarding mental health is that “Personality weakness or character flaws cause mental health problems. People with mental health problems can snap out of it if they try hard enough.” This same entity debunks this myth by explaining that “many factors contribute to mental health problems,” such as biological and genetic factors and traumatic experiences.

Another myth debunked by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that “there is no hope for people with mental health problems. Once a friend or family member develops mental health problems, he or she will never recover.” Out of the one in five American adults who experience some kind of mental health issue, many of them will recover completely (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2017). These numbers, and any statistics for that matter, are unable to fully encompass the intricacies and complexity of the human brain. As a psychiatrist once said to me, “We

(psychiatrists) treat symptoms. Generally, the only way we know something is wrong is once a behavior manifests.”

One of the goals of this recital presentation was to raise awareness of the many issues combat soldiers experience during deployment and post-deployment. Another main goal was to begin the conversation of how mental health professionals as well as the general public can address those who experience the results of “what’s happened to them,” as Longden suggests. What better way to begin the conversation than with music?


Appendix



an dem Ri - ma - u - fer lasst mich e - wig
wei - - nen nach ihr!

1271

Figure 3.1 Final phrase of “Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du so trüb”
(Brahms 1954, 6-7)



Allegro
Ro - - te A - bend - wol - ken zieh'n am

Figure 3.2 Crossed-bar dotted chords in piano accompaniment (Brahms 1954, 18-19)

The image displays a musical score for the final phrase of the song "Rote Abendwolken siehn am Firmament" by Johannes Brahms. The score is presented in three systems, each consisting of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "nur al - - lein von dem sü - - - ssen Lieb - - - chen mein." The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with a steady eighth-note rhythm and a treble line with chords and melodic fragments. The vocal line is a simple melody with a long note on "al - - lein" and a final note on "mein." The score is enclosed in a rectangular frame.

Figure 3.3 Final phrase of “Rote Abendwolken siehn am Firmament”
(Brahms 1954, 18-19)

Que de son sang a vou-lu ra-che-ter

mf

Figure 3.4 Stabbing text painting (Poulenc 1939, 2-3)

per-les Que l'on voit au ma-tin trem-ble,

Nous i-rons é-cou-ter les mar-les,

pp

Figure 4.1 Flattened sixth scale degree (Berlioz 1975, 1-5)

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in the treble clef, starting with a *p* dynamic and ending with a *dim.* and *pp* dynamic. The piano accompaniment is in the bass clef, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords. The lyrics are in French and English.

le cœur se creuse... et s'affaiblit :
The heart be.numbed, can fight no more:

Figure 4.2 Heartbeat mimicking (Massenet 1909, 158-159)

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