VOCAL HEALTH AND REPERTOIRE FOR THE DRAMATIC MEZZO-SOPRANO:
A SUGGESTED COURSE OF STUDY
A DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

Vocal Health and Repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano: A Suggested Course of Study brings together the fields of vocal pedagogy and performance. This curriculum guide focuses on repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, ages 18-30. The guide includes selections from the genres of art song (beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels), opera and oratorio arias, concert works, and song cycles. Selected art songs and arias are presented from a vocal health perspective, using McKinney’s eight principles of Good Vocal Sound. In addition, the Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance model is integrated via the identification of a focus skill for each song or aria.

This suggested course of study emphasizes proper vocal technique and offers suggestions when studying and singing the larger works of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire. These suggestions include recommendations gleaned from interviews with well-known mezzo-sopranos Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick concerning their opinions regarding repertoire, vocal health, and appropriate song and aria assignments for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The guide also includes insights into training methods for today’s young dramatic voices based on observations of The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices.

Key outcomes and implications are that Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos must take the time to develop their voices before singing the more advanced arias of the standard
repertoire, such as those by Verdi and Wagner, and this can be done through the study of art song. Further, Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos must be strong technically in their approach to singing to help ensure vocal health and to avoid excessive strain on the vocal folds at all times. Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos must also have strong skills in musicianship and performance in order to meet the demands of the repertoire for this voice type. The information presented in this curriculum guide will assist both voice teachers and performers in the teaching and singing of repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.
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Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano Defined 50
Richard Boldrey (1994) describes the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as follows:

She is the mother, the witch, the whore, the dowager, sometimes even the queen.

She is a favorite voice of Verdi and Wagner, as well as the composers of Eastern Europe and Russia. She also appears in most twentieth-century operas written in America and Europe. (p. 26)

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a complex voice, one of many colors and personalities. These qualities can easily lead to misconceptions concerning appropriate repertoire as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano develops vocally; the singing of opera arias too early in the process of vocal development is one example. Instead, a focus on art song is important during the early stages of study. Because the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice is one of considerable size and power, some teachers of singing may believe that art song is too limiting for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. This power is indeed both entrancing and exciting to listen to and work with, whether in the private voice studio or in performance. As such, there may be a natural tendency for teachers of singing as well as students themselves to want to work at full strength as often as possible. This desire can lead many well-intended teachers to assign the larger works before the student is vocally prepared. An understanding of appropriate repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano
with an emphasis on proper vocal development is critical as she begins to grow towards maturity. Clearly, a curriculum guide is needed to assist voice teachers who do not fully understand appropriate repertoire for or the vocal pedagogy behind the training of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. A curriculum guide may help to ameliorate potential damage to developing singers by providing teachers with a much-needed resource for working with the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano that emphasizes vocal health.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to explore repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and provide a suggested course of study that helps to ensure continued vocal health. This curriculum guide includes several genres: art songs, opera arias, oratorio arias, and concert works. No resources currently exist that combine an emphasis on vocal health with repertoire curricula solely for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. This curriculum guide seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

Existing research in the field of vocal pedagogy includes books by Doscher (1988), McKinney (1994), and Miller (2004). These authors are among those well known in the field of vocal pedagogy; they have similar opinions concerning vocal pedagogy but present their information from different viewpoints and perspectives. Doscher (1988) provides an excellent overview of sound principles of vocal pedagogy, helping to give readers a guide to vocal technique and artistry. McKinney (1994) offers ways for both teachers of voice and choral directors to identify and then help to correct vocal problems that arise for singers. Miller (2004) presents specific tools for performers and teachers in the field of vocal pedagogy. He does not speak in generalities in his text; rather, he answers specific questions that he has been asked as a teacher of vocal pedagogy. Though
the development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is not specifically mentioned in the books listed above, all three authors present helpful information concerning vocal development in general.

Existing books concerning repertoire curricula and that which is vocally appropriate for different voice types include works by Boldrey (1994), Doscher (2002), and Clark (2007). While Boldrey and Clark focus primarily on opera arias, Doscher focuses on opera arias as well as other genres including art song, oratorio, and concert works. Each of these books provides information concerning repertoire in a way that is accessible and informative for teachers and students. This curriculum guide expands upon the information these authors have provided, with a sole focus on repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.

Art songs and aria selections used in this curriculum guide are chosen based on principles of vocal pedagogy and health. These principles include: correct breathing, breath support, correct posture, and the observation of techniques to help avoid vocal problems such as tremolo or vocal fold nodules. The selections included are intended to ensure the following characteristics of good vocal sound (McKinney, 1994, p. 77):

- Freely produced
- Pleasant to listen to
- Loud enough to be heard easily
- Rich, ringing and resonant
- Energy flows smoothly from note to note
- Consistently produced
- Vibrant, dynamic, and alive
• Flexibly expressive

**Interviews: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Experience**

To give further insight into appropriate repertoire and vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, this curriculum guide includes interviews with two well-known mezzo-sopranos: Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick. Mignon Dunn has sung leading roles in the world’s premiere opera houses. She currently teaches at the Manhattan School of Music; she has also taught voice at Northwestern University and has extensive insight and experience in working with dramatic voices. Ms. Zajick is one of the leading Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos of today. As the general director of the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, which she founded in 2006, she also has experience working with dramatic voices. The Institute for Young Dramatic voices is an intensive summer program specifically for students with large voices. Students are chosen by audition and are given voice lessons and vocal coaching with the staff as well as group voice instruction from Ms. Zajick herself. The students also participate in master classes, opera scenes, and recitals as part of this innovative program. These interviews provide insight into the following:

• How to recognize the true Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice
• Beliefs about vocal health as it relates to repertoire
• The easiest and most difficult opera roles of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire
• The best aria assignments for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano
• Whether the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should sing the lighter arias of Mozart
• The effects on dramatic mezzo-sopranos if they sing roles that are too light for their voice type
• The right time to start assigning the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano roles such as Azucena from Il Trovatore or Erda from Das Rheingold
• Appropriate art song assignments for students
• How the singing of art songs affects the vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano

This curriculum guide builds on these interviews, as well as the theories of vocal pedagogy experts, to provide a sequence of art songs and arias that will facilitate the healthy development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice.

Limitations of the Project

The most significant limitation of this curriculum guide is that, because every voice is different, it is not possible to conclude exactly what repertoire will work at a particular time for all Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voices. However, narrowing the focus of this study to the creation of a single curriculum is to miss the overarching point of the exercise. The primary focus of this curriculum guide is to promote an understanding of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice in the context of vocal health and longevity. It will not replace instructors, but it is hoped that it will assist them in their craft.

Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are defined as they are used in this suggested course of study:
1. **Scientific Pitch Notation**: This system, developed by The Acoustical Society of America in 1939 (Young, 1939) and used by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), is used to identify vocal ranges.

2. **Fach System**: This is a vocal classification system used to determine who will sing what role in German opera houses. “The system itself is essentially a group of expressions (Dramatic Soprano, Lyric Tenor, etc.) with specific definitions (range, timbre, appropriate roles, etc.)” (Cotton, 2007, p. 61).

3. **Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano**: A female voice classification in the Fach system identified as having a large, penetrating voice with a rich timbre and a range of G3 to Bb5 (Boldrey, 1994).

4. **Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP)**: Principle of music education stating that teachers should teach with the intent of having the student learn a principle of musicianship through the student performing an assigned piece (Pontius, 2012).

5. **Vocal abuse**: Singing with excessive tension in the tongue and larynx, singing with inadequate abdominal support, and/or employing excessive volume (Sataloff, 1988).


**Significance of the Project**

Little research exists in the area of developing the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. The suggested course of study within this curriculum guide could be a valuable resource for Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos and their teachers. The need for studying art song
methodically, thoroughly, and carefully is clearly stated. Excluding extraordinary circumstances, it is essential that Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos be given the time needed to mature properly by avoiding the more demanding arias from Verdi and Wagner operas in the early years. During this time they should instead be encouraged to study art songs, such as those by Barber, Brahms, Mahler, Schubert, and Schumann. Taking the time to study art songs during early development will prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for the increased vocal demands that will be placed on her as the voice matures. This can be achieved by following a suggested course of study specifically aimed at the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Every voice is different, and many options for art songs are included in this suggested course of study. These songs are meant to serve as a foundation to help ensure vocal health. Opera arias, oratorio arias, and concert works have also been included in the suggested course of study. However, these are included in the latter part of the study, as the suggested art songs should be studied in preparation for the advanced literature.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a rare voice type. The vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, within the context of vocal health, requires a degree of patience that is not necessarily required for other voice types. This guide seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing the following: 1) a unique course of study specifically for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, 2) further insight into the vocal development and demands placed on those who are Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos, and 3) a guide for teachers of voice, so that they may come to understand how better to teach this rare voice type in a way that is vocally healthy.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this curriculum development project is to explore repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice and provide a suggested course of study that helps to ensure continued vocal health. This literature review includes three main sections: the definition of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, vocal health within the context of common problems faced by the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, and repertoire selection including suggested criteria and an overview of current repertoire guides.

To define Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, one must first understand the Fach system. The Fach system categorizes both male and female voices for the purpose of deciding who will sing what role in German opera houses. Though the Fach system is not used in American opera houses, it is still critical for American singers to understand the system as it defines vocal ranges, classifications, and characteristics of voice (Boldrey, 1994). Boldrey asserts that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is best suited to roles in operas by composers such as Verdi and Wagner.

Vocal health is a major focus within this curriculum guide because of the relationship between song choice and vocal health. This guide addresses problems common to the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as well as ways to avoid such problems. For
example, Vocal Fold Nodules (VFN) is one of the more common vocal problems for singers and can be exacerbated during a performing career (Sataloff, 1988). Ways to avoid VFN are discussed in the context of vocal hygiene and the intelligent use of vocal warm-ups (David, 2002). The psychological impacts associated with vocal afflictions in addition to those associated with late development common among Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos are also considered.

Appropriate repertoire selection is a key focus of this guide. Singing the proper literature at the appropriate time can help to ensure vocal health and longevity. Nix (2002) states that few singers can overcome the problems of singing inappropriate repertoire. Accordingly, this section of the literature review considers repertoire for students, with specific considerations given for art songs, arias, and concert works. Adding practical knowledge to theoretical insight, information has been drawn from interviews with well-known mezzo-sopranos Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick to better understand the impact of repertoire on vocal longevity and why the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano tends to be late in reaching full vocal development. Full detail related to these interviews is found in Chapter 4.

**Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano Defined**

The German word *Fach* means “specialty or category” (McGinnis, 2010, p. 2). As applied to opera, the *Fach* system represents a series of different vocal classifications. The general classifications for men, within the system, include Tenor, Baritone, and Bass. The general classifications for women include Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Contralto. Each of these six general classifications has sub-classifications. For example, the sub-
classifications under Mezzo-Soprano include Light Lyric Mezzo-Soprano, Lyric Mezzo-Soprano, and Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano (Boldrey, 1994).

The Light Lyric Mezzo-Soprano typically has a range of G3 to B5 with a light, pleasant sound that is also capable of coloratura. An appropriate role for this type of mezzo would be Rossini’s “Cenerentola” in *La Cenerentola* (Boldrey, 1994). A Lyric Mezzo-Soprano has a range of G3-B5, a warm timbre, and a rich, full sound that is capable of sustaining a legato line. A suitable role for the Lyric Mezzo-Soprano would be “Carmen” in Carmen by Bizet. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a large voice that has a range of G3-Bb5 with a rich, dark timbre (Boldrey, 1994). Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano roles are common in the operas of Verdi and Wagner: “Amneris” in *Aida* (Verdi), “Azucena” in *Il Trovatore* (Verdi), “Eboli” in *Don Carlos* (Verdi), and “Erda” in *Das Rheingold* (Wagner). The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is “the voice among Verdi roles that can only be sung with a large voice, a certain range, and a certain tessitura” (D. Zajick, personal communication, June 28, 2012).

**Vocal Health**

Vocal health is important when considering repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Producing a sound that is vocally healthy will help to ensure proper vocal growth and longevity. James McKinney (1994) provides a description of a sound that is vocally healthy in his book, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults: A Manual for Teachers of Singing and for Choir Directors*, stating, "the sound is freely produced, pleasant to listen to, loud enough to be heard easily, rich ringing and resonant, energy flows smoothly from note to note, consistently produced, vibrant, dynamic and alive, and flexibly expressive" (p. 77). Significant topics related to vocal health that are vital for
teachers of singing and students to understand include vocal hygiene, the necessity of vocal warm-ups and singing intelligently, the dangers of vocal fold nodules (VFN), and the psychological impact of vocal problems. Correct knowledge in these areas can help to avoid future vocal problems.

**Vocal Hygiene**

Singers and teachers can help themselves avoid vocal problems by having knowledge of vocal hygiene. The article *The Effects of Preventive Vocal Hygiene Education on the Vocal Hygiene Habits and Perceptual Vocal Characteristics of Training Singers* (Broaddus-Lawrence, Treole, McCabe, Allen, & Toppin, 2000) focuses on the vocal attitudes of untrained singers and what their reactions would be towards receiving information concerning vocal health and hygiene. None of the participants in the study had previous vocal problems, and all participants were students between the ages of 18-22 at East Carolina University. The subjects of this study attended four one-hour classes that addressed four vocal hygiene issues: the anatomy and physiology of the phonatory mechanism; an outline of vocal abuses; an overview of pathologies associated with abuses; and instruction on proper vocal technique for speaking, including strategies to eliminate vocal abuses (Broaddus-Lawrence et al., 2000). Each participant in the study had less than two years of training but wanted to pursue a career in professional singing. The participants were given a Likert-scale questionnaire concerning the use of vocal hygiene knowledge (where 1 = “Always” and 7 = “Never”). In response to the statement, “Independent consideration of vocal anatomy and physiology while singing,” the pre-instruction mean was 3.73. This indicated that the subjects “frequently” or “sometimes” considered vocal anatomy and physiology while singing before they were formally taught.
about it. The post-instruction mean for this same question was 2.36, or “usually”; this suggests that receiving knowledge about vocal anatomy and physiology was beneficial.

**Vocal Warm-ups**

While knowledge of vocal hygiene is important, so is the practice of warming up the voice before singing. There are several reasons for vocal exercises: warming up the voice, extending the range, *lining up* the voice (making sure that an even tone is being produced and that the voice is being placed correctly), acquiring vocal technique, and correcting vocal faults (McKinney, 1994). David (2002) emphasizes the importance of singing intelligently when warming-up, with an understanding as to what is happening to the voice. He claims that most singers work out technical problems by utilizing exercises in the warm-ups. The article *Vocal Warm-Up Practices and Perceptions in Vocalists: A Pilot Survey* (Gish, Kunduk, Sims, & McWhorter, 2010) addresses the subject of vocal warm-ups. The survey participants (*n* = 117) included undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students from throughout the United States. The results indicated that 63 of the 117 participants always warmed up vocally before singing. The percentages for independent warm-up activity range from 75% before a private voice lesson to 90% before a brief solo singing experience (Gish et al., 2010).

**Vocal Fold Nodules**

The absence of knowledge of vocal hygiene and warming up before singing, as previously reviewed, may lead to vocal problems. Vocal Fold Nodules (VFNs) are defined as callous-like masses of the vocal folds caused by vocally abusive behaviors and are a dreaded malady of singers (Sataloff, 1988). A common sign or precursor to VFNs is
the tremolo—excessive wavering of the voice found in poor or deteriorating voices (Brodnitz, 1988).

In 1999, Otolaryngologists, Speech Pathologists, and Teachers of Singing responded to a survey regarding their opinions about VFNs and treatment possibilities (Appel, Guinn, Haxer, & Hogikyan, 1999). Of 41 Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) who participated in the survey, 100% agreed or strongly agreed that singing could resume after appropriate treatment for VFNs (Appel et al., 1999). When asked whether VFNs are difficult to treat and can usually end or severely damage a singing career, only 2.4% agreed and 0% strongly agreed. Otolaryngologists’ (OTO’s) opinions concerning VFN were similar to those opinions held by SLPs. The research indicated that 85.8% of OTOs agreed or strongly agreed that singing could resume after appropriate treatment for VFNs. The number of OTOs who agreed that VFN are difficult to treat and can usually end or severely damage a singing career was higher at 7.1%; as for SLPs, 0% of OTOs strongly agreed with this statement.

According to Doscher (1988), the leading cause of VFNs is vocal abuse, and the major functional causes of VFNs are attributed to using breath pressure that is too high and glottal attacks. She goes on to say that, once VFNs have formed, they disturb cord closure and vibration, causing even more damage. Doscher concludes that if singers under the age of 30 sing at a very high tessitura for a prolonged period of time, they risk permanent damage. Sometimes a talented performer may choose to take on heavy professional responsibility, such as dramatic roles, before her voice and technique is secure (Miller, 2004). Singing dramatic roles that have a high-lying tessitura within a short span of time can also contribute to vocal problems and career termination (Miller,
2004). Dolora Zajick, an active performer and teacher in the opera world, attributes some difficulties experienced by dramatic singers to auditioning for roles before they are ready to do so. She explains that big voices have trouble with dynamic changes (Matternach, 2010).

**Psychological Impact of Vocal Health Problems**

Vocal problems, like VFN, can have both physical and psychological impacts upon singers due to the stigmas they carry (Sataloff, 1988). The effects of anxiety and emotional stress on physical functioning can be devastating (Doscher, 1988). The article *Voice Handicap in Singers* (Murry, Zschommler, & Prokop, 2009) gives insight into the psychological impact of vocal problems through the use of the Voice Handicap Index (VHI). Developed for the speaking voice by Jacobsen in 1997, the VHI consists of 30 statements focusing on the voice and vocal health. Patients within the original study were asked to rate each statement in the VHI from 0 to 4 (0 = “never” and 4 = “always”). The minimum score on the VHI is 0 and the maximum score is 120. The higher the perception of the patient concerning their vocal handicap, the higher the VHI score will be. The VHI was recently modified to include only 10 statements from the original 30. This modification is known as the VHI-10. The article reports the results of a survey completed by 35 singers, mean age of 19.7, and 35 non-singers, mean age of 41.2. The results indicate that the emotional impact of a vocal problem is of greater concern for a singer than for a non-singer. For example, statement 8 in the VHI-10, “My voice problem upsets me,” ranked first among singers’ concerns but eighth among non-singers (Murry et al., 2009, p. 378).
A modification for singers, known as the VHI-10S, also exists. The modification in the VHI-10S substitutes the words “singing voice” for “speaking voice” in three of the ten statements (Murry et al., 2009). When singers were presented with the VHI-10S modification, the perceived vocal handicap was 11% higher than on the VHI-10. The authors note that validity and reliability studies still need to be done concerning the singing voice, but emphasized that clinicians may get additional information from singers when using the VHI-10S.

Sandgren (2002) sampled a group of 49 opera singers from Sweden, 25 men and 24 women. The subjects completed both a questionnaire and an interview regarding the impact that singing has had on them both physically and emotionally. As suggested by the Murry study, vocal problems have greater impact on singers than non-singers. For example, the participants of the survey were asked to rate statements on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of importance. According to this study, singers who experienced threats to vocal functioning, such as sickness or VFN, had the greatest risk of indisposition. Singers who experienced laryngitis also reported a psychological impact, leading to feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy.

**Repertoire Selection**

Selecting correct repertoire is critical to vocal health. This is especially true for the developing Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, and must be done carefully. Currently, a number of repertoire guides are available to teachers of singing and students. These include books with suggestions about appropriate repertoire for young students of singing, art song repertoire, and appropriate opera roles and arias for singers. Rather than choosing repertoire by simply relying on personal knowledge or preference, it is
suggested that certain criteria such as ability, musicianship, and emotional maturity be considered when assigning repertoire to students of this voice type.

**Criteria for Selecting Repertoire**

Mezzo-Soprano Marilyn Horne is one of the most honored and recognized opera singers of today. In addition to leading master classes around the country, Ms. Horne is the Director of Voice for the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. Ms. Horne believes that a performer must be strong and make correct choices concerning repertoire. This includes having a healthy respect for the voice and knowing its limits (Sadler, 2000).

One of the most important tasks concerning the maintenance of vocal health involves choosing the correct repertoire for the singer, but existing literature is broad. Very little information exists solely for the developing Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. When choosing repertoire, several criteria must be considered. According to Nix (2002), these include the physical limitations of the singer, the voice classification of the singer, expressive/emotional factors, and musicianship skills. These criteria will differ depending on whether the student is a beginning, intermediate, or advanced student. David (2002) suggests that the difficulty of the music and extremes of range should be carefully considered when choosing repertoire. He also encourages singers to limit themselves to songs and roles that they are mature enough to sing and allow for the use of their natural voices. Nix (2002) echoes the significance of considering maturity when assigning repertoire. In the article *Reunion: Mignon Dunn*, Dunn explains that big voices do not mature until about age 30 (Myers, 2008). In addition, younger students may not have the emotional and musical maturity to appreciate works such as Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder*.
that singers in their forties might (Nix, 2002). The following sections will review current curricula with a view to understanding the degree of direction offered to the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.

**Repertoire Selection Guides**

It is important to have a reasonable knowledge of existing repertoire guides. Some focus only on art song or arias, while others concentrate on both major areas. Due to the importance of studying art song before opera or oratorio arias, books concerning art song will be discussed first, followed by repertoire books concerning opera and oratorio arias, and finally those books that discuss a number of classical genres, including art song as well as opera and oratorio arias.

Author J.A. Hopkin (2002) wrote *Songs for Young Singers: An Annotated List for Developing Voices*. While the repertoire in this book is primarily intended for high school students, it is also helpful for music education majors as well as performance majors who teach private lessons to these young singers. Songs are listed by composer and level of difficulty (Levels 1-3). The level of difficulty is based on factors such as tessitura and length of phrase. This book also contains a comprehensive listing of song anthologies, rating their difficulty level according to seven elements: melodic contour, phrasing, rhythmic complexity, contrasts, text, accompaniment, and language. Boytim (2003) has also contributed to the subject of beginning repertoire in her book, *The Private Studio Handbook: A Practical Guide to All Aspects of Teaching*. In the chapter entitled "The Songs We Sing," Boytim discusses selecting repertoire according to the maturity level of the student and then leading the student gradually through all types of music and musical styles. *The Art of the Song Recital* by Emmons and Sonntag (2002) covers each aspect of
the song recital, from how to build a recital program to determining an appropriate program for each main voice type (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass). It further discusses ensemble recitals. There is a chapter for song cycles, which discusses how to study art songs. The study of folk songs and new music are also included within the book; it suggests accompanists, and promotes a need for young singers to participate in recital programs.

_A Guide to Art Song and Style Literature_ (Kimball, 2005) differs from other repertoire books as the listing of art songs is comprehensive and includes a focus on the style of composers of art songs. Kimball includes the following elements of art songs for each composer listed in the book: general, melody, harmony, rhythm, accompaniment, text, form, and influence. Kimball’s book gives a general overview of composers such as Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Fauré, and Wolf, and also includes song listings and translations of songs along with further commentary on the background of the composers themselves.

Author Martial Singher wrote _An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students_ (1983). It is a listing of arias from operas by composers from Beethoven to Wagner. It includes well-known arias from the standard opera repertoire. Each aria listed includes a synopsis of the plot for the aria as well as some coaching suggestions.

As repertoire books continue to be written, they are including more detailed information. _Guide To Operatic Roles and Arias_ by Boldrey (1994) provides great insight into vocal categories and the roles each vocal category should include. Boldrey lists vocal categories such as the Lyric Soprano, Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Countertenor,
and Dramatic Bass. He explains the vocal ranges and characteristics of each voice type listed in the book. Boldrey also provides comprehensive listings that link voice categories to arias, operas, performers, and composers of opera.

A recent book concerning opera arias is Mark Ross Clark’s (2007) Guide to the Aria Repertoire. This resource is meant to assist singers in identifying, choosing, and understanding arias for study and performance. It includes arias for the Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, and Bass voices and explains the synopsis of each aria. This book also includes information about the dramatic characteristics of the aria and a discussion of its place in the opera plot as well as information concerning the Fach of the aria and the librettist for the opera. Concerning repertoire for young singers, this book advises that arias that are too heavy for a young singer may be appropriate later as the voice continues to develop and mature.

Among books concerning vocal repertoire, there are those that include both art songs and arias. One of the first series of this kind was written by Coffin (1960). His book, The Singer’s Repertoire Part II: Mezzo Soprano and Contralto is the fifth book in the series The Singer’s Repertoire – a series that is still used as a resource today. It gives a thorough listing of art songs and arias arranged by composer. Lists of recital songs are included along with songs and arias in English, French, and German. The Singer’s Repertoire is specifically designed to aid teachers of singing in building recital programs, providing suggestions for vocal training and suggestions for sacred repertoire.

Each song or aria listing includes the range and tessitura of the song or aria and some general remarks. Songs by composers such as Beethoven, Bizet, Brahms, Schumann, Verdi, and Wagner are included. This book builds on Coffin’s approach by including comments useful for musical interpretation.

*From Studio to Stage: Repertoire for the Voice* (Nix, 2002) is based on the notes and writings of Barbara Doscher as compiled by John Nix. Each art song or aria listing includes the title, the difficulty level from beginning to advanced, the poet, range, and voice type. The book further includes the tessitura and commonly found editions of each song or aria. This book is distinctive because it includes not only comprehensive art song and aria listings with specific commentary from Doscher, but also information concerning commonly found editions of repertoire books for teachers and singers.

**Chapter Summary**

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a unique voice type that tends to develop later than other voice types. As a result, sustained vocal health is of particular concern. This includes awareness of vocal hygiene, vocal warm-ups, vocal problems, and the physical and psychological impacts of vocal problems upon vocal performers. While vocal problems like VFNs may not end a singer’s career, their existence warrants consideration of how vocal problems can be avoided through the use of proper technique and the singing of appropriate repertoire. Numerous repertoire guides exist, providing recommended literature lists and advice for selecting repertoire, but none focus specifically on the unique needs of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. This is a significant gap in the vocal pedagogy literature.
The purpose of this curriculum guide is to provide a suggested course of study for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to help ensure vocal health and development. Titled *Vocal Health and Repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano: A Suggested Course of Study*, this curriculum guide includes suggestions for art songs, concert works, oratorio, and opera arias. The repertoire selected for this curriculum focuses on art songs and arias that are most appropriate for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in terms of vocal health and development. Selection factors included range and difficulty level as well as specific principles of vocal pedagogy and performance salient to each song or aria. The primary principles for vocal health are based on McKinney’s points of good vocal sound. The Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) principle as it applies to the private voice studio was used to help ensure performance progress. Difficulty levels of the repertoire chosen include Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced. These levels are based on range, intervals, rhythm, melody, accompaniment, language, and overall difficulty of the text.

Interviews with internationally renowned mezzo-sopranos Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick have been included to give important insight into the repertoire most appropriate for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and the performance challenges and
considerations that exist for this rare voice type. The author’s auditing experience at the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, founded by Dolora Zajick, is included to provide an understanding of recommended methods used to train some of the exceptional dramatic voices of today. These methods reflect the unique pedagogical challenges for the development and training of the dramatic voice.

**Development of the Repertoire Curriculum**

The repertoire curricula for this suggested course of study is primarily based on McKinney’s points of healthy vocal sound. Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance is used as it applies in the private voice studio. In this manner one specific principle of performance – such as communicating the text of a song – or one specific principle of musicianship – such as interval accuracy – is included in each song and aria entry. Three levels of difficulty have also been considered: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

A total of 79 selections are included in this curriculum guide. Languages for the songs and arias chosen include Italian, English, German, and French, as these are the languages in which art songs and arias are most often performed. The Art Song section contains a total of 60 selections divided into Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced categories. Each category includes 20 songs, five each in the four languages selected for this curriculum guide. The structure of the Opera Arias section is the same as that of the Art Song section, but with fewer selections. The Opera Arias section contains 12 selections, with three selections in each language. The Oratorio Arias section of this guide varies slightly in that it includes three selections: one each in English, German, and
Latin. The last section, Concert Works, includes four selections; one of these is a song cycle. The languages included in this section are English, German, and French.

**McKinney’s Points of Healthy Vocal Sound**

James McKinney identifies eight principles of good vocal sound; these have been used in the selection of the repertoire chosen for this curriculum guide. They are:

1. **Freely produced** - not constricted, forced or strained
2. **Pleasant to listen to** - the sound is not strident or rasping
3. **Loud enough to be heard easily** - not too loud, resembling shouting or yelling
4. **Rich, ringing and resonant** - not hoarse
5. **Energy flows smoothly from note to note** - the sound is not breathy
6. **Consistently produced** - not weak, colorless, or devitalized
7. **Vibrant, dynamic, and alive** - the sound is not inconsistently produced
8. **Flexibly expressive** - the sound is not shaky or wobbly

(McKinney, 1994, p. 77)

**Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance**

Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance (CMP) is a pedagogical approach in which teachers instruct with the intent of having the student learn a principle of musicianship through performing an assigned piece. In essence, it is “performance with understanding” (Pontius, 2012, para. 2). This is another of the principles upon which the repertoire curricula for this suggested course of study is built. Using this approach, teachers assign specific art songs or arias to the student with the goal of learning about a principle of vocal health and technique, such as breathing, through the performance of the
assigned work. Once the student masters the principle and the performance, she is then ready to move on to the next selection in the suggested course of study.

**Difficulty Levels**

Difficulty level is also important to consider when choosing appropriate repertoire. The selections for this project have been classified as follows:

**Beginning** - These selections will typically have a vocal range of no more than a tenth. They will consist of non-syncopated rhythms, and usually have melodic intervals of no more than a fifth. These art songs have short and repetitive texts; the singers are expected to find a basic translation of the selections in their first language and demonstrate an understanding of the difference between poetic and literal translations while learning these pieces. The phrases of these selections will also be shorter than those in the intermediate or advanced selections, to reflect a basic understanding of breathing that is foundational to healthy singing.

**Intermediate** - These selections will have ranges greater than that of the beginning selections, sometimes as much as a twelfth. Syncopated rhythms will be included, as well as more difficult harmonic settings. The ability to sing the melody without the accompaniment is expected of those students who perform these selections. The texts are also longer and not as repetitive, regardless of the language in which the song is written. Singers are expected to use literal translations as needed when working with a song or aria. The phrases will tend to be longer than those of the beginning selections, but not as long as those in the advanced selections.

**Advanced** - These selections include not only art songs, but also arias, oratorios, and concert works. They have varied ranges and challenge the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano
to use the full extent of her range. The ability to sing the melody of the selection regardless of the accompaniment style is assumed for singers who are at this level of study. The rhythms are more difficult and the phrasing demanding. An advanced understanding of vocal technique is needed to sing the selections in this category. Concerning opera and oratorio arias included at this level of study, the student must be able to clearly identify the character who is singing the aria, the setting where the selected work occurs in the opera or oratorio, as well as the synopsis of the work and how the selected aria affects the plot overall. Proper understanding of these aspects is essential for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to be successful when performing these selections.

**Templates for Song and Aria Entries**

Three templates were used to create the Song and Aria Entries in the curriculum guide. Each template was designed to present an art song or aria in an effective way by giving the needed information clearly and concisely. It is important that the teacher and student both are familiar with the selected song or aria and understand how the selected work will help the student grow in the areas of performance, technique, and musicianship. Each entry includes the title of the song or aria being discussed, the name of the composer, the vocal range of the selected work, the difficulty level, one principle of vocal health and good singing as stated by James McKinney (a McKinney Principle), as well as a CMP Focus followed by a place for commentary from the author concerning each art song or aria. Here is the template format used to create this curriculum guide:

**Title:**

**Composer:**

**Range:**
Difficulty Level:

McKinney Principle:

CMP Focus:

Commentary:

This template is used for all Beginning and Intermediate Art Song selections in this curriculum guide.

The template is altered in the Advanced Art Song and Opera and Oratorio Arias sections of the curriculum guide. At this level, the student should have an advanced understanding of vocal technique, and therefore should be able to apply each McKinney Principle interchangeably. Due to this expectation, the Advanced Art Song template has been modified to include a focus on two McKinney Principles per selection instead of one.

In the Oratorio and Opera Aria section of this curriculum guide, the McKinney principle is replaced with the identification of one or more Preparatory Art Songs. The art songs listed on this line of the template are meant to specify select art songs in the curriculum guide that serve to prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for the more advanced repertoire.

**Concert Works**

Due to the amount of advanced vocal technique, musicianship, and artistry needed to perform concert works, the template format is not used in this section of the curriculum guide. Rather, the author provides a general commentary for each selected concert work, focusing on the more difficult aspects and specific challenges of each piece discussed.
Interviews and Observations

The author’s interviews with internationally known mezzo-sopranos Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick are included in this project. These interviews focus on opinions and experiences related to teaching the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as well as personal experiences related to singing Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire.

The interview with Ms. Dunn was conducted by phone on February 27, 2012. Ms. Dunn’s voice could not be heard in the initial digital recording; she kindly offered to repeat the interview so that an acceptable recording could be made. The date of the second interview was March 26, 2012 and it was again conducted by phone. The second interview was successfully completed and recorded. There was continued communication between Ms. Dunn and the author through phone conversations and email, and she requested a hard copy of the transcript be sent to her home in New York. The transcript was sent in late April of 2012, and she sent a hand-written letter back on May 4, 2012. Her letter included corrections to the transcript, and she gave further suggestions for repertoire in her letter. Information from the second interview and the hand-written letter are discussed in Chapter 4 of this document.

The author was able to conduct an interview with Ms. Zajick in person while auditing at the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. The interview was arranged by Sarah Agler, who is the Executive Administrator for the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices. The author and Ms. Agler exchanged a series of emails concerning this interview from January to June of 2012. Ms. Zajick communicated with Ms. Agler, giving her consent to be interviewed. The interview occurred at 10:00 am on June 28, 2012 and was recorded using a digital recorder. A transcript of the interview was sent to Sarah Agler.
via email on July 9, 2012. She, in turn, sent the initial transcript to Ms. Zajick. After Ms. Zajick corrected and approved the transcript, she sent it back to Ms. Agler. The transcript was then returned to the author via an email from Sarah Agler on August 1, 2012. This interview is also discussed in Chapter 4.

The author was one of five auditors at The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices during the week of June 23-28, 2012 in Orem, Utah. This five-day observation was arranged by Sarah Agler through a series of email exchanges with the author from January-June of 2012. Auditing at the Institute included observing voice lessons, vocal coaching, and group voice lessons as well as attendance at master classes for the student participants of the Institute.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter describes the processes and pedagogical tools that were used to define the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of difficulty for the purposes of choosing the repertoire for this curriculum guide. The development of the repertoire curricula was based on the literature that is most appropriate for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to help ensure vocal health and continued growth in the areas of musicianship and performance. McKinney’s Principles of good vocal sound were used to identify specific aspects of vocal technique for the student to concentrate on in each song and aria selection. Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance was used as it applies in the voice studio to promote continued growth in the areas of musicianship and performance. Difficulty levels included Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced. Difficulty levels were based on factors such as range, intervals, rhythm, melody, accompaniment, language, and overall complexity of the text. Templates were used in
creating Song and Aria Entries for this curriculum guide; these include information concerning the title, composer, range, McKinney Principle, CMP Principle, and Commentary relevant to each selection. The template approach is not used in the Concert Works section of curriculum guide; rather, a general commentary addresses the specific challenges for each piece. Information from interviews with Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick, who are champions of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire and have extensive performance as well as teaching experience with dramatic voices, was included to give insight into the unique challenges that exist for this rare voice type. The author’s auditing experience at the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices in Orem, Utah provided additional insight into how the dramatic voices of today are being trained.

The resulting pedagogical materials and accompanying information are meant to assist Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos and their teachers in gaining a better understanding of appropriate song and aria assignments as well as specific approaches to teaching and performing this repertoire. This curriculum guide brings the fields of vocal pedagogy and performance together to help ensure the overall vocal health and development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.
Mignon Dunn and Dolora Zajick are renowned mezzo-sopranos who have had years of performing experience in the best opera houses world-wide and also work with students and young singers. Ms. Dunn is a long-time faculty member of the Manhattan School of Music. Ms. Zajick is the founder of the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices, a summer training program for students and young singers with large voices.

The following interviews present the opinions of Ms. Dunn and Ms. Zajick concerning repertoire and vocal health, song and aria assignments that best fit the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, vocal development, the individuality of the student, and the definition of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Advice on how a student prepares and learns assigned songs and arias as well as advice concerning auditioning is also included. The interview questions are presented in italics followed by a synopsis of the answer. In most cases, quotes from the interviews, presented in block form, are included along with the original as well as follow-up questions. Some of the answers to the interview questions have been paraphrased. A brief discussion of the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices follows the interviews.
Mignon Dunn

Mignon Dunn is an internationally known and acclaimed mezzo-soprano, having sung leading roles in many of the world’s major opera houses. Mignon Dunn is known especially for her portrayals of the dramatic Italian roles such as Amneris in *Aida*, Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, Eboli in *Don Carlo*, both Laura and La Cieca in *La Gioconda*, the Princess in *Adriana Lecouvreur*, and Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Her French repertoire includes Dalila in *Samson et Dalila* and Giulietta in *The Tales of Hoffmann* as well as Dulcinée in *Don Quichotte* and *Carmen*, which she has sung over 400 times in four different languages. She is widely known as a professor of voice and has taught on the faculties of the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Illinois, Northwestern University, Brooklyn College, and for many years at the Manhattan School of Music. (Manhattan School of Music 2012).

It was the author’s privilege to study with Ms. Dunn for five years. Ms. Dunn graciously gave of her time, sharing her expertise in this interview: commenting on repertoire and roles that are appropriate for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, the importance of vocalizing, the role that art song have in healthy vocal development, and the individuality of each student. This interview was conducted through several phone conversations, email exchanges, and letters from January through May of 2012.

**What do you believe about vocal health as it relates to repertoire?**

Ms. Dunn supports having a large song repertoire and recommends composers such as Bellini, Donizetti, Donaudy, and Rossini when singing Italian art song. Ms. Dunn says that one of the major issues of vocal health is developing the stamina to sing major roles. Young singers should be assigned arias that are a bit beyond them, but they must
not go any further than what would be vocally healthy, and that singing art songs is important in preparation for roles. Further, regarding vocalization and Italian Art Song, Ms. Dunn shared this memory:

I came to know a wonderful Wagnerian Soprano, Hildegard Berens, who would vocalize in her dressing room with ‘Ruggiadose odorose’ (from “Le Violette”) and then go out on stage and sing ‘Ho jo to ho! . . . Vocalizing is very important and should never be neglected.

This is an example of the importance of vocalizing and the necessity of singing art songs. This is especially important for dramatic voices, so that they may develop needed stamina in a way that promotes vocal health.

What was the easiest role for you to sing, and what was the hardest?

Ms. Dunn said that she could sing two performances of “Azucena” from *Il Trovatore* for one performance of “Amneris” from *Aida* because of the sheer duration of the role. She also said that the role of “Carmen” from *Carmen* was easier because it lies in the middle register, and that the more lyric role of “Dalila” from *Samson et Dalila* was not as difficult for her vocally. Ms. Dunn then addressed the issue of what happens with the voice as aging occurs, explaining that, as you get older, the voice gets heavier.

Concerning high notes, she stated:

Those notes are hard to keep. It depends on the singer, and every singer is an individual. We are not robots, and there’s no general rule for anything.

What Ms. Dunn has to say concerning the individuality of singers is very important and can also have a further application for teachers of singing. Teachers must remember that each student is going to have different abilities, and that there is not one voice that is
exactly like another. These truths are important to keep in mind when assigning repertoire, as well, and that song assignments should bring out the best in the students while allowing them to grow vocally.

**What do you feel are the best aria assignments for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano?**

You certainly can be looking at “O mio Fernando”... I sure would stay with some of the Bellini... it depends on where your voice lies. Some of the Mozart is wonderful; however, if you have problems with the passagio you better be careful. If you want to be healthy... the Bellini is great... Donizetti the “O mio Fernando”... the whole role would be a lot because the ensembles sit very, very high but the arias mostly, try some things that feel good, try things with a line... .“Ah mon fils” another one... very, very pretty. But the German is difficult... if you are more of a contralto, look at the “Weiche Wotan!” It’s not going to hurt you. It’s not that heavy and you mustn’t sing it heavy because the orchestra is not playing loud at that particular point. I certainly would not do the “Ortrud”... no. I think judiciously you could try “Borgena” but not before you are 24 or 25. I wouldn’t go for any of these bigger arias... you are better off... you can do some of the Carmen even very young. I think if you are on the younger side, it is better to look at the opera seria of Rossini... do bits and pieces also; that’s a very good thing. Take a cadenza out of one of the operas and work on it as an exercise.
Would you suggest that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano sing the lighter arias of Mozart?

I wouldn’t do the lighter ones; some of the Rossini or Barber is fine. If you are a very low mezzo, then do “Cruda Sorte.” Otherwise, it is going to be so low that nobody is going to hear you. But in some of the Rossini, there are wonderful things . . . Gluck arias are great . . . . The Orfeo is just full of music from beginning to end that is just like gravy . . . from the opening aria to the very last thing. Some of the Handel arias are great fabulous when you want to do something with coloratura, if you find something that suits you.

Through sharing her insights on the subject of aria assignments, Ms. Dunn is offering great options for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano outside of the well-known lighter arias of Mozart. It should be remembered that there are many pieces to choose from in the repertoire of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, and that it is important to consider composers and arias that would differ from what may be considered standard to meet the vocal needs of this unusual voice type.

Ms. Dunn also discussed what goes into learning a new song or aria while also commenting on pieces she assigns her own students and how art songs affect the overall development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. When learning a new piece, Ms. Dunn advises young singers to do the following:

When you learn a new aria, don’t try to do all the fortes and pianos. Sing it comfortably. Also, breathe more often – you’ll take the breaths out later.

Concerning artistry and dynamic levels, Ms. Dunn states:
You have to learn anything from one note to the next and then the first three notes and then the first four notes. You must know what you are saying . . . it is important to know the text of what you are saying and the rhythm. Most of the time a young singer will just sing the whole thing full-force . . . I mean you want to get the color, and it doesn’t have to be always loud.

Ms. Dunn suggests an excellent approach to learning the melody of a song as well as great advice for dynamic levels concerning artistry and musicality. Correct breathing is crucial for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano; breathing more often when learning a song or aria is a great way to reinforce appropriate technique when singing. As the singer becomes more comfortable, she will be able to sing longer phrases and delete any unnecessary breaths. Ms. Dunn wisely cautions young dramatic singers to be musical even when learning a piece, so that they use their voices appropriately, avoiding the vocal abuse that can result from over-singing.

**Concerning art song, what songs do you assign your students?**

Oh . . . I assign them Rossini. Very much Rossini . . . I would assign them as far as the Italian is concerned . . . Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti . . . some Verdi songs and Puccini songs are all fine for a young dramatic . . . . Verdi had wonderful songs . . . look into the Italian repertoire . . . Donaudy is gorgeous . . . but I love Debussy and Duparc has great songs and Poulenc has great songs . . . . I’m very, very, partial to Schumann and to Wolf then when you get a little bit more, then Mahler . . . the whole works. The Strauss songs are fabulous, but be careful and don’t sing the great big ones for a while when you’re young. Be sure that you are working on the texts . . . very important.
Ms. Dunn further suggests that a young singer begin with Schumann, and then go to the songs of Wolf, then Mahler. In terms of American art song, Ms. Dunn recommends composers Mark Adamo and Libby Larson. She also assigns her students works by Barber, Hundley, and Rorem, as well as some early Britten.

The offering by Ms. Dunn of many composers for song assignments points to the varied repertoire that exists for young singers, especially the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. It is important that young singers are exposed to a number of different composers when learning to sing, not only for technical reasons but also to experience variations in style.

*How you think the singing of art song effects the vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano?*

Ms. Dunn responded by stating:

Well it teaches you just about everything. It teaches you to know loud and soft; it teaches you to know what words you are singing, and you should have a word for word translation and don’t go online and get it, dictionaries are a good thing, you know. You won’t always find everything online . . . don’t do it the easy way . . . .

If you dig a little bit you are really going to remember it more.

Ms. Dunn suggested some new ideas as to what songs to assign the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Speaking from performance experience as well as teaching, Ms. Dunn has invaluable advice for the young singers of today. Her thoughts and opinions on the necessity of art song, singing in a way that is vocally healthy, and keeping the voice singing comfortable as it grows are especially important for young Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos. Further, her advice as to interpretation and each singer
finding her own literal translations of texts provides an opportunity for young singers to communicate with their audiences in deep, meaningful ways. Ms. Dunn has inspired many students while guiding them in their careers. The author thoroughly enjoyed interviewing Ms. Dunn and is grateful for the further insight gained as to how to work with young singers.
Dolora Zajick

Hailed as “THE Verdi mezzo of the day” (Opera News) and considered “a mezzo in a class by herself” (New York Times), Dolora Zajick has been internationally acclaimed as that rare voice type, a true dramatic Verdi mezzo-soprano, typified by the composer’s most famous and difficult mezzo-soprano roles. In her signature roles as Azucena in Il Trovatore, Amneris in Aida, and Eboli in Don Carlo, Dolora has appeared on the world’s greatest stages, including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Vienna Staatsoper, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Berlin Staatsoper, . . . Opéra National de Paris, among numerous others, as well as at the Salzburg and Orange Festivals, and the mammoth Arena di Verona. (Conroy Consults, 2012).

The author was given the opportunity to interview Dolora Zajick concerning her opinions regarding vocal health and repertoire. Ms. Zajick discusses how singers must choose repertoire that is right for them, roles that are not too heavy or too light, the importance of technique versus artistry, and assigning art song for young singers as well as the definition of and how to identify the true Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Ms. Zajick also has some important advice for Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos who choose to audition with the well-known aria “Stride la vampa!” from Verdi’s Il Trovatore.

What do you believe about vocal health as it relates to repertoire?

Well, I think the important thing is to sing what is right for you. Young singers get into trouble because just because they like the piece rather than what is right for them or what makes them look good . . . it’s like wearing clothes . . .
sometimes people like things that don’t necessarily look the best on them . . . but you have to have repertoire that suits your voice at your level of development if you really want to sound your best.

**What has been your easiest role to sing, and what has been your hardest and why?**

You know . . . there is no such thing as an easy role, and the hardest are usually the ones that you are pushing to the limits of what is proper for you . . . that is what it usually ends up being.

Ms. Zajick emphasized that this does not mean that singers should not push themselves to grow, as this is a separate issue. Singing roles that have tessituras that are too high or too low can be problematic in terms of vocal health. The same is true of singing roles that are too heavy or too light.

**In what way does it affect a dramatic mezzo if a role is too light?**

Well, you can’t really sing it . . . the conductor is always trying to shut you up, but you know, it’s a little bit different for very young singers because often teachers put the cart before the horse and try to get them to be artistic before they have the technical means to do so. Even if the artistic idea is right, you end up with a lot of polished nothing . . . so you have to have the substance to polish in the first place, so when I work with very young singers we don’t work with *fortissimos* and *pianissimos*, we just work with getting the voice rolling… just a little bit of tendency towards *pianissimo* . . . a little bit of tendency towards *fortissimo*. . . .

For example, I’ll tell a young singer who is artistically precocious, that when they have the technique, they need a *mezza voce* here but not now because they aren’t technically ready to do it at the moment, it would be more effective if you just
sing the note normally without dynamics, and a couple years from now you are
going to be doing it as a pianissimo or whatever is necessary so, with a big voice
you want to get it rolling in the beginning. Another thing that there are a lot of
misperceptions about is most real Verdi mezzos . . . First of all, a Verdi mezzo is
almost but not quite a soprano. It’s a mezzo on the upper end . . . not like the
ladies who sing “Dalila” or “Principessa” – they aren’t contraltos. They are
mezzos towards the lower end of range. Many dramatic mezzos are going to have
a top. A good thing for young dramatic mezzos is Mozart, but don’t shut the
voice down. It is an exercise that teaches a person to sing something down the
road. The aria that taught me how to use my passaggio was Cherubino, but I
didn’t sing it with a Mozart voice.

When is it the right time to start assigning Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano roles such
as “Azucena” from Il Trovatore or “Erda” from Das Rheingold?

Ms. Zajick said that she learned the role of “Azucena” when she was 24. If the
voice and technique are right, then the singer is ready to perform this role. Ms. Zajick
held that, 100 years ago, singers performed the role of “Azucena” as young as 20 or 22,
but that was in a time when the opera houses were smaller and the orchestra was not as
loud.

Concerning art song, what composers and songs do you assign your students?

Ms. Zajick explains that the assignments vary, depending on the abilities of the
student. Handel is a composer that is good for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Ms.
Zajick then further addressed the misconceptions people seem to have concerning the
development of a dramatic voice. She cautioned that, while many people feel that the
dramatic voice truly develops later, it does not always work that way. It is a mistake and excuse used by those who do not wish to tell students that they are not dramatic singers. She explained that at the Institute, they have singers who are dramatic from ages as young as 16. Ms. Zajick went on to explain when a student should be identified as having a dramatic voice. Ms. Zajick states that:

I think it’s a mistake to tell a student in 10 years they will be fine for dramatic repertoire. It’s often done as an excuse because they don’t want to say to the student that they’re not a Verdi singer. It shows up early. By the time a girl is about 17 and a guy is about 19 or 20, you know, as you can tell by our youngest people here. Then you hear the more evolved ones that know how to use it, that large voice, like the difference between an adolescent voice and a voice of one of our older students . . . their voices are actually similar in size, but one has an adolescent sound.

**How do you recognize a true dramatic mezzo voice? Is there anything in terms of the size, timbre, color, ability?**

A Verdi mezzo or Verdi baritone is defined as the voice, as the one, among Verdi roles that can only be sung with a certain large voice, a certain range, and a certain tessitura. So, a dramatic mezzo would fit into that. You have to have the volume to ride the brass and thickness in the orchestra. The singer has to be able to ride the crest of that sound . . . with a sizeable voice. It’s true of the other voices, but it’s especially true for baritones and mezzos that you have to have a top that a lot of mezzo roles don’t have . . . and that’s why I say it’s almost a soprano but not quite, because you do have to have that top for the big moments
in addition to low chest notes . . . and then the big high notes. If you don’t have both of those, it’s difficult to do it stylistically correctly. So, you have to have a real technical grasp of your voice to be able to shift in and out of chest and head when necessary. You have to be able to do real dynamic contrast; it’s not like Wagner where everything is flowing. It’s almost a combination of different styles because Verdi uses contrast a lot something almost spoken and then something very lyrical and then he patches it together in dramatic way. So, it requires an unusual level of vocal technique and style to be able to handle.

As Ms. Zajick spoke about arias to sing for auditions, specifically “Stride la vampa!” from *Il Trovatore* (Verdi), she remarked that she hears many Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos audition with this aria, and that this choice is a mistake. She advises Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos that they are much better off singing the “Condotta el erra in ceppi” from *Il Trovatore* because it is easier to sing and much more impressive. She mentions that:

Unless they have a trill, but even people with trills . . . if you listen to the great mezzos, if you listen to Simionato and Barbieri, they didn’t even trill in this aria because it was so hard. Very few people trill there, but it’s always good to know that that’s there, and then when conductors look at it, they’ll see that you’re not doing the trill when you audition for it and they’ll go “oh . . . but there’s no trill . This is important audition advice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, as “Stride la vampa!” is a common audition choice.

Dolora Zajick provides insight to the daily vocal reality for dramatic voices and how they should be trained. As a Mezzo-Soprano herself, she has practical advice
concerning repertoire and audition choices for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Ms. Zajick’s technical approach to teaching gives students a sound foundation to build their voices on.

**The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices**

Founded in 2006 by Dolora Zajick, The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices is a training program for big voices. The program has four levels: Discovery, which is for high school students, ages 15-17; Intermediate, for young singers ages 18-23; Advanced, ages 24-33; and Young Professional, ages 27-36. This training program is held annually during the summer in Orem, Utah. Students are given private voice lessons, coaching, master classes, diction classes, as well as opportunities to perform in opera scenes, recitals, and concerts given by the Institute.

This comprehensive training program focuses on the whole person as a singer. In addition to what is listed above, the students are also given the opportunity to attend a lecture given by a New York agent concerning the importance of up-to-date materials, personal marketing, professional behavior, and general advice. Healthy meals are provided each day for both faculty and staff at the Institute. The talented and dedicated faculty and staff members of the Institute provide a positive, nurturing, and caring environment for the students.

The Institute places an emphasis on understanding and applying principles of correct vocal technique. Each day, all the students in the program meet for a warm-up class given by Dolora Zajick. The students begin by singing warm-ups together, followed by the men standing and singing and then the women, or vice-versa. When each group stands, they focus on one vocal exercise and principal of technique, such as breathing or
resonance. They sing the chosen exercise together, and then each group member is called on to sing it alone for the class. Ms. Zajick does not move on to the next person in the group until the person who has been asked to demonstrate the given vocal exercise does so correctly. The singers are encouraged to also practice on their own each day; however, those in the Discovery program are not allowed to practice more than 30 minutes a day, and the practicing must be supervised. This measure is taken to help ensure that students at this level are applying vocal technique correctly and not singing too much during any given day.

The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices is the ideal training program for students who have larger voices. Here, they can find acceptance while gaining invaluable information from some of the best teachers in the field while growing voices in a way that promotes vocal health by applying correct principles of vocal technique. While no Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos attended the Institute during the summer of 2012, Ms. Zajick said that they are hoping to have three Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos attending the program next summer. Ms. Zajick stated that the rare voice types such as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and Dramatic Baritone are voice types that the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices is actively looking for to recruit to be a part of their program.

**Chapter Summary**

Mignon Dunn is an experienced singer and teacher who offers excellent advice to the students that she teaches. Ms. Dunn suggests that a student proceed through the repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as she is vocally ready to do so. As an alternative to Mozart, Ms. Dunn suggests arias by composers such as Rossini, Gluck, and Handel. She cautions young singers to learn music carefully and correctly while
acknowledging the individuality of each student and that there is not a general rule for everyone.

Ms. Dunn believes that singing art song can teach students a great deal, especially artistry and understanding the text. She believes that a student should start singing art song by studying Schumann, and then move on to other composers such as Wolf. When initially learning a new opera aria, Ms. Dunn cautions students to sing the aria comfortably and breathe more often, and then to eliminate extra breaths as the student is able. Ms. Dunn has a well-founded approach to singing and vocal technique, as a result of her extensive experience as an opera singer, that students have and continue to benefit from today.

Dolora Zajick works especially with young dramatic voices. She also acknowledges the individuality of the student and believes that each singer needs to sing repertoire that is appropriate for his or her own level of ability. Ms. Zajick believes that dramatic voices can be identified in students as young as the age of 16, and that it is a mistake and excuse to tell a student that he or she will be a dramatic singer at some point because a voice is either dramatic or it is not. Ms. Zajick believes that singing arias that are more demanding is more a matter of the student learning how to use his or her voice correctly through the use of proper vocal technique. Artistry is important, but it is more important still to get the voice rolling to the point that the voice itself is one column of sound. After that is achieved, the student can then work on being artistic while singing. Ms. Zajick explains that singers can sing the works of Mozart, but that they must use their own voices to do so, and that singing works that are too light can be problematic if the singer chooses to not use his or her own full sound.
Ms. Zajick defines the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as a Verdi mezzo who has the size and ability to ride the crest of the Verdi orchestra. She believes that a Verdi mezzo must have unusually high levels of vocal technique and artistry to sing the works of Verdi in a way that is stylistically correct.

Though “Stride la vampa!” from *Il Trovatore* (Verdi) may be common audition choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, those singers who would audition with this aria are better off singing “Condotta el erra in ceppi” also from the opera mentioned above because this aria is just as impressive and does not have the amount of trilling that “Stride la vampa!” has. Ms. Zajick has made and continues to make significant contributions in training young dramatic voices as a performer, teacher of voice, and founder of the Institute for Young Dramatic Voices.

The Institute for Young Dramatic voices was founded in 2006 and is a summer training program especially for those young singers who have larger voices. The program has four different levels. These levels range from beginning to professional and allow singers with large voices to be identified, develop, and mature into vocal artists. Student participants of this program are offered a well-rounded program of voice lessons with an emphasis on correct vocal technique, vocal coaching, diction, career advice, and performance opportunities including student recitals and opera scenes productions. The Institute for Young Dramatic Voices is actively seeking Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos as well as Dramatic Baritones to attend their program in the coming seasons.

Opinions concerning the development and training of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano are as individual as the students themselves. Ms. Dunn stated that dramatic voices cannot be identified right away, while Ms. Zajick said that dramatic voices can be
identified from a very young age. Perhaps this reflects a difference in perspective between pedagogues and performers: Most vocal pedagogues advocate giving larger voice types time to develop in order to avoid excessive vocal strain and abuse, while performers may tend to operate on the premise that vocal maturity is not a matter of chronological age but of personal ability.

While varying opinions abound in both fields of vocal pedagogy and performance, points of agreement do exist. These include that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should not sing repertoire that she is not vocally ready for, and that vocal technique is an important part of vocal development. However, even in these points of agreement, variations exist. Some teachers of singing may feel that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos in their studios are ready to sing repertoire that others may feel the student is not ready for. It is rare that one teacher of singing will completely agree with another. It is also true that there may be some teachers of singing who are at a loss as to what repertoire to assign the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. As a result, they rely on operatic arias that are commonly found in the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire and assign these arias to the beginning Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, unaware of the potential vocal damage they may be inflicting on the unsuspecting student. Clearly, a curriculum guide focused on appropriate repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano would be a valuable addition to the profession.
CHAPTER 5

VOCAL HEALTH AND REPERTOIRE
FOR THE DRAMATIC MEZZO-SOPRANO:
A SUGGESTED COURSE OF STUDY

Preface

Richard Boldrey (1994) describes the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as follows:

She is the mother, the witch, the whore, the dowager, sometimes even the queen. She is a favorite voice of Verdi and Wagner, as well as the composers of Eastern Europe and Russia. She also appears in most twentieth-century operas written in America and Europe. (p. 26)

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a complex voice, one of many colors and personalities. These qualities can easily lead to misconceptions concerning appropriate repertoire as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano develops vocally; the singing of opera arias too early in the process of vocal development is one example. Instead, a focus on art song is important during the early stages of study. Because the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice is one of considerable size and power, some teachers of singing may believe that art song is too limiting for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. This power is indeed both entrancing and exciting to listen to and work with, whether in the private voice studio or in performance. As such, there may be a natural tendency for teachers of singing as well as students themselves to want to work at full strength as often as possible. This desire can
lead many well-intended teachers to assign the larger works before the student is vocally prepared. An understanding of appropriate repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano with an emphasis on proper vocal development is critical as she begins to grow towards maturity. Clearly, a curriculum guide is needed to assist voice teachers who do not fully understand appropriate repertoire for or the vocal pedagogy behind the training of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. A curriculum guide may help to ameliorate potential damage to developing singers by providing teachers with a much-needed resource for working with the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano that emphasizes vocal health.

The purpose of this guide is to explore repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and provide a suggested course of study that helps to ensure continued vocal health. This guide includes several genres: art songs, opera arias, oratorio arias, and concert works. No resources currently exist that combine an emphasis on vocal health with repertoire curricula solely for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. This curriculum guide seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

**Explanation of Terms**

The terms listed below are defined as they are used in this suggested course of study:

1. **Scientific Pitch Notation**: This system, developed by The Acoustical Society of America in 1939 (Young, 1939) and used by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), is used to identify vocal ranges. Scientific Pitch Notation identifies specific pitches by assigning numbers to octaves: C0 is the lowest octave, C4 is the middle octave, C5 is one octave above middle C, and so on (see below). The octave number designations change at each C and remain the same continuing up through the next higher B.
2. **Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP)**: Principle of music education stating that teachers should teach with the intent of having the student learn a principle of musicianship through the student performing an assigned piece (Pontius, 2012).

3. **Vocal abuse**: Singing with excessive tension in the tongue and larynx, singing with inadequate abdominal support, and/or employing excessive volume (Sataloff, 1988).

4. **Vocal Fold Nodules (VFN)**: Callous-like masses on the vocal folds caused by vocally abusive behaviors (Sataloff, 1988).

**Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano Defined**

The German word *Fach* means “specialty or category” (McGinnis, 2010, p. 2). As applied to opera, the *Fach* system represents a series of different vocal classifications. The general classifications for men, within the system, include Tenor, Baritone, and Bass. The general classifications for women include Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Contralto. Each of these six general classifications has sub-classifications. For example, the sub-classifications under Mezzo-Soprano include Light Lyric Mezzo-Soprano, Lyric Mezzo-Soprano, and Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano (Boldrey, 1994).
The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is a large voice that has a range of G3-Bb5 with a rich, dark timbre (Boldrey, 1994). Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano roles are common in the operas of Verdi and Wagner: “Amneris” in *Aida* (Verdi), “Azucena” in *Il Trovatore* (Verdi), “Eboli” in *Don Carlos* (Verdi), and “Erda” in *Das Rheingold* (Wagner). The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is “the voice among Verdi roles that can only be sung with a large voice, a certain range, and a certain tessitura” (D. Zajick, personal communication, June 28, 2012).

**McKinney’s Principles of Good Vocal Health**

Vocal health is important when considering repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Producing a sound that is vocally healthy will help to ensure proper vocal growth and longevity. James McKinney (1994, p. 77) provides eight principles for a good sound that promote vocal health:

1. **Freely produced**- not constricted, forced or strained

2. **Pleasant to listen to**- the sound is not strident or rasping

3. **Loud enough to be heard easily**- not too loud, resembling shouting or yelling

4. **Rich, ringing and resonant**- not hoarse

5. **Energy flows smoothly from note to note**- the sound is not breathy

6. **Consistently produced**- not weak, colorless, or devitalized

7. **Vibrant, dynamic, and alive**- the sound is not inconsistently produced

8. **Flexibly expressive**- the sound is not shaky or wobbly

Singing with correct vocal technique is not only helpful to producing good vocal sound, but can also help to avoid future vocal problems.
Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance

Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance is used as it applies in the private voice studio. In this manner one specific principle of performance, such as communicating the text of a song, or one specific principle of musicianship, such as interval accuracy, is included in each song and aria entry.

Difficulty Levels

Three levels of difficulty have also been considered: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

Beginning – The beginning art song selections for this curriculum guide are common to beginning singers in all major voice types, including Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, and Bass. It should be remembered that more often than not, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice matures later in vocal development, and cannot always be identified right away. As such, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is encouraged to study standard beginning vocal literature that promotes the development of correct vocal technique; as this voice type progresses to intermediate and advanced abilities, repertoire that is more dramatic and demanding can be undertaken and performed. Beginning selections typically have a vocal range of no more than a tenth, have non-syncopated rhythms, and usually have melodic intervals of no more than a fifth. These art songs have short and repetitive texts; the singers are expected to find a basic translation of the selections in their first language and demonstrate an understanding of the difference between poetic and literal translations while learning these pieces. The phrases of these selections are shorter than those in the intermediate or advanced selections, to reflect a basic understanding of breathing that is foundational to healthy singing.
**Intermediate** – The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will begin to study songs that are more technically demanding and dramatic than seen in previous selections of this curriculum guide. These selections have ranges greater than that of the beginning selections, sometimes as much as a twelfth. Syncopated rhythms are included, as well as more difficult harmonic settings. The ability to sing the melody without the accompaniment is expected of those students who perform these selections. The texts are also longer and not as repetitive, regardless of the language in which the song is written. Singers are expected to use literal translations as needed when working with a song or aria. The phrases tend to be longer than those of the beginning selections, but not as long as those in the advanced selections.

**Advanced** – These selections include not only art songs, but also arias, oratorios, and concert works. Art songs at this level of study are the most specific to the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. These advanced art songs are intended to directly prepare the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing the opera and oratorio arias included in the repertoire for this rare voice type. These selections challenge the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use the full extent of her range. The ability to sing the melody of the selection regardless of the accompaniment style is assumed for singers who are at this level of study. The rhythms are more difficult and the phrasing demanding. An advanced understanding of vocal technique is needed to sing the selections in this category. Concerning opera and oratorio arias included at this level of study, the student must be able to clearly identify the character who is singing the aria, the setting where the selected work occurs in the opera or oratorio, as well as the synopsis of the work and how the selected aria affects the
plot overall. Proper understanding of these aspects is essential for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to be successful when performing these selections.

**Song and Aria Entries**

Three templates were used to create the Song and Aria Entries in the curriculum guide. Each template was designed to present an art song or aria in an effective way by giving the needed information clearly and concisely. It is important that the teacher and student both are familiar with the selected song or aria and understand how the selected work will help the student grow in the areas of performance, technique, and musicianship. Each entry includes the title of the song or aria being discussed, the name of the composer, the vocal range of the selected work, the difficulty level, one principle of vocal health and good singing as stated by James McKinney (a McKinney Principle), as well as a CMP Focus followed by a commentary concerning each art song or aria.

Here is the template format used to create this curriculum guide:

- **Title:**
- **Composer:**
- **Range:**
- **Difficulty Level:**
- **McKinney Principle:**
- **CMP Focus:**
- **Commentary:**

This template is used for all Beginning and Intermediate Art Song selections in this curriculum guide. The template is altered in the Advanced Art Song and Opera and Oratorio Arias sections of this study. At this level, the student should have an advanced
understanding of vocal technique, and therefore should be able to apply each McKinney Principle interchangeably. Due to this expectation, the Advanced Art Song template has been modified to include a focus on two McKinney Principles per selection instead of one. In the Oratorio and Opera Aria section of this curriculum guide, the template is altered once more, replacing the McKinney principle with the identification of one or more Preparatory Art Songs. The art songs listed on this line of the template are meant to specify select art songs in the curriculum guide that serve to prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for the more advanced repertoire.

**Concert Works**

Due to the amount of advanced vocal technique, musicianship, and artistry needed to perform concert works, the template format is not used in this section of the curriculum guide. Rather, the author provides a general commentary for each selected concert work, focusing on the more difficult aspects and specific challenges of each piece discussed.

**Structure for the Curriculum Guide**

This guide includes a total of 79 selections. Languages for the songs and arias chosen include Italian, English, German, and French, as these are the languages in which art songs and arias are most often performed. The Art Song section contains a total of 60 selections divided into beginning, intermediate, and advanced categories. Each category includes 20 songs, five each in the four languages selected for this curriculum guide. The structure of the Opera Arias section is the same as that of Art Song section, but with fewer selections. There are a total of 12 selections in the Opera Arias section, with three selections in each language. The Oratorio Arias section of this guide varies slightly in that it includes three selections: one each in Latin, German, and English. The last section,
Concert Works, includes four selections; one of these is a song cycle. The languages included in this section are German, French, and English.
BEGINNING ART SONGS

It is important that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano be given the technique and time needed to develop her voice. The need to understand how to breathe and move air correctly, develop principles of musicianship including aural skills, learn the melodies of the songs correctly, sing intervals accurately, and perform rhythms correctly are all important aspects of vocal development and musicianship. It should be remembered that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano at the beginning level will typically need to develop the skills mentioned above, just as other voice types will. As such, the following twenty beginning art song selections may be seen as common to all voice types and are suitable for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.

The individual song or aria entry for each selection includes the Title, Composer, Range, Difficulty Level, McKinney Principle, CMP Focus, and Commentary. This format provides the teacher or student using this suggested course of study with an overview of the selected piece and an idea of how the selected art song may help the student grow vocally as well as in the area of performance. The McKinney Principle and the CMP Focus allow for the student to focus on one major principle of technique while also concentrating on one major principle of performance as she is learning how to sing. This is meant to help ensure that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is growing simultaneously in the areas of vocal technique, musicianship, and performance.

Languages included in each level of study are Italian, English, German, and French. It is recommended that the student begin with the Italian selections, as these selections allow for singing vocal lines on the vowel, which is helpful for learning correct breath support. The Italian selections should be followed by the English art songs to continue to build
upon as well as reinforce what is being learned in the Italian selections in terms of technique. The German and French selections should come last, as these two languages may be more difficult for some students due to the introduction of mixed vowels. As this is a suggested course of study, the teacher may determine the final sequence of the songs based on the technical and musical needs of each student.
Title: “Dolente immagine di Fille mia”
Composer: Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)
Range: B3-D5
Difficulty Level: Beginning
McKinney Principle: Freely produced
CMP Focus: Musicality

Commentary: When singing “Dolente immagine di Fille mia” one must create a sound that is freely produced. The tessitura of this song lies from B3 to B4, which is ideal for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. In this song, the singer will be given the opportunity to perform in a comfortable range utilizing only a portion of her sound. There is not a dynamic of forte called for in this piece. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should sing this at a reasonable mezzo-forte to help to create a sound that is freely produced (i.e., not forced or constricted in any way).

A challenge of this song is found in the repetitive text. For example, at the end of the song in mm. 32-40, the text “inestinguibile l’antico ardor,” (the old flame of love cannot be extinguished”) is sung three times in a row. This gives the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to work on developing musicality and to emphasize this part of the text by conveying it to the audience in a way that is expressive, in which the dynamic levels vary with each repetition.
Title: “Lasciatemi, morire!”

Composer: Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Range: D4-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Pitch and interval accuracy

Commentary: It is best when working with beginning singers to assign repertoire that is within a reasonable singing range, no more than an octave. “Lasciatemi, morire!” has a range of D4 to D5. The melody of this song will expose the singer to both chromatic, as in mm. 2-3, and diatonic step-wise motion, as in mm. 9-10. Both are important to master for pitch and interval accuracy. “Lasciatemi, morire!” also allows for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to focus on the foundational principles of correct breathing.

The song allows the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing something that is dramatic without it being overwhelming, so that she can taste what it is to sing with dramatic interpretation and sound within reasonable limits. The song is not exceptionally demanding: for example, the singer is not called on to use a full sound at all times. Hence, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should be able to create a pleasant sound. More importantly, singing “Lasciatemi, morire!” will help the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano appreciate how to sing well without over-singing.
Title: “Le Violette”

Composer: Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Range: C4-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Performing with energy

Commentary: “Le Violette” is a bright and energetic song that has a reasonable singing range of a ninth. It is a light song with an Allegretto tempo marking at the beginning of the introduction. The tempo sets the mood of the song and affords the singer an opportunity to create a sound that is vibrant, dynamic, and alive. This helps the singer to effectively communicate the text. Given the lightness of the vocal accompaniment and shorter phrasing, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be careful to not push the sound out. In addition, she must be careful not to sing too loudly, as this would work against the mood that is created by this playful art song. It is perhaps best to perform this song with a dynamic range of mezzo-piano to no louder than mezzo-forte. Keeping the sound light and maintaining the allegretto tempo throughout will give the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to sing consistently at dynamic levels that are not frequently sung by this voice type, while continuing to help the voice develop in a vocally healthy way through the increased use of flexibility.

“Le Violette” must be performed with energy. This is accomplished by understanding and connecting to the text from the very beginning; the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should use the introduction to set the tone for the rest of the song. The text conveys how beautiful violets, though half-hidden, rebuke the too ambitious desires
of the one viewing them. Both the desire and the ambition create energy. To perform this
song without physical and emotional energy can cause the story of the violets to be
missed. Therefore, it is essential that the singer perform this piece with vocal energy
behind each phrase. Also, the singer must maintain the tempo while showing the meaning
of the text through gestures and facial expressions.
Title: “O cessate di piagarmi”
Compositor: Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)
Range: D#4-D5
Difficulty Level: Beginning
McKinney Principle: Energy flows smoothly from note to note
CMP Focus: Singing melismas
Commentary: “O cessate di piagarmi” is a strong choice for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano because, while the mode of the song is minor and the mood dramatic, it allows for creating a sound that is full, but not too demanding on the voice. This selection has many similarities to “Lasciatemi morire!” in that they are both excellent for giving young singers an appreciation for what it means to sing dramatically while also helping singers to grow musically by providing interesting interval challenges. An example of this in “O cessate di piagarmi” is found in m.7 when the vocal line descends from B4 to D#4, which is a minor 6th. To sing this successfully, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must employ what was learned in previous selections concerning pitch and interval accuracy. The tone should not be breathy; a breathy tone is indicative of a generally unsupported sound. To correct this, the young singer should remember to fully support the sound by breathing and employing the abdominal muscles correctly. This will help to create a sound in which energy flows smoothly from note to note, which will in turn keep the sound moving well from phrase to phrase.

Because this selection is from the Baroque era, style dictates that the repeated section should be ornamented; melismas are commonly used for this. The Glen Paton edition of the 26 Italian Songs and Arias (Medium Low) has some wonderful
recommended melismas written in for the repeat. Using melismas while singing is not often asked of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, but it is important for overall vocal health for maintaining as well as increasing flexibility and for adding stylistically to the performance of this piece.
Title: “Sebben crudele”

Composer: Antonio Caldara (1670-1736)

Range: C4-C5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Feeling strong beats

Commentary: “Sebben crudele” is a good choice for helping to create a sound that is loud enough to be heard easily while helping the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to feel the strong beat in a phrase without over-emphasizing it. The melody of this selection has a range of an octave—certainly comfortable for beginning singers. If the sound becomes too loud, it can become forced and lose part of the natural beauty of the tone that would otherwise be created. One must sing with enough confidence to be heard, but not so much as to resemble yelling which is altogether inappropriate. The triple meter of “Sebben crudele” establishes a strong downbeat in each measure. The challenge for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will be to sing on the strong beat without accenting it, so that it does not interrupt the legato line. This can be accomplished by the use of a crescendo on strong beats periodically throughout the piece. Singing crescendos on the strong beats will help the singer initially in understanding where the strong beats are and will further help develop her skills in counting through the performance.
Title: “At the River”

Composer: Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Range: Eb4-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing, and resonant sound

CMP Focus: Singing through transition points

Commentary: This arrangement of the hymn “At the River” comes from Copland’s Old American Songs. The beginning tempo marking of the arrangement is “with dignity” portraying the drama contained within. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should sing this piece with a well-focused sound within the head register. Using the head register will allow the sound to be rich, ringing, and resonant while guarding against vocal strain and hoarseness. The singer should not have to push to get the sound out. If the singer has to push the sound out, there is increased risk of vocal problems.

“At the River” has a beautiful melody and contains some immediate challenges for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Though the overall range is only one octave, the octave includes an important transition point for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice type. Transition points refer to “breaks or lifts” in the voice (McKinney, 1994). One can witness a transition point in m. 12 beginning on C5 and going through Eb5 at a dynamic marking of pianissimo. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should learn to sing through the transition points. The singer should be conscious of these points to ensure that the voice moves naturally through the registers without creating vocal strain. The transition point of Eb occurs in both the middle (mm. 18-20) and upper registers of the voice for the Mezzo-Soprano. “At the River” moves over Eb on multiple occasions
and accordingly affords the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, who has a transition point on Eb, opportunities to master this transition point as well as opportunities to create a legato line. Both skills contribute to sustained vocal health and improved performance.
Title: “Drink To Me Only”

Composer: Colonel R. Mellish (1777-1817)

Range: Db4-Db5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Being musically expressive

Commentary: “Drink To Me Only” is a relatively simple art song with a lovely melody. It stays within Db4-Ab4 for most of the piece, with an occasional jump to Db5. Most phrases begin pianissimo and then expressively crescendo to a peak, as seen in m. 9. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should utilize this song to learn how to sing at a dynamic level that is loud enough to be heard easily without creating a sound that resembles shouting or yelling (McKinney, 1994). To use a louder sound would go against the artistic mood created by this song, working against what the text is trying to convey. It is necessary to apply principles of correct breathing and to sing at a balanced dynamic level to perform this selection in a manner that is vocally healthy and loud enough to be heard.

Being musically expressive is an essential skill for any musician and is of great value when performing this song. Without musical phrasing, this selection could be extremely boring for the performer as well as the audience, which would be a disservice to the melody. The phrasing in the piece provides room for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to interpret and/or shape the piece – inserting crescendos and decrescendos as appropriate. The ability to sing expressively will become increasingly important as the student progresses through this curriculum.
Title: “Long Time Ago”

Composer: Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Range: F4-F5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Consistently produced

CMP Focus: Singing octave leaps

Commentary: “Long Time Ago” is a relaxed and slow English art song in strophic form. The song requires dynamics ranging from pianissimo at the beginning in m. 5 to no louder than a mezzo-forte as seen in m. 38. The song has a gentle accompaniment, which leaves the vocal line exposed. As a result, inconsistencies in vocal production may be easily identified. Accordingly, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must control her breathing with a full understanding of the musical phrasing involved. She should remember that singing at softer dynamic levels requires just as much support as singing at louder ones. “Long Time Ago” gives the singer an opportunity to practice singing softly, building upon skills addressed in Quilter’s “Weep You No More.”

The CMP focus of this song is singing octave leaps. Maintaining a sound that is consistently produced is imperative when performing octave leaps, like that found between F4 and F5 as first seen in m.11 on the word “brighter.” This word is most easily sung on F5 using an “Ah” vowel. However, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should avoid over-emphasizing the top note. Greater emphasis should be placed on the lower note (F4) as a gradual preparation into F5. There will be a switch in registers, from the middle head register to the higher head register, while singing this part of the phrase; this change in registers is fundamental to the consistent production of sound and to vocal
health. The selection is a strong choice for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano seeking to practice octave leaps and explore the lower and upper registers of the voice.
Title: “The Daisies”

Composer: Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Range: A3-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Articulation of final consonants

Commentary: “The Daisies” is a short art song telling the story of one who goes to meet the one she loves and they walk together through a field of daises. The vocal line moves quickly with occasional staccato articulations as seen in mm. 13-14. However, it is important that the energy of the sound flows smoothly from note to note. Singing staccato passages with a supported tone that is not breathy can be challenging, especially for the novice Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Each note in the phrase should receive the same level of support and movement of air so as to keep the sound moving forward and the tempo consistent. Failure to move air evenly will increase the chances of producing an undesirably breathy tone. “The Daisies” has a relatively simple melody that is easy to learn. This simplicity provides an opportunity for the singer to focus on breathing correctly and moving air evenly over the course of each phrase.

Due to the quick tempo of this piece, it can be a challenge to articulate all needed consonants. A good example of multiple consonants is found in mm. 9-10 on the text, “We did not laugh, and we did not speak.” Have students practice speaking the text before singing it, being careful to articulate all of the consonants. Placing the sound forward will help to articulate the final consonants of “did” and “speak.” Speaking the
text in rhythm and at the proper tempo will facilitate proper enunciation when singing.

By performing this song, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will develop vocally with an emphasis upon articulation.
Title: “Weep You No More”

Composer: Roger Quilter (1877-1953)

Range: B3-D#5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Singing softly

Commentary: The tessitura of the song is from B3-B4, which is characteristically ideal for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The melody is relatively simple and somewhat repetitive. As the overall mood of the piece is gentle and sweet, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should focus upon creating a sound that is loud enough to be heard easily, but also mindful to support and move air so that intonation does not suffer as a result of being strident from the loss of natural vibrato. The warm timbre of the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will automatically reflect the warmth that is created by the accompaniment and the text. This song also provides an opportunity to continue to develop expressiveness and phrasing due to the varying dynamics throughout the piece.

One of the interesting challenges found within this song is the double pianissimo in m.22. This marking is reflective of the text in this measure, “Sleep is a reconciling,” and it is therefore imperative that the singer observe this dynamic marking. A double pianissimo as seen in m.22 is rare for the dramatic singer. It should be remembered that singing at this dynamic level requires as much breath support on the part of the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as singing at a fortissimo.

Proper breath support is imperative to musicality, expressiveness and to vocal health. A singer may be tempted to use less breath support when singing softly. This
approach is incorrect. To use less breath and/or abdominal support can lead to undue tension on the vocal folds. It can also lead to pitch inaccuracies and a breathy tone. For these reasons, “Weep you no more” is both challenging and achievable; it can help the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano develop vocally with proper attention to vocal health and musicality.
**Title:** “An die Musik”

**Composer:** Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

**Range:** A3-D5

**Difficulty Level:** Beginning

**McKinney Principle:** Energy flows smoothly from note to note

**CMP Focus:** Singing in German

**Commentary:** “An die Musik” is one of the more common songs found in German art song collections. It is a strophic song with a relatively simple melody. The challenge of this piece is found in the text, as there may be quite a bit more German for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to learn than what she has done previously. Singing in German is different than singing in Italian; Italian allows the young singer to sing on simple vowels while the German language is more guttural and has harder consonants than Italian, as well as the addition of mixed vowels. Accordingly, this selection provides a great opportunity for the singer to improve her German diction.

It is important for a young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to avoid a breathy sound. A sound that has too much air around it will not carry well; this indicates an unsupported and vocally unhealthy sound. The opposite of a breathy sound is an energetic sound that flows smoothly from note to note; this is the desired sound for “An die Musik.”

The voice-leading of the song takes the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano through a transition point in m. 13. Transition points refer to “breaks or lifts” in the voice (McKinney, 1994). Further, “An die Musik” includes some difficult intervals. One example is found in m. 18 where the line moves from Bb4 to D4, which is a minor 6th and can be difficult to sing correctly. Singing difficult intervals as well as singing through
transition points requires that the sound be fully supported with effective movement of air.

It is clear that the vocal line in this song provides an initial challenge before the singer moves on to working with the text, which is the primary challenge. “An die Musik” introduces a number of mixed vowels and other words the singer may not have been exposed to yet, such as “Kunst,” “für,” and “entrückt” among others. This means that the intervals must be thoroughly learned and understood by the singer before learning the text so that she is able to focus her energy on learning and singing German mixed vowels correctly.
Title: “Ich liebe dich”

Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Range: C4-Eb3

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Singing dotted rhythms with energy

Commentary: “Ich liebe dich” is a well-known German art song. It is relatively short in length and yet still provides unexpected challenges of technique and musicianship. To sing this selection effectively, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use proper breath support so that there is not undue laryngeal pressure. Hence, the singer must breathe deeply and intentionally for each phrase and avoid the temptation to sing without engaging support muscles. Putting excessive weight on the vocal folds will cause the sound to lose flexibility and instead become the opposite, which is shaky and wobbly (McKinney, 1994). A wobble occurs when there are a number of low oscillations per second combined with a wide fluctuation in pitch (Doscher, 1988). Causalities include age, muscle fatigue, or an overly weighty, dark production (Doscher, 1988). While a wobble can happen periodically, it needs to be closely watched and fixed when it does occur. A wobble in the voice may be indicative of a tremolo, which in turn can be vocally damaging, as it is the precursor to vocal fold nodules. To avoid vocal fold nodules and as a part of general vocal health, it is important to focus on creating a sound that is flexibly expressive.

The legato line often heard in “Ich liebe dich” is created through the energy being placed on each dotted eighth note so as not to interrupt fluidity in the line. Learning how
to sing dotted rhythms with energy through the use of proper breath support and movement of air while still allowing for a legato line will help the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano sing more advanced repertoire.
Title: “Seit ich ihn gesehen”

Composer: Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Range: Eb4 to Eb5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Singing pianissimo in the upper register

Commentary: “Seit ich ihn gesehen” is the first song in the cycle Frauenliebe und Leben by Robert Schumann. It is a song that is ideal for a young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano who needs to improve the skill of singing pianissimo in the upper head register of the voice. Given the light accompaniment of the piece, the sound should use a tone that is pleasant to listen to, not forced or strained. There is no reason to over-sing. The vocalist that over-sings “Seit ich ihn gesehen” will create a strident sound that is vocally unhealthy.

The text conveys the feelings of a woman who is blinded by the love she has for a man. In mm. 7-8, the high point of the phrase rests on Eb5. Eb5 is a transition point for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and must be handled with care. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should approach the Eb5 from the proceeding Bb4, accenting the Bb so that it is stronger than the Eb5. This will facilitate a needed change into the upper head register while keeping the same dynamic level ultimately creating a sound that is musically and dramatically effective.
Title: “Sonntag”

Composer: Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Range: Bb3-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing, and resonant sound

CMP Focus: Mixing the middle and lower registers of the voice

Commentary: “Sonntag” is a rich folksong set by Brahms. Set in strophic form, the tessitura of the piece is primarily from Bb3-G4. This gives the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the chance to further develop a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant, while learning to negotiate the middle to lower ranges of the voice. One example where a rich sound can be used is found in mm. 1-3 at the beginning of the song on the text “So hab ich doch die ganze Woche mein feines Leibchen nicht geseh’n” (So for the whole week, I haven’t seen my sweetheart). The song has no introduction so the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be ready to enter with the piano on Bb3. Because the vocal and piano lines begin the song together, the singer should be given the pitch before beginning to help ensure that initial pitch is accurately sung. The sound of the voice should be rich, but not over darkened; such a tone can be actualized by mixing the middle register with the chest register. This same approach can be applied in m. 3 on the word “Woche” which outlines an Eb major chord beginning on G4 going through Eb4 and ending on Bb3. Mixing the middle and lower registers of the voice will help place the sound correctly and prevent it from falling too far back in the throat, thus producing the rich, ringing, and resonant sound that is desired. When practicing this song, it is suggested that
it initially be sung on an [u] vowel. This will help to focus the sound and keep the sound even despite changes in register.

In performance, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should focus on conveying the text while applying techniques learned in practice. The more opportunities that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is given to apply these vocal techniques, the easier they will become to apply when performing. Through performance the singer will come to understand how to best mix the middle and lower registers of the voice through the practical application of correct vocal technique.
Title: “Wie melodien zieht es”

Composer: Johannes Brahms (1813-1897)

Range: Ab3 to Eb5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Aural skills

Commentary: The art song “Wie Melodien zieht es” has a range of Ab3-Eb5. Given that this is a modified strophic piece, the legato line throughout the song gives the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano many opportunities to work on producing an even tone quality that is loud enough to be heard. This is most easily accomplished when the phrasing is sung musically, providing for slight crescendos at the high points of phrases while keeping the sound within the same dynamic level.

Although dramatic voice types are large voices, it does not follow that their full potential, in terms of sound, should be utilized in every instance. This principle is particularly true for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano singing “Wie Melodien zieht es.” Within this piece the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should strive to sing creating a tone that is pleasant to listen to while avoiding creating sounds that would resemble shouting or yelling.

“Wie Melodien zieht es” is a modified strophic piece that is relatively easy to sight-read. The unconventional harmonies it contains within make this song a strong choice for developing aural skills. An example of this can be seen in the opening phrase in mm. 1-4; an F natural is introduced as the vocal line moves from A natural to F natural, and then to G natural. To sing intervals of a Major 3rd followed by a Major 2nd
correctly, the young singer must rely on her aural skills, fighting an understandable
tendency to inappropriately begin the phrase on F#.

Developing aural skills is as important to a singer as using correct technique and
being vocally healthy. Strong aural and sight-reading skills will help the singer when
learning an operatic role as well as in choral situations. The number of accidentals
included in “Wie melodien zieht es” provides the perfect opportunity for these skills to
develop.
Title: “Exaudet’s Minuet”

Composer: Jean Baptiste Weckerlin (1821-1910)

Range: D4-E5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Musical phrasing

Commentary: “Exaudet’s Minuet” is a charming French art song from Bergerettes. As implied in the title, this song has a dance-like setting. It is well set for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, and it is a strong choice for focusing on singing with energy that flows smoothly from note to note. The meter is 3/4. The singer should stay true to this meter while singing and not sing too slowly, which would work against the overall mood and intention of the piece. Maintaining the given tempo of a song up can be challenging whether you are in duple or triple meter. The song should be sung with proper support, even exhalation of air as well as energy and resonance to keep the sound spinning. Maintaining the tempo and singing with energy will increase the likelihood of a successful performance.

“Exaudet’s Minuet” includes passages with repeated notes, as seen in mm. 29-30, which provide an excellent opportunity to work on musical phrasing. Repeated notes should not be sung at a single dynamic level; rather, they should crescendo or decrescendo according to interpretation. To keep the same dynamic level on each repeated note may cause the line to stagnate and the tempo to become too slow in the same way that it will when breath is not supported and/or energy is low. Each phrase must take shape and have shades of color through the use of varied dynamic levels, such
as going from *mezzo-forte* to *forte* or *forte* to *pianissimo*, in order to keep the performance interesting. Paying attention to musical phrasing and singing with energy that flows smoothly from note to note will help create a successful performance that will be as enjoyable for the singer as it will be for the audience.
Title: “Ici-bas!”

Composer: Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Range: D4-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Singing French mixed vowels

Commentary: “Ici-bas!” is a light, yet somewhat dramatic song about loss and longing. The haunting melody offers the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the chance to produce a vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound while moving through the middle to upper head range of the voice. The drama of this song is more subtle compared to other selections in this course of study, but is still present. The sound must not be weak, colorless, or devitalized (McKinney, 1994). Each phrase must be sung with dramatic intent, using the proper movement of air to keep the energy and color of the voice intact while singing. Singing with a vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound will help to communicate the drama of “Ici-bas!” in an emotionally effective and vocally healthy way.

The immediate challenge of this piece rests within the performance of French mixed vowels. Consider words such as “demeurent” and “effleurent” (see mm. 8 and 12). Singing French mixed vowels can be difficult for the beginning singer. The [œ] vowel, for example, is formed by saying an open “e” while forming the lips to an open [ɔ]. One must remember to keep the sound forward while singing. The use of the [e] vowel will facilitate the correct position. As with most learned skills or competencies, the more one practices the easier it will become. “Ici-bas!” is a strong selection for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano seeking to master this difficult vowel.
Title: “Le Miroir”

Composer: Gustave Ferrari (1872-1948)

Range: C#4-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Freely produced

CMP Focus: Singing in French

Commentary: “Le Miroir” is a lesser-known but beautiful art song by Gustave Ferrari. A student must show basic competency in singing a legato line and have a basic understanding of proper breathing and support before she undertakes this piece. The tessitura of this piece lies very well for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The accompaniment provides the singer with enough support without playing the melody line with the singer throughout the piece. This song allows for the opportunity to work on creating a sound that is freely produced. A full forte sound is not required at any point; rather, there is a consistent dynamic marking of pianissimo throughout. “Le Miroir” provides a rare opportunity for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing at a pianissimo dynamic level for a prolonged period of time.

The challenge of this piece is found in the text. While the song is short in duration, the text is not repetitive and contains nasal as well as mixed vowels. Nasal vowels are specific to French and may be more difficult for some students of singing than for others. Due to the fact that this piece is for the beginning student of voice it is not as musically challenging as other songs in French might be. The vocal line also requires a great deal of legato singing, which will help reinforce proper support and movement of air. This selection is also relatively short, two pages in length, making the text shorter.
overall than other longer songs in French. These combined factors make “Le Miroir” a well-considered and strong choice for students learning to sing in French.
Title: “Madrigal”

Composer: Vincent d’Indy (1851-1931)

Range: C4-C5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Creating legato line by using clear enunciation of text

Commentary: “Madrigal” is a beautiful strophic French art song. The phrases are reasonable in length, and should be sung using a tone that is loud enough to be easily heard. The ability to sing at this dynamic level is something on which the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must continually work on so as to avoid pushing the sound and over-singing. Singing too loudly could lead to vocal problems stemming from unnecessary strain placed upon the vocal folds. Young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano singers should embrace opportunities to sing songs that do not demand a full sound. Learning to sing these songs with correct technique will broaden their range of repertoire and enable them to better manage their sustained vocal health and development.

Singing with legato line is an essential part of any French art song. While the vocal line of this piece lends itself easily to legato singing because of the close and easily sung intervals of the vocal line, there is also a good amount of text which can interfere with the line if the singer does not enunciate properly. In this case, the text will become muffled and difficult to understand. Proper enunciation of the text requires energy, and can be successfully accomplished by active mouth movement, with purposeful articulation of beginning and final consonants. It is important to maintain the legato line while doing so via the proper movement of air and energetic singing. Clear enunciation
will make for stronger communication with the audience, enhancing the overall performance of this piece.
Title: “Plaisir d’amour”

Composer: Johann-Paul Martini (1741-1816)

Range: A3-D5

Difficulty Level: Beginning

McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing, and resonant sound

CMP Focus: Singing with confidence

Commentary: “Plaisir d’amour” is a relatively simple French art song with a slow tempo—effective for continuing the development of a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant. The tessitura generally lies in the middle to lower registers, so the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should not attempt to further darken the sound in an attempt to achieve a rich tone quality. Over-darkening of the sound places the sound too far back and the tone becomes muffled, lacking resonance. A healthy sound is one that is resonant; a resonant sound is heard when the voice is correctly focused and produced in the correct vocal register for the repertoire. Because the melody of “Plaisir d’amour” is repeated several times throughout the song, the singer has an opportunity to practice singing in the middle and lower registers without allowing the sound to fall back in the throat. Producing a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant is crucial to the overall development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice type and should be consistently pursued throughout vocal training.

The CMP focus of “Plaisir d’amour” is singing with confidence. Confidence in performance comes through knowledge of the piece and knowledge of one’s ability to execute the piece. The repetition within “Plaisir d’amour” facilitates both because there is less material to communicate and more time to refine one’s mastery of the song. It is
normal to be nervous in performance, but it is important to channel those nerves in a way that is positive and beneficial for the singer. The beautiful melody and tessitura of this piece makes “Plasir d’amour” a strong choice for helping the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to learn to sing with confidence.
INTERMEDIATE ART SONGS

This curriculum guide is based on the premise of continued growth, development, and improvement of the student. The intermediate selections for this suggested course of study have greater ranges, syncopated rhythms, and more difficult harmonic settings than those seen in the beginning selections. The ability to sing melody lines without the vocal line being doubled in the accompaniment is assumed of students at this level of study. Breathing correctly and movement of air are still emphasized as important aspects of vocal technique. Increasing overall musicianship and a greater emphasis on expressive performing are also primary goals of the intermediate level.
Title: “Ah, mai non cessate”

Composer: Stefano Donaudy (1879-1925)

Range: Bb3-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Changing vocal registers

Commentary: “Ah, mai non cessate” is a short song with a quick tempo that is excellent for developing a sound that is flexibly expressive. Many art songs and arias in the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire contain a great deal of legato line. However, flexibility in the voice is an important aspect of vocal health. A sound that is not agile can deteriorate, causing the sound to become erratic; a wide vibrato may develop when too much weight is placed on the vocal folds.

“Ah, mai non cessate” contains a number of melismas which give the singer the chance to practice moving through the chest, middle, and upper registers of the voice. An example of the melismas seen in the vocal line is found in mm. 18-21, which takes the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano from Bb to Eb in approximately four measures. Given the quick tempo of the piece, the singer performing this selection needs to demonstrate a basic command of moving air during phonation in a consistent and precise manner to help ensure pitch accuracy. As the singer improves the ability to effectively change vocal registers, flexibility will increase; this, in turn, will allow for the singing of more varied repertoire while maintaining vocal health.
Title: “Dopo la regata” from *La Regata Veneziana*

Composer: Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Range: C4-G5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Chiaroscuro

Commentary: Perhaps one of the best composers to study when developing flexibility in the voice is Rossini. His music typically has a higher tessitura and many vocal runs or melismas. While this selection is written for Mezzo-Soprano, it is a song that may be more common for the lighter tone quality found in the Lyric Coloratura Mezzo-Soprano. However, there are sections of this art song that call for a relatively full sound. “Dopo la regata” also provides the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano with the opportunity to work with the upper and lower extremes of the vocal range as the vocal line moves quickly and frequently between chest and upper-head register. As there are many runs in this selection, the degree of flexibility achieved in previous selections will be applied and developed while studying and performing this very exciting art song.

“Dopo la regata” provides an excellent opportunity to develop the ability to use *chiaroscuro*. This term is used in visual art, but can have an application in vocal music and singing as well. In singing, *chiaroscuro* means to deal equally with the lighter and darker timbre of the voice, meaning that the tone produced by the singer should be an overall mixture of both. If the singer is technically able, *chiaroscuro* can be present at all dynamic levels (Miller, 2004). *Chiaroscuro* happens when increased energy during
exhalation turns into tone as the vocal folds elongate, according to the vowel, tessitura, and intensity of the vocal line (Miller, 2004).

In the context of this melody, *chiaroscuro* can be applied when singing the written melisma with a lighter tone as seen in mm.60-64 and repeated throughout, while allowing for the darker and more natural timbre of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice to be used in more legato passages as seen in mm. 113-134. The more this aspect of technique is exercised through practice and performance, the more vocally flexible the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will become.
Title: “Quella fiamma che m’accende”

Composer: Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739)

Range: F#3-E5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Consistently produced

CMP Focus: Building vocal stamina

Commentary: As Mignon Dunn suggested in her interview concerning vocal health, one of the central issues to building a healthy voice is stamina; “Quella fiamma che m’accende” is a strong choice to help Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos to build endurance. The singer must be focused and breathing correctly from the onset, as there is no introduction for this piece. This selection requires longer phrasing and a louder dynamic level overall than what has been expected in some of the previous selections for this suggested course of study. The song moves forward continually, with very little time to breathe between phrases. An example of this is found in mm. 74-80, where the text “che giammai s’estinguera” is repeated several times, allowing for a short breath in m. 79 just before ascending to E5 at the climax of the phrase. To be dramatically effective, the sound must be consistent, and at the root of consistent sound is a solid technique. A breathy or weak sound that lacks richness will detract from the overall drama of this lovely and intense art song.

As with any voice type, breathing is of particular importance, but for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, breathing correctly and the ability to sing long phrases are crucial to building vocal stamina. A more advanced understanding and functionality in breathing for singing is required to sing this piece that is vocally healthy manner. Breathing is a
cyclical event where inhalation and exhalation should be continually present, and should not feel like opposing actions (Doscher, 1988). The singer should not breathe in a way that may cause her to feel as if inhalation and exhalation are separate actions working against one another, as can happen if the singer does not fully support the breath during the breathing cycle. Instead she should apply correct breathing technique during which inhalation and exhalation work together as one fluid motion in each cycle. “Quella fiamma che m’accende” allows for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to practice this type of breathing in the studio and then to instill it through performance while building the necessary stamina to sing successfully.
**Title:** “Toglietemi la vita ancor”

**Composer:** Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

**Range:** B3-Eb5

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**McKinney Principle:** Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

**CMP Focus:** Switching between staccato and legato

**Commentary:** This is another selection in the suggested course of study that has a quick tempo and must have a sound that is vibrant, dynamic, and alive to be sung successfully. An important aspect of keeping the sound vibrant is to be in control of the breath. The student performing this intermediate selection should be able to demonstrate the basic ability to correctly take both short and long breaths during the inhalation phase of singing. Failure to breathe correctly will cause the tone to become straight and colorless, which can lead to faulty intonation. In this selection, there is the added concern that incorrect breathing may cause the singer to lag behind the beat because of the quick tempo. This song provides a way for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to continue to build on the foundation of correct breathing in order to produce a vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound.

“Toglietemi la vita ancor” offers the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano a unique opportunity to sing with a lively sound while switching from using *staccato* for dotted rhythms to singing a legato line. This is first seen in mm. 5-7 of the melody; the rhythm of the vocal line alternates between eighth and sixteenth notes. Switching rhythms of a musical line so quickly involves being able to control the sound by driving the air effectively. This is accomplished by giving a quicker release of air initially, followed by a
crescendo on the following quarter note in m. 7. This approach will help to create a legato that will allow for enough air to complete the phrase. This can be challenging to manage in terms of technique. Given that “Toglietemi la vita ancor” is a strophic song, it provides an opportunity for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to practice this aspect of technique that will be used in the operatic arias to come.
Title: “Vergin tutto amor”  
Composer: Francesco Durante (1684-1755)  
Range: A3-C5  
Difficulty Level: Intermediate  
McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing and resonant sound  
CMP Focus: Legato line  

Commentary: When singing the art song “Vergin tutto amor,” the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will have the opportunity to continue building the voice in a vocally healthy way while concentrating on producing a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant. The dramatic music and text may lead to over-singing. This is evidenced by the dynamic levels that are required of the singer throughout the piece. The dynamic marking of *mezzo-piano* is seen in m. 1. The song begins to build dynamically and dramatically beginning in m. 9 as a sense of urgency is created by the text “il pianto suo ti muova” (The weeping that moves you). This is followed by a *crescendo* in m. 12 to a *forte* in m.14 that continues throughout the remainder of the song. Because this song builds to a *forte* expected at the end, unintentional over-singing can happen. It is important for the singer to remember when building the dynamic level to a focus on creating a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant. This is done by breathing deeply and engaging the abdominal muscles for support to help move the air correctly.

Remember that a full *forte* for one singer may not be that for another; each singer should sing within her own capabilities to create the desired sound. The singer will need to use the principles of correct breathing, as well as movement of air, pitch, and interval accuracy, while working the CMP focus of legato line for this selection. The vocal line is
set in 12/4 with the strong beat on counts one and three. When encountering strong beats, it may be easy to overemphasize the first and third beats of the phrase. To help avoid this, the singer should practice performing legato while avoiding the tendency to overemphasize the strong beats in each phrase.
Title: “Come Ready And See Me”

Composer: Richard Hundley (b.1931)

Range: Bb3-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Consistently produced

CMP Focus: Sustained singing

Commentary: “Come Ready And See Me” depicts someone who is longing to see another and asks the person to come to her before the years of life run out. This song should be sung simply and at a slow tempo. However, this does not mean that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should avoid proper vocal technique and correct breathing. Given the tempo of the song as well as the exposed vocal line, consistent production of sound is necessary so that the overall tone color does not change to become weak or colorless. This is best achieved by consistent inhalation and release of air during the breathing cycle, as previously discussed.

   It is interesting to note how the vocal line is set by Hundley as there are many long phrases, and there is not typically a great deal of time to breathe in between phrases. Another aspect of consistently produced sound is sustained singing, which is what sustained singing requires: control as the air is moved. The tempo does not pick up, and triplets are used in places that can potentially elongate the duration of the vocal line as seen in mm. 11-16. This means that the air must be evenly distributed throughout each phrase from a gentle onset to completion. The importance of the onset cannot be underestimated: “how the singer begins the phrase determines the degree of freedom in the rest of the phrase” (Miller, 2004, p.8). Singing in a manner that is vocally free and
consistent is indicative of a voice that is vocally healthy. The singer who approaches the phrases in this song with a vocally free sound will enjoy a positive performance experience while continuing to build the voice on principles of vocal health.
Title: “Heart, we will forget him”

Composer: Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Range: Bb3-G5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Singing the melody line independent of accompaniment

Commentary: This is a beautiful setting of the Emily Dickenson poem “Heart, we will forget him.” This selection presents a new set of challenges for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, as well as the continual challenge of being able to sing so that the energy is flowing smoothly from note to note. This song has a considerable range and more challenging intervals, including leaps of augmented fifths, sevenths and octaves. To sing these passages effectively, the energy of the sound must flow smoothly from one note to the next. Octaves and seventh intervals should be approached from the bottom note with greater weight than what is put on the top note of the octave so as not to put excessive weight on the voice in the upper-head register. The sustained and pianissimo singing that is required throughout creates a greater need for energy and movement of sound, as seen in mm. 24-30. Here, the singer has to approach a G5 from an A4, followed by a progression that takes the voice down to an F4 in m.27. This is followed by an E5 descending to Bb4 in the following measure.

“Heart, we will forget him” affords the singer the opportunity to further develop her musicianship in the areas of pitch and interval accuracy as the accompaniment works beautifully with the vocal line but does not double the as the vocal line itself. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be able to sing the melody independently of the
accompaniment. This is a necessary skill as a musician, and can be difficult to learn when first doing so. However, once mastered, the ability to sing the vocal line independent of the accompaniment line strengthens musicianship in the area of pitch and interval accuracy. In turn, this ability can also enrich the performance of this art song as musical independence can allow for greater artistry and expression overall.
Title: “Love”

Composer: Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

Range: A3-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing, and resonant sound

CMP Focus: Mixing the lower-head and chest voice.

Commentary: As the tessitura of this selection is in the lower-head to chest voice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, it is an ideal choice for continuing to work on a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant while learning to mix the head and chest registers. The sound will be naturally rich because of the color of the voice, but that tone needs to be consistent and not too heavy. The sound should have continual vibrato without straight tones. One example of transitioning from the lower-head voice to chest voice can be found in mm. 2-6. Beginning in m. 2, the vocal line begins on a G4, moving smoothly to an E4 then C4. In the following measure, the voice moves from E4-A3. This is a constant pattern throughout this song. In these instances, it is best to focus the sound in the mask of the face and then move evenly into chest voice when going from C4 without putting too much weight or sound on A3. This approach will help maintain a rich, ringing, and resonant sound.

At times when transitioning from lower head voice to chest voice, there can be a temptation to over-emphasize on the lower notes such as A3 as the chest register is being used. However when notes in the chest register are sung too loudly and without support, the sound will lose the natural color and become brash and unpleasant. The singer should also be cautious when approaching the transition point of C4-D4 in the lower head voice
so as not to carry the chest voice too high. Carrying the chest voice too high is vocally unhealthy because forcing the voice into a register other than where it naturally resonates causes the sound to be pushed. For this reason, it is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must learn to effectively sing through transition points. To assist in this process, it is suggested that the singer practice singing the notes C4-E4 on more closed vowels such as [u] or [e] so that she can become more aware of where the voice does transition in order to help even out the registers as the voice continues to grow.
Title: “Sure on this shining night”

Composer: Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Range: B3-E5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Consistently produced

CMP Focus: Syncopated rhythm

Commentary: “Sure on this shining night” is an excellent introduction to 20th century music. This art song is rhythmically complex in a manner one would not anticipate. This is due to the simple and legato melody line that masks the syncopated rhythms contained within the accompaniment. It introduces interesting harmonies for the singer that will also allow for continued work on pitch and interval accuracy. “Sure on this shining night” should be chosen for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano after she understands the principles of correct breathing and phrasing beyond the beginning level. The phrases of this piece are relatively long and the time between phrases is somewhat limited.

A consistently produced sound is created not only by correct breathing, but also by identifying and employing appropriate vowels. Vowel selection impacts resonance. An example of this is found in m. 13 on the word “all.” While it may be easier for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use the [ə] vowel here, it should be remembered that this vowel is darker and has greater potential to fall back in the throat, muffling the sound and color of the voice. For this reason, a modification of this vowel to a brighter vowel such as [a] is suggested, because the sound will be placed forward instead of falling back, creating a more resonant sound. The young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will not lose richness in the sound by employing this technique. Instead the use of a brighter vowel
will make for easier vocal production because it is an open vowel and is set on E5. Using a modified, brighter vowel when needed in this song will help to create a sound that is consistently produced.

As discussed earlier, “Sure on this shining night” is rhythmically deceptive. The song is set in 3/4 but frequently uses ties to the first beat of the following measure. This in turn may cause the singer to miscount or fall behind the beat if she is relying too heavily on being able to sense a strong downbeat. It is important for the singer to be confident with the rhythm before learning the melody. This approach will allow the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to focus on developing rhythmic comprehension and ability.
Title: “Waitin”

Composer: William Bolcom (b.1938)

Range: Bb3-D5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Communicating the sub-text of a song

Commentary: “Waitin” is from the Cabaret Songs by William Bolcom. It is essentially a song about seeing the light of understanding in life. The tempo is slow. The sound produced for this song should be as pleasant to listen to and beautiful as the accompaniment. The tessitura of this song lies well for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and is a great exercise in producing a tone that is consistent and rich while being pleasant to listen to.

The challenge of this piece is in the length itself. “Waitin” is only twenty measures long. This is not a great deal of time, and the first four measures are a slow introduction. The singer must set the mood of the piece from the very beginning without singing. To create a sub-text, the singer needs to have a full understanding of the text and be able to decide what her own thoughts are about it. One suggestion for creating a sub-text would be to have the student write out her own interpretation of the song and see how well it translates into the song itself during lessons in the studio and during practice time. When a sub-text is communicated successfully, it serves to add depth to the overall performance of the piece because of the added facial expressions and physical movement that come as a result of thinking of the sub-text while singing. This approach will help to give a stronger performance of the piece overall.
Title: “Du Ring an meinem Finger”

Composer: Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Range: C4-F5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Using varied shades of color in the voice when singing

Commentary: “Du Ring an meinem Finger,” from the song cycle Frauenliebe und Leben, is a lovely and sustained piece that calls for a relatively soft dynamic level when singing. This gives the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to work on producing a sound that is pleasant to listen to without singing too loudly. It is important for the singer to keep in mind that the dramatic sound does not always have to be loud. (M. Dunn, personal communication, March 26, 2012). A place in the music where the singer may be tempted to use more sound than needed can be found in mm. 27-29 as the vocal line leaps from G4 to Eb5 and then continues up to F5. This is because it is typically easier to use more sound when singing in the upper-head register. As previously discussed, singing at a pianissimo dynamic level is difficult and takes a great deal of support and control. This vocal line provides an important opportunity for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to work on breath support and control while singing so that the sound does not become strident and remains vocally healthy.

The bigger sound of a dramatic voice is exciting to hear. However, using varied shades of color in the voice can also add to any performance. It is possible to use a lighter color while maintaining the natural richness of tone characteristic of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Using a lighter color will effectively communicate the text of the piece
while allowing the audience to listen to a dimension of this voice type that is not often heard. This will assist the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in expanding her repertoire to include additional styles of singing.
Title: “Gretchen am Spinnrade”

Composer: Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Range: C4-E5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Understanding text painting in music

Commentary: This well-known art song was composed by Schubert in 1814, using a text from Faust by Goethe. While this song was originally written for the Soprano voice, it has been transposed for the Mezzo-Soprano. One of the most prominent aspects of this piece is the drama created by the relentless tension of the continual motion of the piano line under the dramatic music written in the vocal line. To sing this wonderful art song effectively, the sound must be vibrant, dynamic, and alive at all times to keep with the immediate energy that is created as the story of the song unfolds. The time between phrases is short, so the inhalation of breath must be done quickly and correctly in order to produce a consistent sound. A suggestion while practicing would be to go through the song phrase by phrase from the beginning, taking only the necessary breaths by breathing in through the nose and mouth simultaneously for each phrase. This will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to become used to the feeling of quick inhalations while coming to understand the space that is created when the soft palate is lifted and the air goes more deeply into the body (McKinney, 1994). This approach in turn, will help to produce a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant.

It is important to understand text painting in order to enhance communication with the audience. Text painting is found when the accompaniment and vocal line reflect
the text of the piece. “Gretchen am Spinnrade” has an obvious, yet very powerful example of this that begins with the piano introduction. It is that of the spinning wheel, created by the continual sixteenth-note motion that alternates between the right and left hand in the accompaniment. The first entrance of the vocal line in m. 2 should be sung at a *pianissimo* dynamic level to communicate the intensity of the text. An important change in mode occurs in m. 51, as we see a C major chord in the left hand of the accompaniment. The motif of the spinning wheel continues in the right hand, but the switch from minor to major harmony occurs in this measure as Gretchen is reflecting on her supposed feelings of love for Faust, as seen in mm. 50-68:

“Sein hoher Gang, Sein' edle Gestalt Seines Mundes Lächeln, Seiner Augen Gewalt Und seine Rede Zauberfluss Sein Händedruck, Und ach, sein Kuß!”

“His tall walk, His noble figure His mouth’s smile His eyes power And his mouth’s magic flow His handclasp, And ah, his kiss!”

(Translation by Thompson, 1997)

The singer should communicate this change in the text both vocally and physically while on stage. Because the change of mode from minor to major is an obvious one, the singer has the responsibility to communicate this change through gestures and facial expressions. Also, the singer must remember to change the mood of the song to reflect the harmonic return to minor in m. 68 during the *fermata* on the word “Kuß.” At this
point Gretchen begins to fall back under the hypnotic spell created by the spinning wheel. If the singer does not successfully communicate the changes of mood in the text the audience will not experience the depth and intensity that is found in this piece. The understanding that can be developed through studying and performing “Gretchen am Spinnrade” will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to grow vocally while learning how to powerfully communicate to those who hear her sing.
Title: “Liebst du um Schoenheit”

Composer: Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Range: F4-Eb5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Managing transition points

Commentary: This selection is a lovely setting of “Liebst du um Schoenheit” that is very different from the setting by Mahler. While the Mahler setting of this text may be more common for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to perform, this setting by Schumann provides the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano opportunities to work on producing a sound that is vibrant, dynamic, and alive while also working on transition points in the voice. Producing the former requires that the sound not be weak or devitalized (McKinney, 1994). “Liebst du um Schoenheit” begins on Ab4 in m. 3 and then has a melodic interval of a fourth to Db5 found in m. 4. This is a pattern that repeats throughout the selection and must be approached with a well-focused sound. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should place the sound forward so that it will have energy and will not be over-darkened.

This selection provides many opportunities for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to work on transition points, like those found between Db5-Eb5 at the end of the piece in mm. 31-36. This is a common transition point for dramatic mezzo-sopranos. Singing through transition points can be difficult. It is important to place the sound forward in the mask, being sure to breathe deeply and lifting the soft palate as necessary so that pushing the sound is avoided. The more opportunities the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano has to work on singing through transition points, the easier it will become.
Title: “Süßer Freund du blickest”

Composer: Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Range: D4-D5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Key changes

Commentary: “Süßer Freund du blickest” is another beautiful selection from Frauenliebe und Leben that also challenges the voice to be able to sing at softer dynamic levels. The main focus of the singer should be to produce a sound that is loud enough to be heard easily. As it is primarily a song that calls for less sound than what a Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano may be used to producing, the challenge will be in keeping the breath supported and moving through each phrase while not over-singing. Though the dynamic level for this song does not call for anything beyond pianissimo, it should be remembered that pianissimo for a dramatic voice is going to be different than a pianissimo for a lighter voice. There are places in this song where the vocal line repeats, as in mm. 2-7 and again in m. 12. When a phrase is repeated, it is a chance for emphasis. In these places, a dynamic level of mezzo-piano to mezzo-forte is suggested for overall musicality as well as a comfortable dynamic level for the dramatic singer. Having the opportunity to practice singing at a level that is loud enough to be heard easily will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to grow in a way that ensures vocal health.

In terms of comprehensive musicianship, “Süßer Freund du blickest” asks the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to change keys in m. 25 from F Major to Bb Major. While this change is from one major key to another, it still can be difficult to sing with correct
intonation if the singer is not prepared or does not adjust well due to something such as nervousness in performance. New accidentals F#4 and G#4 are seen in mm. 25 and 27. The singer needs to be confident with the melody and listen to the accompaniment very carefully concerning intonation, which will contribute to a successful performance of this piece.
Title: “Vergebliches Ständchen”

Composer: Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Range: C4-D5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Consistently produced

CMP Focus: Storytelling

Commentary: “Vergebliches Ständchen” is an art song that comes from the Folklore of the Lower Rhineland. It is a strophic, animated song with a sequential melody. This piece offers the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano a chance to use the natural color and strength of her voice. This requires that the sound be consistently produced. One of the best ways to produce a sound that is vocally healthy is by controlled exhalation. Controlled exhalation helps to create phonation and is a part of the breathing cycle as explained by McKinney where “the length of the controlled exhalation is determined by the demands of the musical phrase” (McKinney, 1994, p.51). This means that singers need to take breaths with the length of the phrase in mind, so as not to waste air or take in too much air, which will cause a quicker exhalation if not controlled properly, resulting in a breathy sound. The phrases also lend themselves to a natural legato, with reasonable places for the singer to breathe. When the sound is consistently produced, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will be able to maintain the natural richness and needed vitality to sing this song correctly.

This art song tells a story that the singer must communicate through facial expressions and gestures, as well as using different shades of color in the voice. The song opens with the singer taking the part of a young man standing below the window of the young woman for whom he declares his love. He asks her to let him in. In verse 2,
beginning in m. 23, the narrative changes as the singer assumes the voice of the young woman who tells him she cannot let him in. There is a change in the mode from major to minor in verse 3, m. 43 as the narrative goes back to the young man complaining of the cold night air. He begs her to let him in, claiming that his love will die if she does not. In m. 64, the mode returns to major as the singer resumes the part of the young woman, who in effect slams her window shut and tells him to go home. Overall, it is a serenade sung in vain by the young man. As the dialogue of the text goes back and forth between characters, the singer must communicate the change through physical expression and stance. The colors of the voice should change slightly as well. A suggestion would be to sing at a slightly louder dynamic level when singing as the young man, who is outside. When communicating a story such as this, it is important to remain fully engaged emotionally so that the emotional energy is sensed by the audience for the duration of the song. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano continues to practice story-telling and does so through performance, this needed skill will continue to grow along with the voice, helping to prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for opera roles that are to come.
Title: “Fleur desséchée”

Composer: Pauline Viardot (1821-1910)

Range: B3-D5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Intonation-singing intervals in tune

Commentary: This selection is a lovely art song by Pauline Viardot that calls for the warm timbre characteristic of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. To sing this song effectively, the singer must produce a sound that is “pleasant to listen to—not strident or raspy” (McKinney, 1994, p.77). Given the nature of the music and the setting of the text in this piece, singing at a dynamic level that is mezzo-forte to forte only when needed will help to create the pleasant sound expected when properly supporting and moving the amount of air required to sing each phrase.

“Fleur desséchée” introduces some interesting harmonies to the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano without changing keys. There are a number of accidentals that occur in the vocal line of the song; an example of this can be found in mm. 26-35. This line has stepwise motion leading to a descending octave in m. 28. Singing lines that use accidentals require a level of proficient musicianship from the singer as it momentarily takes them out of the key in which the song was written. The octave in m. 28 is especially important; the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano needs to know how to properly approach the descending octave so that she does not use too much chest voice resulting in a harsh sound. Instead, a head- and chest-voice mixture is suggested to help ensure accuracy and a resulting sound that is pleasant to listen to as well as vocally healthy. “Fleur desséchée” is an important
French art song for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Studying this piece will help to create a sound that is balanced and pleasant to listen to as well as to improve the singer’s intonation and interval accuracy.
Title: “J’ai pleuré en rêve”

Composer: Georges Hüe (1858-1948)

Range: E4-Gb5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Rich, ringing, and resonant

CMP Focus: Singing in the upper-head range of the voice

Commentary: This song requires a louder dynamic level overall than other selections, as markings such as *piu forte* are introduced in m.16. It is important for the singer to remember to not push the sound out to reach louder dynamic levels, but instead to sing as loudly as is naturally comfortable. Should the singer begin to push, the resonant sound will be lost due to too much pressure being forced on the vocal folds; this may also cause the sound to stop ringing. To sing at a comfortable *forte*, the singer must support the breath completely through each phrase, being careful to control exhalation of air evenly to sing all the way through each line.

“J’ai pleuré en rêve” further challenges the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing in the upper extent of her range. An example of this is found in mm. 25-30 where the vocal line moves from Eb5 to E5 includes an F5 in a triplet before moving to a Gb5 in m.26. The level of *forte* must continue until the end of the phrase in m. 30. A suggestion for the singer would be to keep the tongue down in a relaxed position, touching the bottom teeth, while keeping the mouth in an open position, thus creating enough space for the to resonate in this register. These notes will become easier to sing in time, through continued practice and performance experience.
Title: “Les Berceaux”

Composer: Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Range: G3-E5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Maintaining legato line when singing syncopated rhythms

Commentary: “Les Berceaux” has a lovely, yet haunting melody. It tells of how mothers will weep when their young men sail away, and how these young men feel drawn to the memory of a distant cradle. The vocal line of the piece moves continually, reflecting the motion of the waves on which the ships are sailing. To portray this, the energy of the voice must move smoothly from note to note, precluding a breathy sound while maintaining the tempo. The meter of the song is 12/8, and the tempo marking is andante; it can be difficult to avoid unintentionally slowing the tempo in compound meters. To keep the energy moving requires continual breath support and even exhalation of air while singing. This approach will help to ensure productive practice and successful performances of this piece.

One of the challenges in singing “Les Berceaux” is found in the rhythms written in the vocal line. While this piece has a number of dotted rhythms, such as those seen in mm. 3-8, the legato line must be preserved. The singer should avoid continually accenting the first beat in each measure, which is tempting when singing songs in triple meter. The depiction of the waves is present in the accompaniment, and should not be over-emphasized by the singer. In the book Solutions for Singers: Tools For Performers And Teachers, author Richard Miller (2004) says this concerning the importance of
legato line: “Legato singing is the most musical thing possible. Connected vocal sound permits both depth and brilliance of sound while retaining good vowel definition” (p. 200). Singing with legato line helps the singer grow both vocally and musically while promoting sound that results in good vocal health.
Title: “Offrande”

Composer: Reynaldo Hahn (1875-1947)

Range: C4-C5

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

McKinney Principle: Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Singing triplets

Commentary: “Offrande” gives a beautiful musical setting of the poem by Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). It allows for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to continually produce a sound that is pleasant to listen to. It is important that the sound not be strained or forced in order to communicate the text more effectively. An important aspect of singing well lies in controlling the quantity of singing and mastering dynamic contrasts so that vocal production is interesting (Miller, 1996). While the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will often be called upon to sing at a dynamic level of forte or louder, being able to effectively sing all dynamic levels while retaining the basic color of the voice is important for vocal development (Miller, 1996). “Offrande” requires the singer to practice being able to sing at varied dynamic levels, helping to cultivate this needed ability.

An important aspect of musicianship for a vocalist lies in the ability to correctly sing a triplet. This selection includes several triplets; an example is found in mm. 7-9. When singing a triplet, it may be easy to accent the first note and fall slightly behind on the remaining two notes, or to lose the beat all together. It is best to sing each note of a triplet with equal weight, even during a change in tempo such as a rallentando. Rhythmic accuracy relates to the tempo of a given piece, so it is necessary to have the opportunity
to practice and vocally work with triplets, which will lead to stronger musicianship overall for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.
**Title:** “Quel galant m’est comparable?” from *Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques*

**Composer:** Maurice Ravel (1875-1938)

**Range:** C4-Eb5

**Difficulty Level:** Intermediate

**McKinney Principle:** Flexibly expressive

**CMP Focus:** Creating a strong character as a pants role

**Commentary:** This is a short, yet very declamatory song. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is asked to enter at a *forte* dynamic level after only one chord has been played in the accompaniment. There are short melismatic ornaments in m. 2 and then again in m. 13. An occasional dotted rhythm is also found throughout the vocal line; an example can be seen in m. 6. Further, the vocal line contains the rhythmic pattern of an eighth note followed by sixteenth notes as seen in m. 8. The short melismatic ornaments should be sung accurately, and this can be done by maintaining vocal flexibility when singing. Though the dynamic level of this song is *forte*, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano does not have to use her full sound when singing at this level because of the size of the voice. Just as a *pianissimo* is different in this voice type than in lighter voice types such as Lyric Mezzo-Soprano, so is a *forte*. Singing at a reasonable *forte* will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano maintain vocal flexibility when singing this selection. A sound that lacks flexibility tends to wobble or shake (McKinney, 1994). If singers with dramatic voices are not careful and sing too heavily without support, the vocal tone will be obscured and the vocal line will become more difficult to sing. Flexibility is best maintained when the air is distributed evenly over each vocal passage.
Because the Mezzo-Soprano voice is a lower voice type, there are some pants roles – when a woman is asked to play the part of man – that are included in the overall standard repertoire. There are some well-known pants roles that can be sung by the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as the voice continues to develop and mature. These include Octavian from Der Rosenkavalier by Strauss and Orpheus from Orfeo ed Euridice by Gluck. For this reason, it is important for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to learn how to bring strong characterization to a pants role. “Quel galant m’est comparable?” tells the brief story of a man who challenges others for the one that he loves. Because this selection is short and declamatory, the singer needs to portray the character from the onset of the song through to the end. There is not much time to communicate the text of the song to the audience, so the communication needs to be strong and purposeful. This can be a challenge for any singer, and the more the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is allowed to experience this unique character challenge, the more proficient and expressive she will become.
ADVANCED ART SONGS

The focus of this part of the curriculum guide is to help prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing the demanding opera and oratorio arias of her repertoire. It is expected that before the study of advanced art song begins, the singer will solidify her vocal technique to be at an advanced level, and be ready to understand the important aspects of vocal technique on a much deeper level than a beginning or intermediate student. In this section, an additional McKinney principal will be added to each song entry.

At this stage in her training, the singer should display not only a literal understanding of the text, but also be able to create her own sub-text within each art song that conveys her own feelings and thoughts about what she is singing. The ability to do this will prepare the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for the challenges that await in opera, oratorio, and concert works.
Title: “In solitaria stanza” from *Six Romances*

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Range: Eb4-Gb5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Consistently produced; Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Introduction to Verdi style

Commentary: This is a lovely art song that will allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to work on producing a sound that is consistent as well as vibrant, dynamic and alive in order to handle the volume that Verdi requires. Consistent vocal production is of great importance for Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos, and involves “singing on the breath.” This means that the air alone can sustain the vibration of sound (Vennard, 1967). The ability of air to sustain vibration is a result of the Bernoulli Effect, means that air that is in motion has less density or pressure than air that is not in motion. (The effective movement of air is what helps to propel sound forward with continued vibrato. It is important for singers to understand the Bernoulli effect as it applies to singing so that they may understand why they do not have to push their voices when creating a high volume of sound or employ excessive muscular force to do so (Vennard, 1967). The more often Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos can practice and apply this principle, the easier singing will become. The better flow of air will allow for the sound to be consistent, as well as vibrant, dynamic, and alive. The length of phrases and comfortable tessitura of “In solitaria stanza” give Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos an opportunity to work on these important aspects of building a voice that is vocally healthy.
Concerning the style of Verdi, Mezzo-Soprano Dolora Zajick states, “Verdi uses contrast in his writing, from something that is almost spoken to something that is more lyrical, and then patches it together in a dramatic way” (D. Zajick, personal communication, June 28, 2012). These are characteristics that make the style of Verdi unique. Singing “In solitaria stanzas” requires the singer to produce a reasonable amount of sound as she is introduced to singing Verdi in a stylistically correct manner. The song begins slowly at a mezza-voce as seen in m.3. It is important to remember that the drama of this lovely woman all alone in a room, and suffering great pain is always present, regardless of dynamic level. As the singer begins to plead with God to save this beautiful woman beginning in mm. 26-28 with the text “Salvate, O Dei pietosi” we see an increase in dynamic level that will remain consistent to the end of the piece. The passion in the music and vocal line becomes more urgent as the singer communicates a fear that God may not be able to create another person who is just as the one who is loved. This is reflected musically and vocally in m. 45 as the vocal line rises to the highest note of the piece, Gb5, and then moves step-wise to downward to B♭4. To perform this correctly, the singer must be able to sing lyrically over the dotted rhythms that are present. These technical challenges will not only help to develop the voice, but will also provide opportunities to understand the style that is needed to sing the works of Verdi correctly. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will come to know more about this distinctive style by the practice and performance of this piece.
Title: “O del mio amato ben”

Composer: Stefano Donaudy (1879-1925)

Range: C4-D5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Pleasant to listen to; flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Connecting emotions and thoughts from one vocal line to the next

Commentary: “O del mio amato ben” is a beautiful Italian art song that requires legato singing throughout. Each phrase of the vocal line is seamlessly connected to the next, moving the song forward. Students at the advanced level should demonstrate an ability to sing using a number of principles of vocal health. This selection allows for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use an amount of sound that is pleasant to listen to while maintaining vocal flexibility. At this point in the suggested course of study, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should have an ability to sing longer phrases with legato and understand of the elements that are present in the breath cycle according to McKinney:

- **Inhalation**: Taking breath in through the nose and mouth to go deeply into the body,
- **Suspension**: The moment where phonation is suspended as inhalation completes,
- **Exhalation**: The breath leaves the body in a way that allows for even distribution of air through a given musical phrase,
- **Recovery**: The muscles involved in the breathing cycle relax

An understanding of this approach will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in creating a sound that is pleasant while allowing her to keep the legato line. A sound that is not
pleasant to listen to may become strident or rasping. A continual rasping sound during phonation is a possible indication of vocal fold nodules, and must be guarded against. The vocal line as written by Donaudy also calls for flexibility in the clear articulation of triplets, as seen in m.14 and throughout. In the context of this song, vocal flexibility addresses the effective use of rubato without slowing down the tempo; an example is seen in mm.17-18. A flexible voice has less likelihood of vocal problems such as vocal fold nodules, due to the correct amount of energy behind the movement of air that keeps the sound from shaking or wobbling.

“O del mio amato ben” conveys a text of lost love and longing, with one sad thought proceeding to the next. The accompaniment in the piano is very connected, and the singer must have this same kind of connection and concentration in her thought process to authentically communicate the text. An example of connected thought is found in mm.38-43, where the text tells of one who has lost her love and that he is far away, connecting to the fact that she continues to look for him with that same longing. The text and the accompaniment create a mood that is bittersweet, as reflected in the phrases “di darmi ad altra cura, sol mi tormento un pensiero: ma senza lui, che farò?” (Give to me another care, only one thought torments me: but without him, what will I do?). There are separate thoughts of night and day, hot and cold, and longing. However, these are all connected musically, so the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must demonstrate that connection by showing the emotions of frustration, inability to feel, and longing within a very short time. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano practices and performs this piece, these kinds of connections will become more apparent over time.
**Title:** “O del mio dolce ardor”  
**Composer:** Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714-1787)  
**Range:** A3-E5  
**Difficulty Level:** Advanced  
**McKinney Principles:** Loud enough to be heard easily; energy flows smoothly from note to note  
**CMP Focus:** Improvisation in ornamentation  

**Commentary:** This passionate Italian art song is one depicts one person’s desire for the love of another. A feeling of urgency is set from the beginning of the piece as the piano accompaniment begins by moving in constant sixteenth notes. The vocal line provides an interesting contrast to this urgency as it begins in m. 2 with a continued legato line beginning on A4. The passionate mood of the song should be reflected in the energy and not the volume of sound that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is capable of producing. For these reasons, the sound should be pleasant to listen to with energy that flows smoothly from note to note. It should be remembered that volume does not necessarily equal power. In fact, if one over-sings, at the expense of tonal beauty, then the overall effect will be one of weakness instead of power in this selection. To be vocally effective when singing this melody, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must fully engage the abdominal muscles when breathing so that air is not present in the tone. It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano uses the natural energy that comes from using correct vocal technique to keep up the tempo and stay with the piano accompaniment. Using natural energy will help to move the sound forward and keep the vocal line spinning with the needed intensity for an efficacious performance of this song.
As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is often challenged to sing fully legato vocal lines, the chance to use vocal ornamentation does not come very often; it is, however, but is important to study and sing in this style in order to maintain vocal flexibility. “O del mio dolce ardor” offers the opportunity to not only use ornamentation in the vocal line, but to use improvisation while singing. The first example of this is found in m. 12 where a possible ornamentation is given to the singer at a fermata with an instruction to improvise (ad lib) above it. It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano have the chance to study and perform works in this style as she may have the opportunity to sing the Alto role of Handel’s well-known oratorio Messiah during the course of her singing career. Having an understanding of ornamentation and the ability and experience in using improvisation in this area will serve to enhance the overall performance of these works. “O del mio dolce ardor” is a strong choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano for learning how to use this important and necessary skill.
Title: “Perduta ho la pace”

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Range: D4-F#5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Consistently produced; Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Communicating the drama of Verdi art songs

Commentary: “Perduta ho la pace” is the perfect follow-up song to “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (Schubert) as they are both based on the same text of “Meine Ruh ist hin” (Faust) by Goethe. This challenging Verdi art song will allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to understand the text on a deeper and even more dramatic level while continuing to work on a sound that is vibrant, dynamic, and alive. The sound must also be energetic and consistently produced to perform this song successfully. This kind of vocal sound is produced breathing technique that uses the back muscles to assist in the overall support of the voice. Back breathing is an outgrowth of abdominal breathing, which can help the epigastrium function independently as the back muscles offer additional needed support. Training back muscles in breathing for singing can take time, but when they are engaged correctly, they act antagonistically to the epigastrium, which in turn allows for relaxation of the diaphragm (Alderson, 1979). As the works of Verdi are more dramatic and require more sound than previously asked of the singer, the addition of the back muscles in breathing are an essential addition to technique that will assist in producing a consistent sound at this level that is also vibrant, dynamic, and alive.

As more is required vocally of the one performing this piece, the dramatic interpretation must also have more intensity as well. Because this text was used in a
previous selection in this course of study, the singer needs to focus not only on what the text means, but on portraying the emotions of the text on a deeper level than in “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (Schubert). Authenticity in performance is crucial to overall effectiveness and communication with the audience. The drama of the song comes across very clearly in the music as set by Verdi from the very beginning in mm. 1-10. The text of these measures reads: “Perduta ho la pace, in core mille guar” which translated into English means, “My peace is gone, and in my heart there are one thousand woes.” These feelings of a heavy heart and agitation are reflected musically as two eighth- note chords followed by a rest in the accompaniment. This musical figure creates a mysterious feeling that builds tension before the vocalist enters on the last beat of m. 2. The singer must be completely in character before the song begins in order to fully communicate this feeling to those listening. As the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano continues to sing the art songs of Verdi, their dramatic understanding and interpretation skills will continue to develop; this will help to prepare her for the dramatic challenges that Verdi’s opera roles present.
Title: “Se i miei sospiri”

Composer: François Joseph Fétis (1784-1871)

Range: A3-D5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Consistently produced; Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Dramatic interpretation and effectiveness

Commentary: As this is a relatively long selection, the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must concentrate on creating a sound that is consistently produced as well as vibrant, dynamic and alive. This can be achieved by well-thought-out breaths that are deeper and require longer periods of inhalation than other songs previously studied. An example of this is found in m. 75 where a breath mark is placed before beginning the long phrase in mm. 76-80 on the text “Se i miei sospiri, Oh Dio! Placassero” (Oh God! Placate). A suggested way to breathe for this phrase, as well as throughout this selection would be to take in air through the nose and mouth simultaneously. This will help to lift the soft palate, allowing for the deep breath that is needed to sing this piece successfully.

Employing this technique will also help to ensure that the sound is vibrant, dynamic and alive, not weak or colorless (McKinney, 1994). Correct breath support will cause the sound to be focused and have energy. Energetic sound will serve to keep both the singer and the audience engaged in this dramatic Italian art song.

The piano accompaniment sets the drama of the piece from the first chord in m. 1. The length of the introduction provides an immediate dramatic challenge for the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, as she must be engaged and portraying the drama of the song, setting the mood and reflecting the drama through facial expression before she begins to
sing in m. 21. It is suggested that the singer enter at pianissimo and then build the sound phrase by phrase through m. 57 to a fortissimo in mm. 58-74 on the text “Oh Dio! Oh Dio! Soffriro, io soffriro!” (Oh, God! Oh, God! Suffer, I will suffer!). Building the phrases dynamically from pianissimo to fortissimo will add to the excitement and drama of the song overall. It should be noted that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano who sings this song needs to have a full understanding of the literal text and portray the text through facial expression and gestures as appropriate. “Se i miei sospiri” is an excellent song selection for developing advanced breathing techniques and growing in dramatic interpretation.
Title: “Nocturne” from This Island

Composer: Benjamin Britten (1913-1977)

Range: Ab3-E5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Loud enough to be heard easily; consistently produced

CMP Focus: English diction

Commentary: “Nocturne” is a solemn and dramatic art song. This song comes from a song cycle that was first written for soprano, but art song books have begun including a translation from the original key of C minor to A minor, allowing for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to have the possibility of experiencing this unique piece. The accompaniment has a rhythm of continual dotted half notes while the meter of the song is 6/4. This combination leaves the vocal line somewhat exposed as the singer moves through the lower chest to the middle register and then later to the head register as seen in mm. 25-29; here the vocal line begins with a marking of *piu forte* on C4. A dynamic marking of *piu forte* would indicate that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should use the full weight of her sound, however, it should be remembered that a *fortissimo* may be communicated not only by sheer volume of sound, but the intensity of the sound itself. Energy can carry sound that is vibrant. Therefore, it is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano builds on the skills of producing a sound that is loud enough to be heard easily and that is consistent in timbre. Controlling the quantity of sound is necessary for good singing, and thoughtful dynamic contrast is needed to keep the sound interesting as well (Miller, 1996). Making sure that the sound is loud enough to be heard easily and consistently produced at an advanced level will help to achieve the needed control of
sound and consistent timbre that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should be ready to sing at this point in the study.

English diction involves the clear articulation of vowels, as well as fricative, plosive, initial, and final consonants. There is also another aspect of English diction that involves communicating the thought of the text. This involves singing with the correct stress patterns of the English language (LaBouff, 2008). An example of this is found in mm. 52-59 the vocal line sits on Ab3 with a marking of pp distento parlante beginning in m. 52 on the text: “Unpersued by hostile force, traction engine, bull or hoarse. Or revolting succubus.” The text is to be almost spoken, and given that it stays on a repeated Ab3, which sits in the lower chest register for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, it may be easy to accent the wrong syllables when the melody combines with the rhythm of this vocal line. However, when learned correctly, the set rhythm of the text can also help the singer with articulation. For these reasons, it is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano apply what she has learned in previous selections regarding rhythm and unifying vocal registers to help ensure that the stresses of the text are correct while using the natural cadences of the English language to communicate the thought behind the text. “Nocturne” allows for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano practice these techniques.
**Title:** “Serenity”  
**Composer:** Charles Ives (1874-1954)  
**Range:** A₄-E₅  
**Difficulty Level:** Advanced  
**McKinney Principles:** Pleasant to listen to; consistently produced  
**CMP Focus:** Singing at the same dynamic level throughout  

**Commentary:** This piece offers some interesting and unusual challenges for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The range spans only a fifth, which might be expected more in beginning song selections. The limited range does not make the song easier as one might think, but more difficult instead. This song is hymn-like while embodying a feeling of chant. The singer does not need to create a great deal of sound, but only needs to create an amount that will be pleasant to listen to and consistent. This is in part, because the sparse, soft accompaniment that is reminiscent of bells leaves the vocal line very exposed. To sing at any dynamic level above mezzo-piano would violate the feeling of calm that is reflected in the title of the song and present throughout this choice of repertoire. The singer must also use what she has learned in previous selections concerning musicianship to make certain that the pitch is precise and the imperceptible meter changes characteristic of Ives are completed accurately.

As alluded to in the previous paragraph, this art song by Ives offers the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the unique challenge of having to sing at a quiet, controlled dynamic level throughout. Ives is very clear in his markings, as seen at the beginning of the piece. Both singer and accompanist are instructed to perform this selection: *Very slowly, quietly and sustained, with little change in tempo or dynamic level throughout* (p. 168). It is
typically easier for bigger voices to sing at levels of *mezzo-forte* and *forte* than softer dynamic levels such as *mezzo-piano*. Even so, the same character of the tone should be should be possible for a singer, whether it is loud or soft (Miller, 1996). In order to accomplish this, the vocalist must be aware of good vocal technique and apply correct principles of breathing and phonation. Through performing “Serenity” the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will come to have greater appreciation of what is needed to sing at softer dynamic levels while continuing to nurture the voice and ensure vocal health.
Title: “The Breath of a Rose”

Composer: William Grant Still (1895-1978)

Range: Cb4-D5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Rich, ringing, and resonant; energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Keeping the tempo from slowing down

Commentary: “The Breath of a Rose” will cause the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use skills in rhythm and intonation that will strengthen overall musicianship. This piece requires that the sound be rich, ringing, and resonant with energy that flows smoothly from note to note because of the demanding phrases that this song contains. Good breath control is paramount to the successful singing of this art song. In order to understand these characteristics of good singing and how breathing is involved on a deeper level, it is important to look at the three phases of a musical tone. They are:

- **The attack phase** – this initial aspect sets the tone for the rest of the phrase, so it is essential that the onset of the phrase be sung correctly. A good onset involves proper physical and mental preparation.

- **The sustention phase** – this is the tone that lasts from the beginning of the attack to the release of the phrase. The tone needs to be kept alive and moving forward for vitality.

- **The release phase** – this needs to be executed with precision. The sound should not fade away from lack of energy. Lack of support in this part of the phase could have an adverse effect on tone quality and pitch (McKinney, 1994).
As the singer learns how to apply the three phases of the musical tone through practice that includes the needed physical and mental preparation, she will develop a greater understanding of the importance of correct breathing and how that relates to producing a sound that is rich, ringing, and resonant while having energy that moves from note to note. These are reasons why this selection is a strong choice for an advanced Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.

One challenge bigger voices may face from time to time is that of keeping the tempo up and not allowing it to slow down as the song progresses. “The Breath of a Rose” has clear tempo markings that the singer is largely responsible for upholding, without help from the accompaniment. An example of this is found in mm. 9-11, where the singer is asked to take the tempo faster and more dramatically and then return to the initial tempo. Then, in m. 26, the singer is asked to take the tempo more slowly, returning to Tempo 1 in m. 33. This piece gives the singer the important opportunity to lead the accompanist, while being mindful of the tempo changes indicated in the music. Slowing down the tempo where it is not marked would detract from the beauty of each musical phrase. The study and performance of this piece will help the singer to grow both vocally as well as musically.
Title: “The Swing”

Composer: Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007)

Range: B3-F5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Freely produced; Rich, ringing, and resonant

CMP Focus: Singing Menotti’s Style

Commentary: “The Swing” is a lovely art song that will require the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to be able to use both extents of her range. In order to do this, the sound must be freely produced, not constricted, forced, or strained. This is especially true when singing the F5 found in m. 8, as the tempo of this piece is andante calmo, slow and calm. When using a sound that is freely produced, its resonance carries the sound over the accompaniment without excessive effort or strain. In part, this level of resonance has to do with the singer’s formant. According to Sunderberg, the singer’s formant “can be present in all sounds” (McKinney, 1994, p.133). The conditions needed to successfully produce the singer’s formant are:

- The lowering of the larynx
- The widening of the laryngeal ventricle
- The widening of the bottom of the vocal tract surrounding the laryngeal tube

The lowering and widening of larynx and vocal tract is most easily achieved in the “yawn” position. The yawn position is achieved by engaging the infralaryngeal muscles when they contract and pull down on the thyroid cartilage and hyoid bone (McKinney, 1994). As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano comes to understand the phenomena of resonance and the necessity of it, she will be able to effectively use her understanding to
carry the amount of sound she is making. This piece is an excellent exercise in the use of resonance as the sustained vocal lines written by Menotti entail the large and full sound produced by the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.

“The Swing” is a challenging contemporary art song. This song challenges the singer with meter and key changes, difficult intervals, and multiple accidentals, as seen in mm. 21-26. The music of Menotti will test the singer on every level of musicianship, promoting significant growth when studied and performed correctly. Songs such as “The Swing” are also of valuable use in preparation for the operatic roles such as “Madame Flora (Baba)” in The Medium as this song allows the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to “taste” the vocal lines of Menotti before learning an entire role.
Title: “Why do they shut me out of Heaven?”

Composer: Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Range: Bb3-Ab5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Consistently produced; Vibrant, dynamic, and alive sound

CMP Focus: Harmony

Commentary: This art song builds on the principles of advanced technique by providing challenges in chromaticism and pitch accuracy, as well the use of legato line and phrasing. Note that the introduction to this piece is rather short—after two chords, the singer must enter, at fortissimo and with authority, while singing the first line. This piece also has a change of mood in the middle, as the character is asking if the angels would give him/her another chance if he/she were in their position. The line “Could I forbid?” is wonderfully set by Copland, as the question is asked three times. Copland’s three settings of this line are somewhat similar yet distinctive enough that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be in full command technically so that she may portray this phrase dramatically in three different ways. On the word “loud” found m.4 and again at the end of the song in mm. 29-30, the dynamic marking is fortissimo. As this song must have a strong beginning it must also have a strong ending. In order to perform this song successfully, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must incorporate two of McKinney’s principles of vocal sound. The sound must be consistently produced, meaning that the support and correct breathing must stay at a high level throughout, and the sound must also be vibrant, dynamic and alive. Errors in either of these fundamental areas may cause the Dramatic
Mezzo-Soprano to sing in a way that is vocally unhealthy and ultimately detract from the beauty and character of this art song.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano who performs this piece must be a strong musician. The harmonies are especially difficult in places; an example of this is seen in mm. 5-6 on the text “But I can sing a little minor, timid as a bird.” The vocal line in these measures is full of accidentals starting with a series of whole steps to a minor third from B₄ to Db₅ in m. 5. In mm. 6-7, the vocal line again has a minor third from and then descends in perfect fourths Db₅ to Ab₄ to Eb₄ to Bb₃ in m.7. The piano accompaniment offers little support for the singer in these measures and throughout the piece, meaning that the singer must be able to sing the melody on her own, being sure that the intervals are sung accurately. These harmonic challenges serve to make the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano an even stronger musician, helping to prepare her for the difficult arias and concert works of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire.
Title: “Allerseelen”

Composer: Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Range: B3-F5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Freely produced; flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Singing at louder dynamic levels

Commentary: “Allerseelen” is a strong choice for transitioning the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano into the larger works of the Romantic Era in music. Composers from this time typically wrote for larger orchestras, and this is reflected in the accompaniment line of this beautiful art song. It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano produce a sound that is not forced or strained, but freely produced while being flexibly expressive. In past selections, the description “flexibly expressive” has been used when describing runs or melismas. However, as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano sings more repertoire from the Romantic Era, “flexibly expressive” can also be applied to singing the long legato lines with a sound that does not have a wobble characteristic of over-singing. In mm. 13-15 on the text “wie einst im Mai,” the music moves step-wise, from B4-C#5. As the sound begins to move into the upper-head register, the change must be made carefully and purposefully. The singer should make the decision to change registers beforehand, so they are not “caught” in this difficult transition point. This approach may make sustaining the C#5 at this particular transition point easier, while maintaining a degree of flexibility that will avoid a wobble.

As this piece reaches the climax in mm. 32-36, the vocal line moves up to F5. During these exciting measures, it can be easy to push the sound out while singing at
louder dynamic levels. This should be avoided at all times by the use of proper breathing and movement of air that keeps the sound spinning and vibrant. One of the prior focuses of this suggested course of study has been to give the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to sing at softer dynamic levels, at this point, it is especially important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano learn how to effectively control her sound at louder dynamic levels as well. The study and performance of “Allerseelen” will allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to grow both as a musician and artist.
Title: “Der Engel”

Composer: Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Range: A#3-E5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Rich, ringing, and resonant; energy flows smoothly from note to note

CMP Focus: Introduction to Wagnerian singing

Commentary: “Der Engel” is the first song in the Wesendonck-Lieder cycle. This piece has the long phrases as that you would expect from Wagner, at the same time having a surprisingly thinner orchestration than expected. These combined characteristics demand that the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano sing with a rich, ringing, and resonant tone while keeping the energy flowing smoothly from note to note. The rich, ringing, and resonant sound is one that is expected of any singer undertaking to sing music by Wagner, and this is particularly true for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. An example of the tone needed can be found at the first phrase of the vocal line in mm. 3-8. The phrase begins on B3 and then moves step-wise to E4. This is followed by an upward interval of a fourth to A4 and then step-wise motion downward to G4 and finally F4. The focus, here in the middle head register for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, should be on keeping the sound forward, yet still rich, ringing and resonant. At this point in the study, the need to place the sound forward has been addressed multiple times. The advanced Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should need only a reminder or prompting from herself or her teacher to do so. She should be aware of the need to place the sound forward to avoid a muffled or swallowed tone quality that will not be heard as easily.
The energy needed to sing “Der Engel” is associated with vocal endurance and longevity. The continual length of the phrase in the vocal line with the demand of a full sound will give the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano an opportunity to develop this kind of endurance. Endurance should not be equated with sound, as it does not always mean that a wall of sound has to be produced. In fact, in m. 19 in the vocal line, the marking reads “gesteigert, aber zart” (in a raised but gentle voice). It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano pace her singing in a way that builds vocal endurance while promoting vocal longevity. It is singing with this kind of drive that will help to ensure the sound continually has energy that moves from note to note.

Since the accompaniment of “Der Engel” is considerably thinner than what is found in many Wagner arias, “Der Engel” is an ideal choice for introducing the young Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to singing the works of Wagner. In this art song, the singer will have the opportunity to creating floating, legato lines without having to be concerned about singing too loudly or pushing. Through the practice and performance of this piece, the singer will begin to develop the stamina needed to sing the Wagnerian operas that are an important part of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire.
Title: “Verborgenheit”

Composer: Hugo Wolf  (1860-1903)

Range: D4-G5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Loud enough to be heard easily; vibrant, dynamic, and alive

CMP Focus: Sustained singing

Commentary: This piece challenges the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing in a way that is full yet sustained. For reasons of accuracy, it is necessary that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must not over-sing, but instead rely on producing a sound that is loud enough to be heard easily, while creating a sound that is vibrant and resonant to carry the sound. The vocal line begins with chromatic intervals, as seen in mm. 3-4. It is vital that the pitches be accurate from beginning so as to avoid intonation problems throughout. It is also important to remember that the support of the air by the abdominal muscles plays a crucial role in helping to ensure pitch accuracy. Singing the phrases of “Verborgenheit” without proper breath support may lead to a problematic performance overall. Another challenge in this song is the presence of octave leaps. What is unusual in this piece, however, is that the octave is a descending instead of ascending octave, as seen in m.30. As descending intervals are more difficult to sing accurately, singing with a sound that is supported and loud enough to be heard easily will provide a greater chance of pitch accuracy overall.

Another challenge for the singer of this piece is that of sustained singing. The phrases in this selection are of medium as well as longer length that will bring the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to the upper extents of the vocal range. These types of phrases
can be found in mm. 20-27 where the tessitura shifts from the middle register to the upper-head register as the voice ascends from an F4 to a C5 in m. 21, then from Eb5 to Gb5 in m. 23 and then finally G5 in m. 27 before descending once again. These kinds of phrases require not only the use of abdominal breathing, but the added use of back breathing as well, as previously discussed. The substantial muscles of the back add another dimension to support, just as lifting heavy objects with the use of back muscles does. The learning and performance of this song will give the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to grow technically while learning about sustained singing and how to continue training the back muscles in breathing to add support to the sound overall.
Title: “Von ewiger Liebe”

Composer: Johannes Brahms (1813-1897)

Range: A3-F#5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Rich, ringing, and resonant; loud enough to be heard easily

CMP Focus: Expressive singing

Commentary: One cannot help but think of beautiful vocal lines and richness of tone when studying or performing the works of Brahms. “Von ewiger Liebe” helps the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to transition into more advanced repertoire by demanding that the singer use advanced knowledge of technique that can help lead to a successful performance and allow for effective vocal growth. This art song challenges the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing at varied dynamic levels. As the song progresses, so does the feeling of urgency that is part of the story line. An example of this is found in mm. 45-68 as the vocal line begins on a mezzo piano and grows to a full forte to portraying the desperation of the text at this point in the song. To sing this effectively, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must let resonance carry the sound and make the pharynx and oral cavities to give space for the sound to resonate. This will help the sound to project and be loud enough to be heard easily as well. This approach will help to prevent over-singing.

This wonderful song by Brahms gives the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to focus on expressive singing by portraying three diverse characters contained within the text: a narrator, a man and a woman. As the story begins, a young man is walking his beloved home under the cover of night. The scene is dramatic, and the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano has the opportunity to reflect this level of drama throughout the
song. The piano accompaniment from mm. 45-83 is a beautiful example of word painting as it portrays the drama of the text and later creates feelings of urgency and anger in mm. 74-84. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must not only sing this passage with a fully supported forte, but she must also physically express the text through facial expression and gesture. The consistency of breath support and level of performance needed to sing this art song successfully allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano an opportunity to focus upon forward tone placement which, in this instance, should facilitate a sound that is rich, ringing and resonant. If sung correctly, the sound will carry. Equally important, the sound will remain rich and consistent with the characteristic sound for which the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is largely known.
Title: “Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?” from *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*

Composer: Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Range: Bb3 to G5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Energy flows smoothly from note to note; flexibly expressive

CMP Focus: Being lively on stage

Commentary: This art song selection is certainly an unconventional choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. However, this does not mean that it is without merit or should be overlooked. On the contrary, the singer will come to learn more about the voice and how to use varied aspects of it through the study of this wonderful piece. One of the most prominent things in the vocal line of this selection are the long melismas and quick tempos required of the singer, as seen in mm. 35-45. The vocal line lies well for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, which is helpful. The challenge is in maintaining a degree of vocal flexibility and keeping the sound focused and light enough, so that the tempos of the runs are not weighed down by the voice itself. This is one reason why the sound must also carry an energy that can move smoothly from note to note. To sing the runs well, the singer must have an advanced degree of technical precision. Singing this type of song is important for the overall health of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano as keeping flexibility and energy give a needed breadth to overall vocal progress.

As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is often given songs, roles, and characterizations that are at times dark and serious, it is important that she have the occasion to sing lighter and be lively on stage. The title of this piece translates as “Who devised this little song?” and describes a person who sees a lovely girl from afar. There is no reason for this
selection to be anything but playful and exuberant, as the character enjoys seeing the sights of nature and points them out to the girl. The mood of the song must be communicated from the time the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano steps on stage. The mood should be conveyed physically as well as emotionally, portraying feelings of happiness through facial expression. Rather than a serious and heavy story line that would be more typical of this voice type, the task in this performance is to show another side of the performer that is able to engage the audience and help them experience the joy of the song as well. By presenting this piece, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will add a variety of vocal colors and characterizations while adding to her own vocal abilities.
Title: “Aimons-nous”

Composer: Camille Saint-Säens (1835-1921)

Range: Db4 to Eb5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Freely produced; rich, ringing, and resonant

CMP Focus: Consistency between the middle and upper registers

Commentary: “Aimons-nous” is a strong choice for preparing the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing the gorgeous music of Saint-Säens. The singer is expected to use what has been learned in previous selections in order to effectively handle the chromaticism that is immediately present as well as the lush vocal line that calls for rich legato singing in each phrase. These musical characteristics will be heard again when the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano sings “Mon coeur s’ouvre à ta voix” from Samson et Dalila. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must continually resist the temptation to force the sound in the face of demanding yet beautiful vocal contours. This piece gives this voice type the possibility to truly blossom and sing at a consistent forte while still being mindful of the need to use musical phrasing. As has been previously stated, a forte or pianissimo for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano and other large voices will differ from a lighter voice type, such as the Soubrette Soprano or Coloratura Mezzo-Soprano. The singer should work sound that is freely produced and not constricted in any way. A focused resonant sound will carry best. When the voice is focused, it is important to remember that the sound is not literally being placed anywhere, but what the singer is feeling are vibratory sensations (McKinney, 1994). When singing this art song, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must rely on resonance to carry the sound rather than force. When the singer applies vocal
technique correctly, the needed resonance will happen naturally as the singer feels the correct vibration.

At this point in the study, the vocal registers should be even and the sound should be consistent from the chest range to the upper-head range. In mm. 38-39, the vocal line moves from Db5 to C5 to Eb5 down to F4. The advanced Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is fully capable of singing these notes with a full sound. While these notes are in a more difficult part of the range for this voice type, “Aimons-nous” provides an excellent opportunity to work on consistency between the middle and upper-head ranges of the voice.
Title: “Le dromadaire” from *Le Bestiaire*

Composer: Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Range: D4-C5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Consistently and freely produced

CMP Focus: Developing the middle range of the voice

Commentary: This piece allows for a great sense of drama within a short time frame. Given the thick orchestration of Poulenc’s composition, which is heard from the moment the introduction begins, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must concentrate on creating sound that is freely produced, not vocally strained from over-singing. Consistent production of vocal sound is also important so that the sound does not lose color. Singers have control over the color of their sound to a degree, depending on how they handle the movement of air and vocal cord closure during the oscillation cycle (Doscher, 1988). This selection has a dark, but beautiful color musically, and the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be careful to not over-darken her sound, which would prevent it from carrying well.

The challenge of this exciting art song is in the tessitura itself. The overall tessitura of this piece is difficult, as it lies primarily between D4-F4, this typically just after a transition point for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. The vocal line stays between D4 and F4 in mm. 11-15 before ascending to B4 and then C5 in m. 16. Because the melody of this song stays in the middle register, it presents an excellent chance to develop the middle voice. In this register, it may be easy for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to allow their sound to fall back, and this can be somewhat measured by understanding the relationship between the larynx and the soft palate, which impacts the
resonance tube. As the larynx falls, the soft palate lifts. (Doscher, 1988). It is important that the singer remember to raise the soft palate while singing this piece to add the needed brightness while still maintaining a rich, vibrant color. In turn, this approach will assist the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in making sure that the same richness of tone is present from the chest through the middle and head registers, which ultimately helps to unify the sound overall.
Title: “Le Spectre de la Rose” from *Les Nuits d’été*

Composer: Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Range: A3 to F5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Energy flows smoothly from note to note; Vibrant, dynamic, and alive

CMP Focus: Collaborating with the accompanist

Commentary: “Le Spectre de la Rose” or “The Ghost of the Rose” tells the story of a rose that is breathtakingly beautiful, so much as to make kings jealous. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano who sings this lovely song must have an advanced understanding of technique, particularly in the area of breathing. Energy must flow from note to note as well to ensure continual legato line. An interesting phrase occurs in mm. 22-24, where the vocal line reaches F5 at the high point of the phrase, it is important to keep the sound at a reasonable dynamic level. To do this effectively, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use a sound that is vibrant, dynamic and alive. This means that the sound must be focused, be supported enough so that there is a consistency in vibrato, dynamic in that when a sound is fully opened, or singing at an acceptable *forte*, the singing is very exciting to listen to. The sound comes alive through the use of vibrato and resonance. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use her understanding of advanced breathing principles and vocal technique to perform this song in a vocally healthy manner.

The performance challenge of this song is found in working with the accompanist to help ensure that the vocal line and accompaniment work together to fully reflect the text. An example of this is found in mm. 44-49 as the rose arrives in paradise. This is
portrayed both in the music and the vocal line as the accompaniment moves from playing arpeggiated chords to a C Major chord on the text “J’arrive du Paradis”. In this section, the height of the phase is on the word, “J’arrive”. Here the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is given the chance to sing in full voice on the E5 and through the rest of the phrase as the vocal line and accompaniment together communicate that moment when the beautiful rose has arrived in paradise. The accompanist/singer relationship is one of true collaboration, which must be understood by both performers. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano studies and then presents this piece, it will help her to mature in this important area.
Title: “Ouvre ton coeur”

Composer: Georges Bizet

Range: C#4-F#5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Flexibly expressive, consistently produced

CMP Focus: Unifying vocal registers

Commentary: “Ouvre ton coeur” is an exciting French art song with a Spanish flair written by Bizet. It is important that the sound be consistently produced. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano at this level must be technically in command and able to use the breath to produce a sound that is not weak, colorless, or devitalized (McKinney, 1994). Due to the Spanish style in which the song is written, there are a number of turns and short runs that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will encounter as she sings the piece. Runs and turns are meant to be sung cleanly, not muffled. Every note should be heard. Movement of air is important in this piece as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will need to move air quickly, to a much greater extent than found within similar selections recommended earlier in the curriculum. This is done by engaging the abdominal muscles fully when singing. While the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will typically sing more legato than coloratura, a degree of flexibility in the voice is needed. This flexibility helps to ensure vocal health by guarding against a wobble in the voice and further enables the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing a varied repertoire, such as the Alto solos found in Handel’s Messiah and music from other vocal genres.

The CMP focus of this selection is unifying the voice in the context of vocal health and longevity. While the range of “Ouvre ton coeur” is within the capacity of the
Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, it sits at the higher end of the spectrum for that which is considered appropriate repertoire for this voice type. This type of voice-leading gives the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to sustain the notes of E5, as seen in mm. 20-21, and F#5, as seen in m. 39. The F#5 in m. 39 has a dynamic marking of forte, which is typically easier for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to sing rather than a pianissimo. A forte will allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use her full sound, which is important when beginning to work with the upper register of the voice. Frequently when beginning vocal development, the chest register of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is rich, full, and strong while the head register is somewhat breathy. By singing “Ouvre ton coeur” the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will have the chance to focus upon the upper register of her voice so as to unify her lower and upper registers.
Title: “Reflets”

Composer: Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Range: C#4-F#5

Difficulty Level: Advanced

McKinney Principles: Energy flows smoothly from note to note; Pleasant to listen to

CMP Focus: Singing an effective pianissimo in the upper-head register

Commentary: This selection gives the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the opportunity to produce a sound that is energetic and pleasant to listen to, without having to be at a dynamic level of forte until the end of the piece. The accompaniment in this song is not as thick as other selections in this category of the study. Due to the fact that the vocal line is more exposed in general, a breathy tone would be more easily heard and negatively impact the study and performance of the piece overall. The singer should remember to be fully engaged and energetic while singing each phrase in order to avoid allowing the tone to become strident or raspy.

A unique challenge for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano awaits those who sing this beautiful art song. This happens towards the end of the piece in mm. 51-57. The dynamic marking is forte beginning on C4, but instead of continuing to crescendo in the following measures the dynamic level diminishes to a double pianissimo in mm. 56-57. This is unusual because the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is typically more accustomed to singing notes in the upper-range at a dynamic level of forte. However, the singer with this voice type is fully capable of singing this vocal line successfully by applying advanced principles of technique including breathing, movement of air, supporting the sound using both abdominal and back muscles, and allowing resonance to carry the sound by
engaging the nasal pharynx and oral cavities when singing. Lifting he soft palate to create the appropriate amount of space for the sound to resonate, will aid the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in singing this last note of the song in a way that is moving and effective.
OPERA AND ORATORIO ARIAS

As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is expected to be at an advanced level of technique when studying and performing these selections, it is also expected that each of McKinney’s principles of good vocal sound can be used interchangeably. Therefore, a specific focus on these principles has been removed from the aria entries for the remaining genres and replaced with “Preparatory Art Songs.” It is intended that art songs used in this curriculum guide provide specific preparation, but it should be noted that all selected art songs in this study are preparatory to arias as they help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano develop technically, vocally, and musically. The CMP focus is now one of developing characters and performance skills. Composers include Bach, Bizet, Donizetti, Elgar, Handel, Humperdinck, Menotti, Meyerbeer, Moore, Ponchielli, Saint-Säens, Strauss, Verdi, and Wagner.
Title: “Condotta el erra in ceppi” from *Il Trovatore*

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Range: A3-Bb5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Quella fiamma che m’accende” (Marcello), “Perduta ho la pace” (Verdi)

CMP Focus: Strengthening vocal endurance

Commentary: This aria tells a story that is horrific, unbelievable, and heartbreaking. It will take the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to the extent of her vocal and emotional capabilities. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will need to use her abilities for vocal endurance as first introduced in “Quella fiamma che m’accende” (Marcello), and communicating the drama of Verdi as presented in “Perduta ho la pace.” “Condotta el erra in ceppi” depicts Azucena telling Manrico a secret she has long kept buried. The story begins as she shares the memory of her mother being dragged in chains to be burned at the stake. She tried to follow her, but was not permitted to do so. In vain, her mother tried to give Azucena a blessing, but Azucena was not let through (Clark, 2007). Her mother cried out to Azucena to avenge her as she was dying, and it is this terrible memory that propels Azucena to the most horrific act in the story. In a terrible case of mistaken identity, Azucena throws an infant child into the fire, believing the baby to be the son of the count. She discovers, however, that it was her own son who died so cruelly at her own hand.

In order to portray the character of Azucena well, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano’s sound needs to be consistent and resonant from the beginning of the aria, while moving forward with physical and emotional intensity. An example of this kind of intensity is
found in mm. 47-81 as Azucena recalls her first memory of her mother being burned alive. During these measures, we hear vocal lines from the preceding aria for Azucena, “Stride la vampa!” The dynamic markings are *sotto voce e declamato* in m. 49, followed by a triple *pianissimo* in m. 52. The singer should remember to produce a consistent sound that is pleasant to listen to without breathiness around the tone while still maintaining resonance. This kind of approach will help to keep the intensity throughout.

Vocal endurance is vital to the successful performance of this difficult aria. Demanding a high level of technique because of the relentless vocal line, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will need to apply technique at a level that has not been seen previously in this curriculum guide. The grueling vocal line in this aria will take the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to the extremes of her range, from the A5 in m. 110 to the Bb5 following quickly in m. 112, and on to the repeated F5 in mm. 114-117. The vocal line descends into the middle and lower-chest registers in mm. 127-138 and then repeatedly from F4 through the remaining middle notes to A3, which is the last note in this exciting-vocal line. To effectively sing this section of the aria, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must employ the full support of the abdominal and back muscles, while singing at levels of *forte* but without over-singing, so that she still has enough energy to end the piece in a dramatic and exciting way. The sound must also be placed correctly placed in the front of the oral cavity, to allow for better articulation overall. Through the practice and performance of this piece, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will have the opportunity to learn more about her own vocal and dramatic limitations, and allow for vocally healthy extension of the range by combining breath support, resonance adjustment, and articulatory movements (McKinney, 1994).
Title: “O mio Fernando” from La Favorita

Composer: Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

Range: B3-A5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “O del mio dolce ardor” (Gluck)

CMP Focus: Singing a Cavatina

Commentary: This beautiful aria demonstrates another side of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Here the singer must use a tone that is light and flexible yet still have a color that is rich and dark. There are places in the vocal line that require a fermata before beginning a descending vocal line, as seen in mm. 69-70; there is also a quasi-recitative in mm. 85-88. For these reasons among others, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should apply what she learned about ornamentation when singing “O del mio dolce ardor” (Gluck). The continual dotted, yet legato, vocal lines challenge the singer to move the air in a way that will not disrupt the vocal line, yet still will make the rhythmic distinction needed. This may be achieved through slightly added abdominal support on the frequently occurring measures that contain dotted rhythms. Each dotted rhythm is important, for in the absence of extra support the line will lose distinction, causing the audience members to hear only legato lines, which is not what Donizetti’s intention. The singer is also given some degree of freedom at the fermata before the vocal line begins again at mm. 132-33. These measures should also be ornamented, allowing the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to continue developing this needed skill, building on what has been learned previously.

“An 18th-century opera term, the diminutive of Cavata, signifies a short Aria without da capo; it may occur as an independent piece or as an interpolation in a
recitative.” (Grove Music Online, para. 1). In this aria, the cavatina begins in mm. 135-161. Previous selections have included a cavatina, which is one reason this aria is of particular importance to this voice type—it allows for increased flexibility in the voice. It is suggested that the singer remember to apply technique correctly, while also making sure that the energy of the sound flows smoothly from note to note as learned in previous art song selections. This aria takes endurance and flexibility, and as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano continues to cultivate these areas of technique the voice will become stronger.
Title: “Voce di donna” from La Gioconda

Composer: Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886)

Range: A3-G5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Long Time Ago” (Copland), “Verborgenheit” (Wolf)

CMP Focus: Descending chromaticism

Commentary: This is a lovely aria where La Cieca, who is blind, has been saved by Alvise and Laura from a mob who mistakenly thought she was a witch. Deeply religious in nature, La Cieca sings this aria to thank Laura for saving her, saying that she has the voice of an angel, and blessing her. While the vocal line is indeed beautiful, this aria contains a variety of previously-seen challenges, including octave leaps, which first appeared in this curriculum guide in Copland’s “Long Time Ago,” and chromatic lines, which were seen in the advanced art song “Verborgenheit” by Wolf. The first octave leap in “Voce di donna” is found in m. 8 on the word “mie,” which the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano can use to her advantage. It is suggested that the singer use the “m” at the beginning of this word to encourage frontal resonance, helping the sound to be rich, ringing, and resonant by allowing for a buzzing of the lips. As the singer approaches the octave leap from below on the “m” she may open the mouth by dropping the jaw to create space for the mixed i: e on the second syllable, being careful that the sound is even. The bottom note should not be heavier than the top note and vice-versa. The same method may be applied to the octave leap found in m. 12 and for the following descending octave in m. 30, reversing the approach. Chromatic lines occur throughout the aria, such as in mm. 6 and 16. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano needs to remember to apply
what she has learned concerning intonation and breathing to negotiate these and other similar passages successfully.

One of the important musical elements of this aria is the chromaticism (Clark, 2007). In addition to the vocal and technical challenges discussed in previous paragraphs, this aria has difficult descending chromatic passages as found in mm. 35-36. The following vocal line in mm. 37-38 is very difficult in terms of intonation. It is not uncommon for descending pitches to be less accurate from time to time than ascending pitches. One reason for this might be that subconsciously, the singer may be using less support on a descending line. To counter this, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must continue to do what her technical training has taught her from the beginning, which is to support the tone, especially in descending passages, to help ensure accuracy. This is especially important in mm. 37-38 where the half-step and whole-step intervals are as close as they can be, so that the subtle distinction is heard in the vocal line.

Though descending chromatic lines are challenging, they must be mastered as a part of necessary growth in technical skill and overall solid musicianship. By learning and presenting this very expressive aria, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will make great strides in these areas.
**Title:** “Afraid, Am I Afraid?” from *The Medium*

**Composer:** Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007)

**Range:** B3-Ab5

**Preparatory Art Song(s):** “The Swing” (Menotti)

**CMP Focus:** Being vulnerable on stage

**Commentary:** This shocking aria from *The Medium* is an exercise in vocal and emotional intensity. As expected, the vocal line is very difficult rhythmically, and difficult intervals abound; in addition the aria requires the singer to work on the upper-head register of the voice. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano was allowed to “taste” the difficult vocal lines of Menotti when learning “The Swing”, she should not be taken by surprise by the level of musicianship and technical skill required in this aria. She will need to recall what was learned in her previous singing experience concerning technique, intonation, and accuracy to sing this aria well.

In general, the tessitura of this piece lies in the middle register; this is particularly true in mm. 4-44, and again at the end in mm. 98-106. During these passages, it can be easy to have breath in the tone if one is not careful about moving the air. This is one reason why it is important to sing with a sound that is freely produced. It is also important to note that mm. 98-106 are sung after the character of “Baba” has been laughing crazily in a way that leads to intense hysteria. Switching from laughing to singing can be difficult, but made much easier if each of these vocal variations is done with the proper amount of support from the abdominal wall. Abdominal wall articulation happens when the singer is *appoggiato*, allowing for an almost unnoticed bouncing action of these muscles (Miller, 2004).
The CMP focus of this aria is being vulnerable on stage. “Baba” is a woman who has led a deceitful life as a medium in order to survive. She is somewhat of a drunk and abuses those around her. It is difficult for many people to have any sort of empathy or feeling for a character such as this. Throughout the opera, she is cruel, vindictive, and cold. However, when she sings “Afraid, Am I Afraid” she becomes vulnerable as she tells how she is now afraid as she takes stock of her life and realizes her sins. “Baba” is also forced to confront a horrific past through memories in this aria, adding even more to her vulnerability, even if she is only exposed emotionally to herself. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, who begins to master the emotion of vulnerability through the performance of this aria, will add depth to her ability to perform roles that are emotionally intense. This is important for this voice type, as Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos are often asked to portray roles such as these.
Title: “Augusta, How Can You Turn Away?” from The Ballad of Baby Doe

Composer: Douglas Moore (1893-1969)

Range: B3-Ab5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Heart, we will forget him” (Copland), “The Breath of a Rose” (Still)

CMP Focus: Emotional maturity

Commentary: This is a vocally demanding, yet beautiful aria. As it is 20th century music the preparatory songs “Heart we will forget him” and “The Breath of a Rose” serve to give the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano a solid foundation concerning the difficult harmonies from this genre. They further help the vocalist carry her line independently of the accompaniment while keeping the tempo up, as this aria is rhythmically demanding throughout as well. The difficult rhythms learned in the preparatory art songs should help the singer to be at a level of musicianship where she may more easily understand the rhythmic complexities of this piece. An example of needing to be vocally independent can be found in the opening measures of the vocal line from mm. 6-9 as half-step intervals from C5 to B4 are immediately heard. The accompaniment has dissonance with the singer, playing a D5 against the C5; this means that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must have her note memorized as she begins to sing. The vocal line also sits slightly higher than other previous selections, as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is asked to sing F#5 and G5 several times as the aria progresses before the vocal challenge of mm. 79-83. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is asked to sing an Ab5 at a fortissimo level and then descend from the upper-head register to the middle register in m. 80. This is most effectively done by making sure that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano uses extra breath
support that keeps the sound consistently produced when moving through transition points. It is important that the singer not push the sound out at any point, as pushing is known to affect pitch and interval accuracy negatively.

“Augusta, How Can You Turn Away?” is a strong choice as an introduction to American Opera. First performed by the Central City Opera in Central City, Colorado in 1956, *The Ballad of Baby Doe* is known as one of the great standards of this repertoire. Just before the aria begins, Mama McCourt has gone to Augusta, and pled with her to help her husband, Horace Tabor, who has been unfaithful to her. Augusta dismisses Mama McCourt, but then finds herself remembering the joys and sorrows of being married to this man. The preparatory art song “Heart, we will forget him” (Copland) has both a technical and emotional application in this context. The text of “Heart, we will forget him” is about the emotional loss of someone who has been betrayed by another, just as in this aria. It is important to note that singers also develop emotionally as their voices mature vocally. By performing this aria, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will grow effectively in both of these important areas.
Title: “Hence Iris, Hence Away” from *Semele*

Composer: G. F. Handel (1685-1759)

Range: Bb3-Db5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Dopo la regata” (Rossini), “Toglietemi la vita ancor” (Scarlatti)

CMP Focus: Baroque ornamentation

Commentary: This fast-paced aria is one that is recommended by Mignon Dunn as suitable for young Dramatic Mezzo-Sopranos, among others. The technique needed to sing the melismas that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano acquired through the study and performance of “Toglietemi la vita ancor” and “Dopo la regata” will assist her as she studies this piece. As with other selections, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be ready to sing before the aria begins, as the first entrance of the vocal line is found in m. 2. The first melisma is seen in mm. 10-13 in a sequential sixteenth, eighth, then quarter note pattern. Vocal patterns may be taken and put into shorter vocalizes that are excellent for working with overall articulation and movement of the epigastrium (Miller, 2004). It is imperative that each note in each of the melismas is heard, through pulsing each individual note. Artificial pulsing or shaking that creates a false vibrato is to be avoided at all costs (Miller, 2004). This is because to deliberately shake the voice when singing is extremely unhealthy and counter-productive. Such vocal behavior may cause a wobble in the voice over time if it is not corrected. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will not only maintain, but also develop, greater vocal flexibility while increasing the energy of the sound through the practice and presentation of this piece.
When singing the *da capo*, in addition to singing what is written, the singer is supposed to add her own ornamentation that will work with the accompaniment. While studying this piece, a higher level of ornamentation is expected of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The ornamentation used in the *da capo* section should reflect the ability of the singer to effectively handle grace notes and other ornamentations such as melismas and *appoggiaturas*. The singer may want to rely more on traditional interpretation and given ornamentations when just beginning to perform them at an advanced level, instead of personal interpretation. However, a more complex ornamentation may be presented during the last measures of the aria, communicating to the audience that the aria itself has come to the end. By so doing, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano has the opportunity to apply what she has learned while building on her own vocal capabilities. This will strengthen the voice as the singer becomes a stronger performer through deeper understanding of correct period style and varied repertoire.
Title: “Hexenlied” from Hänsel und Gretel

Composer: Englebert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Range: D4-Bb5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Ah, mai non cessate” (Donaudy), “Vergebliches Ständchen” (Brahms), “Why do they shut me out of Heaven?” (Copland)

CMP Focus: Concentration; ending strong

Commentary: “Hexenlied” is the witch’s aria from Hänsel und Gretel, and is based on the beloved fairytale by the Brothers Grimm. Though short, it demands a pronounced amount of physical energy and vocal skill from the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The meter of the aria is cut time, and so there is a strong feeling of two throughout. “Ah mai non cessate” (Donaudy) has just as strong of a rhythmic pull, even though the meter of the art song is 3/4. It is helpful to sing this art song before undertaking “Hexenlied” so that the singer can begin to understand that the rhythm of the piece adds a great deal to the vocal line and character of the art song or aria being performed. It is critical that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano take short, yet full, breaths before singing each measure in this aria, being sure that energy is flowing from note to note despite the shorter phrases. The phrasing seen in mm. 6-8 is a model for the rest of the aria, as there is little variation from the pattern of dotted eighth notes followed by sixteenths. Should the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano fall behind the tempo in this aria, it will be very difficult to keep up the ensemble with the orchestra or accompanist, as it is more common for this piece to allow very little time between phrases, with the exception of 3 to 4 measures between verses. It is suggested that the singer plan for this by specifically rehearsing the breaths for each phrase. As this has been also suggested in some of the art song selections, it may well be
helpful again in this context. This approach will also enable the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to dance and move about the stage, as is usually required for the singer playing this character while singing this aria.

In “Hexenlied,” the witch tells Gretel about her life as a witch and what it is like to fly on her broomstick, especially at night. Here, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use her storytelling abilities as done in “Vergebliches Ständchen” (Brahms). Storytelling is not easy by any means, and it is crucial that the singer have a chance to develop this needed skill through the singing of art song before tackling arias such as this one. After the verse ends in m. 44, there is a short musical interlude for the orchestra from mm. 45-72. It is during these measures that concentration becomes a topmost priority. The singer must stay in character as she finishes her story, for she is asked to enter again in m. 75 to finish it on a D5 using the syllable “Prr”. While unusual, the opportunity created by using the “Prr” syllable is one that allows for the sound to come forward into the mask as the voice ascends to an F5 and finally to a Bb5 to end the aria. The Bb5 must be strong, just as the Ab5 needed to be in “Why do they shut me out of Heaven?” (Copland). This art song is highly recommended before studying “Hexenlied” for this very significant reason.

Inasmuch as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano applies what she is able to do in terms of her advanced technique, she will enjoy additional vocal power and maturity as she provides a strong ending that will please audiences each time this challenging aria is performed.
Title: “Ich habe keine gute Nächte” from *Elektra*

Composer: Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Range: Ab3-G5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Nocturne” (Britten), “Le Dromadaire” (Poulenc), “Allerseelen” (Strauss)

CMP Focus: Portraying dark characters in an opera

Commentary: “Ich habe keine gute Nächte” offers technical, musical, and emotional challenges that will require the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use her learned capabilities to the best of her ability. This aria will work all registers of the voice and demands the best in musicianship and artistry to effectively connect with the characters on stage as well as the audience. The singer has encountered similar challenges on smaller scales at previous points in this study. For example, in mm. 62-63, we see that the vocal line has a repeated Bb. In “Nocturne” the vocal line has several instances of a repeated C4. This type of singing requires mastery of using the chest register as well as the proper balance of chest and head registers to make sure that the sound maintains a rich, ringing, and resonant quality. “Le Bestiaire” provides a dark and beautiful mood in a relatively short period of time, which is the same texture the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano encounters in this aria, but on a much larger scale. The singing of “Allerseelen” introduces this voice type to the harmonies and vocal lines of Strauss. For these reasons, these songs have helped to prepare the singer for the technical challenges during the study and performance of this difficult piece.

The sound should be freely and consistently produced while singing at louder and softer dynamic levels, while also facing triplets, meter, and tempo changes within short
periods of time. An example of this is found in mm. 37-59 where the singer is asked to sing triplets periodically, while changing meters from 4/4 to 3/2 to 3/4, accelerating the tempo, and then returning to tempo primo. The vocal line of this aria also continually works both the upper and lower ends of the range. This piece is extremely challenging for a young singer, and it should not be undertaken until the singer in question has demonstrated that she is technically and emotionally mature and ready, not allowing herself to be carried away by dramatic interpretation to the point where the vocal health of the instrument would be sacrificed. It should be viewed as a study assignment and should only be sung for an audition in special circumstances (Clark, 2007).

The opera *Elektra* has a dark story line. In this aria, Klytemnästra is confronted by her daughter Elektra for plotting against and killing her husband with the help of her lover. Klytemnästra cannot sleep because of her guilt and has become weathered and haggard in appearance. This aria tells of her struggles and the nightmares she frequently faces. This kind of dramatic character is intense and takes a great deal of energy to portray. Even so, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must remain in control and still sing with correct technique as well as achieve high levels of musicality. As this aria is primarily an exercise as stated above, it provides the perfect opportunity for the singer to study and learn about what is necessary to portray a character such as this while learning how to integrate interpretation with vocal technique.
Title: “Weiche, Wotan!” from Das Rheingold

Composer: Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Range: B3-E5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Lasciatemi, morire!” (Monteverdi), “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (Schubert), “Der Engel” (Wagner)

CMP Focus: Introduction to singing Wagner arias

Commentary: This aria is an excellent introduction to singing Wagnerian arias while applying the technical and musical skills learned by singing “Lasciatemi morire!” (Monteverdi) and the understanding of text painting as learned in “Gretchen am Spinnrade” (Schubert). The concept of a flowing, yet dramatic, vocal line as learned in “Der Engel” (Wagner) is also of paramount importance as a key to singing this beautiful aria effectively. The aria is somewhat short in comparison to other Wagnerian arias, yet still contains the musical and vocal challenges, as well as the drama, of Wagner’s other works. Because the tessitura of this aria lies in the lower register for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, it also allows for continued work on transition points, which is important because of the need to produce a consistent and full sound. Here the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano portrays the character of Erda, the Earth Mother, who has come to warn Wotan to give the ring away, to yield it and to flee its curse. As Erda begins to talk about her three daughters we see an interesting change in mood in the music beginning in mm. 28-30 with the text “Drei der Töchter urerschaffne Gebar mein Schoss” (The three daughters conceived before time bore my womb). Though Erda has been warning Wotan about what could happen should he keep the ring, here the text as reflected in the music shows a moment of motherly tenderness as Erda talks of her three daughters. The Dramatic
Mezzo-Soprano has an important dramatic opportunity here to reflect the change in mood by changing the vocal dynamic of this aria during these measures. However, while this change is important to the drama of the piece, it needs to be noted that the energy level that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is using must remain consistent during this section in order to keep the sound vibrant and alive. It important here to support the air and to move it effectively; failure to do so may result in a sound that is hoarse because of the great amount of pressure that would be placed on the vocal folds. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be very careful about this, as it is easy when singing the arias of Wagner to want to sing in full voice at all times, which can result in over-singing without realizing it, as previously discussed. When the sound is too loud and resembles yelling, it loses color, and becomes strident and flat. It is important to remember to produce a sound that is consistent as well as rich, ringing, and resonant.
**Title:** “Ah! Mon fils!” from *Le prophète*

**Composer:** Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864)

**Range:** B#3-A#5

**Preparatory Art Song(s):** “Les Berceaux” (Fauré), “J’ai pleuré en rêve” (Hüe)

**CMP Focus:** Singing a strong A#5 (Bb)

**Commentary:** This is a touching aria that tells the story of a man who was forced to choose between his mother, Fidès, and Bertha, the one he loves. He ultimately chooses his mother, and the aria begins as Fidès expresses how overwhelmed she is by his choice.

The feeling of being overwhelmed is depicted in the vocal line in mm. 7-16 with the use of dotted rhythms and short phrasing. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano first encounters continual dotted rhythms in this study when working on Fauré’s “Les Berceaux,” making this art song a logical choice to serve as a preparatory song to singing “Ah! mon fils!” As the aria progresses, the mood turns to one of incredible thankfulness and joy as Fidès looks to up to heaven, asking for blessings upon the head of her son. This is seen in music using text painting as the vocal line ascends upward on the phrase “que vers le ciel” (that unto the sky) in mm. 33-34. The dotted rhythms are continually present here and throughout the rest of the aria, so it is vital that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano rely on her technique to get her through these difficult passages using principles learned when working on pitch and interval accuracy. The more the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano works on and builds her skills in these areas, the more her musicianship will continually grow stronger, which is needed to sing the arias that are specific to this distinctive voice type.

The clear vocal challenge of this piece is found in mm. 34-35 as the vocal line ascends even higher to an A#5 (Bb). It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano
sing through the A# to the end of the phrase, so this is not a note that should be merely touched upon as can be done when vocalizing, but needs to be sung while sustained at a reasonable *forte* instead. This is one reason why “J’ai pleuré en rêve” (Hüe) is important to sing as a preparatory art song for this aria, because through singing “J’ai pleuré en rêve,” the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano works on extending her range in the upper-head register. This needed extension is something that now must be used and solidified in turn, through the singing of “Ah! mon fils!” While singing the A#5 fully is the primary CMP focus for this aria, it is also necessary that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano pace herself, because in the one of the last statements in the aria, the vocal line has a G5 at suggested *fortissimo* in m. 45 which is followed by a *rallentando* on descending intervals. These vocally challenging passages help to keep the vocal line exciting and help to make sure that the voice develops a strong upper-register in a vocally healthy manner.
Title: “L’amour est un oiseau rebelle” (Habanera) from Carmen

Composer: Gorges Bizet (1838-1875)

Range: D4-F5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “Quel galant m’est comparable?” (Ravel), “Ouvre ton coeur” (Bizet)

CMP Focus: Movement while singing

Commentary: The Habanera from Carmen is likely one of the world’s most well-known opera melodies. Carmen’s iconic aria about love requires the vocal flexibility as worked on in “Quel galant m’est comparable?” (Ravel) and the Spanish flair and style as learned in “Ouvre ton coeur” (Bizet). The technical tasks of this aria include pitch and interval accuracy as well as triplets and octave jumps. The vocal line alternates between each of these things as seen from the beginning in mm. 8-12. The pattern seen here in the vocal line repeats itself throughout the aria. Therefore, it is compulsory that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano use varied aspects of vocal technique on an extremely advanced level. She must utilize what she has studied through art songs, especially the ones that are preparatory to this aria, in order to provide a vocal sound that can capture the characteristics of this celebrated melody when singing for audiences. Vocal flexibility causes progression that is beneficial for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano because it contributes to vocal longevity. Vocal longevity is an essential part of a career for a Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, whether it be in singing, teaching, or both. By singing this aria with the correct technique, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano increases the likelihood of both vocal health and longevity.
Carmen is a gypsy, and during the opera, she must be able to move as one. While the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano may be more accustomed to standing and singing with an occasional gesture, it is important that she master this principle as a part of CMP. This aria is absolutely flirtatious as Carmen causes the men that she interacts with to fall in love with her. The singer should not be afraid to embrace this with tasteful movements that help to convey the ability that Carmen seemingly has of getting men to notice her.

Regina Resnik, who is a noted singer, master teacher, and performer explains that Carmen is meant to be free, and not a caged bird (Clark, 2007). As all the men are attracted to her in this scene with the exception of Don José, Carmen makes it her goal to conquer him (Clark, 2007). These emotions need to be portrayed through movement if the character of Carmen is to be believed. The more the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano works on movement while singing, the less awkward and more fluid the movements themselves will become. As a result, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will also become more comfortable with herself on stage and further develop as a performer.
**Title:** “Mon coeur s’ouvre à ta voix” from *Samson et Dalila*

**Composer:** Camille Saint-Saëns

**Range:** Bb3-Gb5

**Preparatory Art Song(s):** “La spectre de la rose” (Berlioz), “Aimons-nous” (Saint-Saëns)

**CMP Focus:** Portraying the character of Dalila

**Commentary:** “Mon coeur s’ouvre à ta voix” tells the story of Dalia’s desire for Samson through the seductively beautiful music of Saint-Saëns. “Le spectre de la rose” and “Aimons-nous” are the ideal art song selections to provide the introductory musical training to sing this aria, because of the lush and expansive vocal lines (Le spectre de la Rose) and the intricate harmonies including descending half-steps (Aimons-nous). An example of descending half-steps followed by a luxurious and spacious vocal line is found in mm. 29-44 as the attempted seduction of Samson begins. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must make sure that this section is perfectly accurate, even though descending half-steps are notoriously difficult. The added interval of a step in m. 29 and the exposed vocal line in this section further add to this important challenge. It is suggested that the singer learn this section slowly, to help ensure needed accuracy, and only move on to the following sections once these measures are completely mastered. As Dalila pleads with Samson to respond to her, the vocal line opens up in mm. 37-41 with the arc of the phrase occurring on Gb5. As the singer maintains the legato, she must also remember to prepare for the Gb5 by approaching it from the given Ab4, being sure to open the mouth to provide enough space in the oral cavity for the sound to maintain a rich, ringing, and
resonant tone. Being mindful of these points will help to create a successful performance of this aria.

Often associated with seduction and betrayal, some may think understanding the character Dalila is very straightforward. However, it is important to note that one of the most telling parts of her character is revealed in the music after this aria. As noted by opera professor and director Sandra Bernhard, Dalila is seducing Samson in verse 2 as a means to trap him, but ends up being seduced in this same verse. This portrays the fact that there is something between them that Dalila has not experienced before (Clark, 2007). The music following the aria is joined by a reaction in nature that includes storms, lightening, and destruction (Clark, 2007). The music in these measures can also be viewed as the beginning of the destruction of Dalila and a foreshadowing of the destruction of the Philistines as well. In fact, Samson eventually destroys Dalila and his captors. This side of Dalila is one that has been uncovered, showing the weaknesses and insecurities of an outwardly confident and seductive woman. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano becomes aware of and understands these aspects of her character, it will serve to create an additional dimension and depth to this notorious individual that will enrich the performance and give the audience a more complete and effective performance of this aria.
Title: “Erbarme dich, mein Gott!” from *St. Matthew Passion*

Composer: J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Range: B3-E5

Preparatory Art Song(s) “Come Ready And See Me” (Hundley) “Quella fiamma che m’accende” (Marcello)

CMP Focus: Accuracy in singing intricate intervals

Commentary: “Erbarme dich, mein Gott” is from the *St. Matthew Passion* by Bach. This aria has a range from D4 to E5. The most immediate and important challenge of this aria is found in the length of the phrases and in the movement of air while singing, as seen in “Come Ready And See Me” (Hundley), and “Quella fiamma che m’accende” (Marcello). In “Erbarme dich, mein Gott”, the phrases are long and relentless. While the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is given ample time to breathe between the sections of this aria, more often than not, she is required to breath between measures. In mm. 18-19, the singer is given a total of six counts before the next phrase begins. It is important for the singer to not wait to take the breath, but to begin inhalation after completing the previous phrase, so that she is ready to enter in m. 19. Also, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano needs to be mindful of the amount of sound being used at the beginning of each phrase, being careful to distribute the amount of air used in exhalation evenly. A suggestion to help with the breathing in this piece would be for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to go through this aria phrase by phrase and practice the breathing needed for each line. This should be done before learning the aria musically, as the more breathing is practiced, the more natural it will become.
There is also the added challenge of correctly singing the intricate intervals that Bach provides in his writing. This is an aria with a repetitive text, and while the notes of the aria may seem repetitive they are not as similar as one may think. The text is set over and again to vocal lines that sound similar, but in fact have small interval changes from one line to the next. An example of this is found in mm. 36-38. In these measures, the text “Erbarme dich” is set first beginning on E4 to D#4, followed by a half-step and then a minor third going from F#4 to A4. When the text is repeated in m. 38, it begins on a B4 and goes to E4, an interval of a fifth. As there are many passages similar to this one in this piece, it is imperative that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano takes the time to learn all intervals correctly before singing this aria as a whole. Learning to sing the intricate intervals of Bach correctly will allow the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to grow as an artist while strengthening overall musicianship.
Title: “Liber scriptus” from *Requiem*

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Range: Bb3-Ab5

Preparatory Art Song(s): “In solitaria stanza” (Verdi)

CMP Focus: Use of dynamic contrast in Verdi arias

Commentary: “Liber scriptus” is one of the more emotionally intense arias for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in the oratorio repertoire. As part of the “Dies irae” in the Verdi *Requiem*, it is an aria of warning, one that foretells the judgment that is going to fall upon the world at the end of days when the books are opened. The vocal line and the orchestra reflect this mood of impending doom. For this aria, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must sing with an unrelenting intense energy and volume of sound that cannot be accomplished without an advanced application of technique, particularly breath support. In the opening measures of the vocal line, the singer enters exposed, as there is no accompaniment underneath, on a repeated A4 with a slide up to E5 at the end of the phrase. The pitches must be absolutely accurate here so as not to take away from the authoritative manner that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must sing this opening line. There are also several times that the singer is asked to enter in the higher part of the range, as seen on the text “Judex” in m. 31 on F5 at a *fortissimo*. It is important to note here that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should modify the vowel to an “ah” to give enough space in the oral cavity to be able to sing this entrance. This approach, when used with proper breath support, will allow the singer to perform this passage effectively. This is an aria that also calls for vocal endurance. In mm. 54-60, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must begin singing a repetitive dotted rhythm while keeping a *forte* dynamic level. This pattern
continues until m. 60, where the singer must sing an Ab5 at *fortissimo* on the text “judicetur.” The same approach recommended for “Judex” in m. 31 in the previous paragraph should also be used here. In addition, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must remember to open her mouth to allow for enough space for the vowel to resonate while using abdominal and back muscles for support to sing this passage in a way that is vocally healthy. In m. 61, the dynamic level changes to *pianissimo*, but the singer cannot use less intensity. In fact, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use more intensity through to the end of the piece to sing it effectively.

While singing “In solitaria stanza,” the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano was introduced to Verdi art song and style. This art song also served to prepare the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to face the challenges of the dynamic contrasts that Verdi wrote in his music. Concerning the dynamic contrast of Verdi, Dolora Zajick explains:

> You have to be able to do real dynamic contrast; it’s not like Wagner where everything is flowing. It’s almost a combination of different styles because Verdi uses contrast a lot something almost spoken and then something very lyrical and then he patches it together in dramatic way. So, it requires an unusual level of vocal technique and style to be able to handle. (Personal communication, D. Zajick, June 28, 2012).

“Liber scriptus” is an ideal choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to learn how to sing and communicate the dynamic contrasts of Verdi correctly. From the varied dynamic levels mentioned above, along with the emotional intensity and advanced technique that is needed, this aria provides the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano the right opportunity to apply what she has learned and continues to learn as the voice develops.
By keeping with intensity and applying advanced principles of vocal technique, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will be able to sing this aria in a way that is dramatically realistic while promoting vocal health and longevity.
Title: “O Lord Almighty, God of Israel” The Apostles

Composer: Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Range: B3-Eb5

Preparatory Art Song(s) “Dolente immagine di Fille mia” (Bellini)

CMP Focus: Dramatic inflection while singing oratorio arias

Commentary: “The Apostles” is a modern oratorio that was first performed in 1903. “O Lord Almighty, God of Israel” is written for contralto, but well within a comfortable singing range for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. This aria gives the singer the chance to build upon musical skills learned as well as another opportunity to sing descending vocal lines with dotted rhythms. This was done previously while singing “Dolente immagine di Fille mia” (Bellini) during the beginning level of this suggested course of study. An example of this type of vocal line is found in mm. 38-40 as the line descends in a whole step from C#5 to B4 and then uses a dotted rhythm on A4 in m. 39. At this point in the study, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should be able to sing these types of lines with greater ability than in beginning or intermediate selections. This is especially important for this aria, as dotted rhythms occur frequently in the vocal line. A point of interest about this aria is how Elgar uses modern harmonies and a thicker orchestration while still maintaining somewhat of a Baroque character commonly heard in the music of oratorio.

An important part of oratorio singing is dramatic interpretation that can be communicated through vocal inflection. This aria is one of pleading, of personal introspection. This, in and of itself, is dramatic but in a more subtle way than what one might think. More often than not, a dramatic sound is equated with a large sound. However, this aria invites the singer to be dramatic in while portraying an attitude that
humble, as she is pleading with the Lord. This type of pleading can be found in mm. 44-50 on the text “Help me, desolate woman, which have no helper but Thee, no helper but Thee.” One who is humble and pleading would not necessarily use a larger sound or forceful color in her voice, but instead, would be dramatic while using an undemanding tone. Therefore, a sound that is focused and resonant, while using a lesser dynamic level such as *mezzo-forte* is suggested for passages such as these in this aria. This approach will allow the dramatic inflection to have great impact through performance and communication with the audience while providing the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano with a strong introduction to using dramatic inflection in oratorio singing.
CONCERT WORKS

Concert Works are recommended only for the advanced singer. At this point, the song and aria entry format is replaced by general commentary for each work, including the areas of vocal technique and approach, musicianship, and a particular focus on interpretation and performance.
Mon Dieu! J’étais une bergère (Liszt 1811-1886)

“Mon Dieu! J’étais une bergère” composed by Franz Liszt is a dramatic concert aria for Mezzo-Soprano that depicts Joan of Arc burning at the stake. This aria will give the singer the opportunity to reinforce vocal technique as the voice continues to grow and mature through performance experience. The challenges of this piece for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano lie in musicality and dramatic interpretation.

Though this aria is dramatic by nature, the vocal line and the accompaniment use lyrical lines and long phrases. As the scene begins, Joan of Arc is praying to the Lord. In m. 9, the triplets should be sung evenly to keep the feeling of legato in the line. The vocal line begins to rise in mm. 30-31 on the text “Je vais monter sur le bûcher” (I go up on to the flame) as Joan of Arc begins to reconcile herself to her death. A dynamic level of mezzo-forte is suggested for the singer for this line as her attitude should be one of acceptance.

The vocal line changes shape in m. 85 as dotted rhythms are introduced when Joan of Arc says “Et pourtant j’ai sauvé la France” (Most importantly, I have saved France). The use of the dotted rhythms symbolize a militant feel as Joan of Arc led the French army to victory before being condemned to die. The dynamic markings in this section begin at pianissimo in m. 85, grow to a forte at m. 90, and return to pianissimo at m. 94. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be sensitive to this, as the phrase “j’ai sauvé la France” (I have saved France) appears several times in this section. When something is repeated, it is usually for emphasis. In order to understand the importance of this repetition and effectively communicate it to the audience, different dynamic levels must be used.
As death comes closer, the use of dotted sixteenth notes at a dynamic level of *fortissimo* occurs in m. 105. The text in this section tells of how Joan of Arc requests her banner of victory and blesses the names of Jesus Christ and the Mother Mary. The vocal line rises higher still, and the singer will need to be prepared to sing F5 several times as well as a G5 in m. 107. As the tempo gets faster and the mood becomes more triumphant, it can be easy to rush the tempo. The singer should trust her technique at this point in the study and remain focused on musicality and effective communication with the audience. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano communicates with the audience, she will find that vocal technique has become second-nature to her.

Near the end of the aria in mm. 143-147, the vocal line will reach the highest note in the aria, A5 as seen in m. 145 on the text “la France” (to France). These are the dying words of Joan of Arc. They need to be communicated with passion and sincerity. Also in m. 145, the singer may take the option to sing an F5 instead of an A5 if needed. It is important to note that the singer should always think of a vocal option for notes that lie at the extreme upper or lower ends of the range, so that he or she is prepared to do so. It is better to sing an ending high note strongly, rather than risk making a mistake vocally by pushing the sound out and causing the voice to crack. This will help to ensure that the dramatic interpretation of the aria is not interrupted or lessened by a mistake that can be avoided with appropriate preparation.

“Mon Dieu! J’étais une bergère” is indeed a beautiful aria that is an ideal concert choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. This aria gives the singer the opportunity to learn to trust her vocal technique and musical instincts. As she becomes more comfortable in both of these areas, her ability to communicate emotionally with the
audience will increase, and she will be able to give a convincing and memorable performance.
In The Beginning (Copland 1900-1990)

“In The Beginning” is a modern day telling of the biblical account of the creation. Written for SATB chorus and Mezzo-Soprano solo, the a cappella choral piece provides many challenges for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. As the narrator of this work, she must be strong both in vocal technique and musicianship.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in mm. 1-13 of the piece, and is responsible for keeping up the tempo of the work while singing a difficult vocal line which continues throughout the piece. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will have to make several entrances on her Transition Points. An example of this is found in m. 74 when the singer enters on an Eb5 on the text “And.” An entrance on a transition point can be difficult, and the singer must prepare for this by making sure that the sound has enough space to resonate by keeping the mouth open while to allow the sound to be bright and forward. Further, it is suggested that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano breathe through the nose and mouth together, which will raise the soft palate, effectively creating the proper space and the needed placement for this and other similar entrances in this piece.

As has been previously discussed, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano has to have a strong upper-register, which she will use when singing mm. 113-116 as she sings an F#5 on the text “So.” This is an obvious example of a place where not only breath support is needed to sing the marked dynamic level of forte, but vowel modification is also needed. Singing a pure [o] in these measures would be vocally unhealthy because there is not enough space to create the sound. Instead, the more open [ɔ] vowel is suggested. Using this vowel will help to avoid the possible tension that can come from pushing the sound out or singing through a space that is too narrow.
One of the greatest challenges of this piece is found in mm. 132-152. Here, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters again on an F♯5. This section is in contrast to the first entrance of the vocal line. When the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters in m.1, she must use a strong and declamatory sound as she begins to tell the story of the creation. However, beginning in m. 134, the singer is given a tempo marking of Allegro with the written directions of light and rhythmically, almost breathlessly. (Boosey and Hawkes, p. 17). Here, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be careful not to use the full weight of her sound. However, she must still use correct breath support, as it takes just as much support to sing softly as it does to sing at louder dynamic markings. This passage provides a wonderful opportunity for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to showcase the lighter aspects of her sound. She must sing the pitches accurately, as a mistake in intonation during this passage could potentially affect the rest of the performance negatively.

The next entrance for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano occurs in m. 211 at the point in the story where the earth is to bring forth each creature after his own kind. In this section, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must use another shade of coloring in her voice while singing, as the marking at the beginning of the section is p (pianissimo) dolce (m. 211). In m. 219, the singer has an interval of a ninth in the vocal line, from E4-F5. The singer should approach this interval by placing a slight accent on the E4 and then opening the mouth wide enough to give space for the F5. Using this approach will help ensure that this difficult passage is sung in a manner that is vocally healthy.

Towards the end of the piece, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters in m. 290, after the choir has sung from mm. 240-289. In this section, the singer is given some freedom to
deliver the vocal line as she wishes, according to her own dramatic interpretation. However, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be mindful of the fact that the choir is singing at the same time, and should be careful to keep the piece in time as a whole. Also in this section, the singer is largely responsible for creating the needed drama to keep the piece moving forward through to the end. Here, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is giving an account of what the Lord has given for food, from herb-yielding seeds to plants that will nourish all who live on the earth. Dramatic interpretation and communication with the audience is necessary for effective performing, and a reason why vocal technique must be second-nature when performing as well. Because a concert setting does not offer staging or an assigned character the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must create her own character and gestures, just as she has to do when singing art songs.

Finally, as the biblical account of the creation is coming to a close and man is about to be created and become a living soul, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters (m. 350). She explains to the audience that this is the record of the creation of everything that was created before it grew, and that the Lord has not caused it to rain because there is not a man yet created to till the ground. The tempo in section is usually somewhat faster, and there is a large amount of text as well. It is essential to use clear articulation of consonants in this passage by placing the sound forward so that the text may be understood by the audience.

“In The Beginning” is a wonderful and exciting choral piece with a challenging Mezzo-Soprano solo. This piece allows the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to grow in the areas of vocal technique, dramatic expression, and musicianship.
**Alto Rhapsody** (Brahms 1833-1897)

Perhaps one of the most beautiful works of the concert repertoire is the Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*. A work for Mezzo-Soprano and four-part men’s chorus, it tells the story of a man who has hardened his heart towards mankind. A plea is made to the Father of Love to renew his heart and open his eyes to the beauty of life. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be able to sing this work with a consistent sound that is lyrical and beautiful while confronting difficult intervals in the vocal line and complex rhythms.

As in “Von ewiger Liebe” by Brahms, *Alto Rhapsody* begins with a narrator telling the story of one who goes out under the cover of night. However, in *Alto Rhapsody*, the man is not going out to meet another but instead is thinking upon the darkness and hatred that has overtaken his soul. The singer is responsible for creating this mood as she enters after the fermata in m. 17. The vocal line begins *a cappella* in m. 18 on the text “Aber abseits wer ist’s?” (But who is that apart?). It is significant that there is no accompaniment underneath the singer, because the vocal line is then left as unprotected as the man who has gone out into the night on his own. The sound should not be at a full *forte* at the beginning of the piece but *mezzo-forte* instead.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is often called upon to sing long phrases with legato lines. An example of this is found in mm. 41-46 on the text “die Öde verschliegt ihn” (The waste land engulfs him). The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano needs move the air correctly, distributing it over the entire phrase.

In mm. 57-69, the tessitura of the vocal line rises higher than seen thus far in the piece, from D5-F5, with Gb5 as the highest note of these measures. This section in particular, will require the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use the strong high register that is
present in her voice. At this point in vocal development, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should have the registers unified so that the voice is “one column of sound” (D. Zajick, personal communication, June 28, 2012). This occurs when the singer matures vocally and with the application of correct technique. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must remember not to push when accessing the top register, but instead to use resonance to carry the sound. Correct placement here will help to achieve the greatest amount of resonance in this instance.

The vocal line continues in like manner for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano until m. 116 with the entrance of the male chorus. The mode changes from minor to major as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters. There is also a slight rhythmic change in the accompaniment, which introduces the use of constant triplets juxtaposed against the quarter notes in the vocal line. This change in rhythm is very important; the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must resist the temptation to rush at this point. She must also sing at a dynamic level that allows for the attention of the audience to be on both her and the male chorus, as they are working together as an ensemble.

Beginning in m. 152 the tempo moves faster as a form of text-painting at the text, “Erquicke sein Herz” (Then quicken his heart). The use of triplets in the accompaniment is still present, and the beautiful harmonies of the solo vocal line and male chorus remain to the end of the piece in m. 175. The challenge for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is to be vocally consistent, while being sensitive dynamically and communicating as a performer. There is a slight accelerando beginning in m. 152 until the end of the piece in m. 175. At this point the main character ends his plea to the Father of Love.
*Alto Rhapsody* is an excellent repertoire choice for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. The opportunity to sing with and as part of an ensemble is important in continuing to develop in a balanced manner. The vocal lines challenge the singer to use consistent vocal production while singing beautiful legato lines. *Alto Rhapsody* is an important piece that will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to further develop skills in artistry and vocal technique.
Kindertotenlieder (Mahler 1860-1911)

*Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children) is one of the most well-known song cycles of the genre. Mahler carefully chose the poems written by Rückert to be included in this composition (Andreica, 2012). *Kindertotenlieder* contains five movements that portray the emotions of grief and loss. While this work may be thought of as intense and torrential, it is important to note that each of the poems in the cycle speak about both light and darkness, in hopes of eternal life instead of despair and death. (Andreica, 2012). *Kindertotenlieder* is not for the faint of heart. It is a considerable undertaking that requires the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to use her knowledge concerning vocal technique, musicianship, and interpretation at an advanced level to perform to the high standard that this challenging song cycle demands. (Though this work is scored for orchestra, please note that the author’s remarks regarding the vocal line and accompaniment refer to a piano and vocal reduction score).
I. Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n (Now the sun will rise as brightly)

The first movement in the cycle has a quiet and hollow beginning, and requires great concentration for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, as she will use softer dynamic levels throughout. An example of this kind of quiet intensity is seen first in the accompaniment followed by the vocal line beginning in m. 5. The dynamic level begins at a piano and becomes softer still, going to a pianissimo in m. 11. Softer dynamic levels continue as the accompaniment in mm. 17-25 creates a ghostly pattern of two quarter notes on the pitch G6 in the left hand in mm. 21-22. In m. 48, the singer needs to change the dynamic level on the text “Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken” (You must not keep the night inside you). Here, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should allow the voice to open up more, continuing to grow as the text refers to going towards the eternal light and not allowing the heart to sink. The singer must then bring the voice down to a pianissimo in m. 68 as she conveys how a light has gone out in her heart. In m. 74, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano needs to be aware of the notes that ask her to take Tempo 1 and not to slow down this tempo. The end of this first movement affords another opening for the voice to increase dynamically, as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is asked to end the piece on a sforzando in mm. 82-83 on the word “Welt” (world). Singing this movement will help the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano to further understand how to use different colors and dynamic levels when communicating the text to the audience.
II. Nun seh’ ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen
(Now I see well why with such dark flames)

The second movement in the cycle stays at a relatively softer dynamic level but also asks for a measure of sweetness in the tone produced by the singer as seen by the *dolce* (sweetly) marking found in m. 15 The song depicts the mother recalling the sparkling eyes of her children and that if she were more aware, perhaps she could have prepared herself for their departing. The song involves chromaticism in the vocal line combined with subtle key changes (mm. 29, 40, and 61 respectively). The vocal line will challenge the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano in the areas of pitch accuracy and intonation. While these essential components of musicianship have been addressed since the beginning of this suggested course of study, it is still an area that must be watched carefully, even at the advanced level. The vocal line of this movement is exposed in several places, such as mm. 15-19 and mm. 43-45. Inaccuracies of pitch in these measures would be easily heard should they occur during study or in performance.

One of the most stirring passages in this movement can be heard in mm. 38-45 on the text “Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten sagen: Wir möchten nah dir bleiben gerne” (You would have told me with your brilliance we would have gladly stayed near you). The text tells of the mother’s longing for her children to be with her. She is imaging that they would stay with her if they were able to. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must allow resonance to carry the sound and not over-sing. The balance of accompanist and singer must also be equal in these measures in order to effectively communicate the text to the audience.
The final passage of this movement occurs in mm. 60-67. The vocal line in these measures is beautifully set, with text-painting at the climax of the phrase occurring on E5 on the word “Sterne” (Star). As the marking here is once again *pianissimo*, it is suggested that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano place the sound forward, making the last section easier to sing while vocally reflecting the text and providing a calm, yet powerful ending to this movement.
III. Wenn dein Mütterlein (When your little Mother)

“When dein Mütterlein” introduces a darker tone and music than what has been seen in the previous movements of this cycle. The text is about the mother who misses her daughter. She still sees her daughter in the doorways of her home as she remembers how her child used to enter so joyously. The tessitura of the vocal line lies considerably lower in this movement as well. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must effectively access the lower-chest register to sing this piece in a way that is vocally healthy. As the singer begins on a G3 with her first entrance in m. 8, she needs to breathe deeply, allowing the chest cavity to open. This approach gives the sound enough space to resonate, without forcing the sound. Forcing the sound out in this register will cause the vocal production to be abrasive and lose the natural beauty of the voice.

We begin to see a gradual rise in the tessitura of the vocal line beginning in m. 23 on the text “näher nach der Schwelle, dort, dort, wo würde dein Gesichten sein” (nearer to the threshold, there, where your dear face would be”). The line rises from a B4 to C4, then to Db5 and finally to F5 at a forte dynamic level in m. 25. The singer needs to use her knowledge of transferring vocal registers so as not to strain the vocal folds in this passage, as the line goes through the transition point of Db5-Eb5 in m. 24. In m. 40, the tessitura returns to the lower register when the vocal line again descends to G3.

It is interesting to note that that the deliberate slowing of the tempo at the text “erloschner Freudenshein” (You extinguish the gleam of joy) gives this phrase more time to be emphasized. The singer needs to be ready to communicate this sentiment at the end of the song by allowing the sound to be full, accenting each note in the step-wise line from G3-C4, while ending this movement and preparing to sing the next.
IV. Oft denk’ ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen
(Often I think that they have only stepped out)

The fourth movement of Kindertotenlieder may be the easiest of all the movements to sing while presenting further challenges in performance and communication. As the vocal line begins in m. 6, the text portrays how the mother sometimes thinks that when the children are not home, that they have only gone out for a while and will return soon. The sadness of this thought is communicated in the accompaniment by the use of C minor. In m. 15, the mode changes to C Major as the mother says: “Der Tag ist schön! O sei nicht bang! Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.” (The day is beautiful! O do not be afraid! They are only taking a long walk). The singer needs to understand this and subtly communicate differences in mood to the audience using personal interpretation and expression.

In m. 24 the mode returns to C minor. The mother further insists “Ja wohl” (yes definitely) in her mind that the children have only gone out. Once again she comforts herself by stating that she should not be afraid and that it is a beautiful day. Many times, insistence may be equated with volume, especially with the dramatic voice. The challenge for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is to sing this section in a way that is vocally insistent but not necessarily at a fortissimo.

A mood of urgency is developing in the final verse of the song, in m. 47. Again she repeats herself, saying that the children are lost or simply do not want to come home. She thinks that as she goes out on this beautiful day she will catch up to her children, who are walking in the hills. As the mother begins to talk of the hills in m. 60, the mode changes back again to Major, and will remain there until the song ends in m. 72. As seen
in the last measures of the vocal line in the third movement, “Wenn dein Mütterlein,” a
*ritard* is again asked of the singer during mm. 69-70. This section is an example of why
the mastering of vocal technique is of utmost importance before the undertaking of
*Kindertotenlieder*. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must trust her technique so that she can
focus the beauty and irony of the song itself. The focus on emotional portrayal and
communication at this instance will prepare her for the intensity of the emotions that
surface in the coming fifth and final movement of this work, “In diesem Wetter!”
V. In diesem Wetter! (In this Weather!)

“In diesem Wetter!” is a storm scene, and the most challenging in terms of musicianship in this cycle as difficult intervals and rhythms abound. One of the most interesting aspects of this song is how well the vocal line and accompaniment fit together. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must take the time to collaborate with her accompanist, to perform this piece successfully.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must start counting immediately as the introduction to this movement begins, even though she does not enter until m. 17. When the singer enters on a D4, she needs to be careful that the sound is placed in the middle-head register, to allow for the space needed to produce a sound that is vocally healthy. As the song begins, the mother is saying that in this storm, she would never have let her children out. The children were carried out and she had no say in the matter. Though the dynamic marking begins at pianissimo as it has in the other movements of this song cycle, it is apparent that pianissimo in this context carries more weight of sound than it has in previous selections. This is because the orchestration is exceptionally thick, and the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano will have difficulty being heard if she were to sing a true pianissimo. Instead, it is suggested that the singer use a dynamic level that is closer to a mezzo-forte so as to be able to be heard. This is especially true for vocal passages that generally stay in the middle-head register, as seen in mm. 17-22 and 28-34 respectively.

The intensity of the movement continues as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters again in m. 51 on the same text as m. 17 “In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus” (In this weather, in this cruel storm). However, this time, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is asked to sing a fortissimo in contrast to her first entrance of pianissimo. This symbolizes the
mounting rage that is occurring on the part of the mother. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must remember to not be carried away by her emotions at this point. She must be sure to apply correct principles of vocal technique to help ensure that the sound is not pushed or forced out due to lack of control in terms of what she may be feeling.

In m. 59, the text reads: “ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen; das ist nun nicht zu besorgen” (I was worried that they would die the next day—but now that is of no concern). The momentary change in mood here is marked once again at pianissimo, signifying that the mood has gone momentarily from anger to introspection, and this must be reflected vocally as well as in the physical performance. It is important that the full range of emotions in this movement is communicated to the audience as the drama of this piece unfolds.

Beginning in m. 79, rage on the part of the mother pours out at the climax of the storm. The mother still insists that she did not send the children out, but that they were forcibly taken and there was nothing that she could do. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must apply her knowledge of correct vocal technique to sing this section well, while remaining dramatically effective. The singer is at a dynamic of level of fortissimo for this entire section, while encountering multiple register changes, as she has throughout the piece. This is where vocal longevity, as created by the correct pacing of oneself, is extremely important. The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano cannot afford to lose stamina here, as to do so would have an adverse effect on the presentation of the piece overall.

As the climax of the storm passes in mm. 91-92, a startling change is heard in mm. 93-96 as the G6 sounds once again in the left hand, recalling the first movement “Nun will die Sonn’ so hell aufgeh’n” (Now the sun will rise as brightly). As the A6 is
heard in the accompaniment, the music suddenly becomes calmer, yet troubled, indicating that the storm is past. In m. 100, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano enters again on “In diesem Wetter!”, but must do so with an entirely different emotional portrayal. As she repeats the text that has been used throughout the song, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must change the character of her singing, which has previously been somewhat staccato, to fully legato in order to reflect the change of mood from one of anger to one of serenity. The moment of acceptance of the tragic loss of the children for the mother comes in mm. 115-124 on the text “von keinem Sturm erschrecket, von Gottes Hand bedekket, sie ruh’n sie ruh’n wie in der Mutter Haus.” (They are frightened by no storm, and are covered by the hand of God. They rest, they rest as they did in their mother’s house). It is important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano remain emotionally engaged as the accompaniment plays lovely and tranquil lines of music from m. 126 through the end of the piece in m. 139.

*Kindertotenlieder* is a work of incomparable depth and complexity. As heard in the hollow opening of the first movement to the storm that the singer is caught in during the last movement, the final acceptance of loss will take the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano through a range of emotions while demanding the highest levels of vocal technique, musicianship, and performance. As the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano rises to the vocal and dramatic challenges presented by the learning and performance of *Kindertotenlieder*, she will grow exponentially as an artist and musician.
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Vocal Health and Repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano: A Suggested Course of Study demonstrates, in a very practical way, the link between vocal health and repertoire. The use of McKinney’s eight principles of Good Vocal Sound and the principle of CMP work together to provide a point of reference and a map as the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano begins to develop vocally and artistically. When the teacher and student can hear McKinney’s principles, such as a consistent sound and a rich, ringing, and resonant tone that has vocal flexibility, this is an indication that the voice is growing in a way that is vocally healthy. The absence of these should be a red flag for any teacher or student of voice, as this is an indication that something may be wrong vocally. The principle of CMP as it applies to the voice studio is one of individuality that allows for the tracking of the performance abilities of the student and allows the teacher to make art song and aria assignments to include performance aspects that need to be studied and worked on by the student. This approach helps the student to grow simultaneously in the areas of vocal technique, musicianship, and performance.

It is clear that vocalizing is especially important for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano. Vocalizing must be done purposefully and carefully each day, as an important part of vocal technique. A singer who neglects to vocalize or does not do so correctly, consistently, or both is inviting vocal problems.
The singing of art songs is paramount to vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. While song assignments will vary depending on the needs and abilities of each student, the repertoire of certain composers works particularly well for this rare voice type. Bellini and Rossini are recommended when working to increase flexibility. It is also helpful to assign students songs written by composers such as Verdi and Wagner, so that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, age 18-30, can have a foundation that will prepare her vocally for the larger operatic works of these noted composers.

The Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must be a vocal technician. She must understand for herself how her voice works and how to apply correct principles of vocal technique in order to be vocally healthy. The voice teacher of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano must also be patient and methodical with this voice type when teaching principles of vocal technique. The teacher should make sure the student can successfully demonstrate and apply each principle taught. Areas of concentration in vocal technique for this voice type include breathing, support, and movement of air. Breathing is foundational to singing; it is the correct support and movement of air to avoid unnecessary strain being placed on the vocal folds. It is also important that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano understands the vocal dangers involved with pushing the sound out to make the sound bigger overall. Pushing the voice may have a negative impact on vocal health and decrease vocal longevity.

Singing roles, arias, or art songs that are too heavy for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano before she is technically ready for them can have an adverse effect on vocal health and longevity no matter what her chronological age. Age is not necessarily a factor in the vocal capabilities of any one singer; however, you cannot make the exception of
one the general rule for all. Instead, voice teachers should watch the vocal development of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano carefully, making sure that the vocal technique, musicianship, and performance ability are at level equal to that of the aria or art songs being assigned.

In terms of operatic arias, the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano should sing lighter works such as those by Handel and Donizetti to develop flexibility in the voice, but should do so within the capabilities of her natural voice. She should not try to sing with a lighter voice because she may think that is what is expected. It is reasonable that what may be a pianissimo for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is different than what that same dynamic level would be for the Light Lyric Mezzo-Soprano and other voice types. Singing lighter arias that require flexibility will add to the genres of music that the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is able to sing.

Opera and oratorio arias as well as concert works and particularly song cycles should be reserved for the advanced Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano repertoire. Advanced singers are able to sing the larger works of the repertoire while applying solid principles of vocal technique and having deeper understanding of the emotional and performance aspects in singing these larger works.

The singing of art songs is preparatory to arias and is also an effective way to promote vocal health. McKinney’s principles of Good Vocal Sound can serve as a guideline to determine whether or not the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano is developing technically and vocally in a way that is strong and beneficial for the student. The principle of CMP should be employed from the beginning of vocal studies as it is important that the singer grow both vocally and artistically. Each student is an individual
and will therefore progress differently than another student. The teacher and student need to take the time to make sure that, at a minimum, correct principles of vocal technique are being applied by the student before the more demanding works of this repertoire are undertaken.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

As this curriculum guide is the among the first of its kind focusing solely on the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano, further research concerning appropriate vocal literature for this voice type is certainly recommended. Possible topics for subsequent curriculum guides include the art songs, arias, and concert works by Eastern European composers including Dvořák, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky. A curriculum guide focusing only on the vocal literature from the Romantic Era in music would also be very useful for those in this Fach, such as the art songs and arias of Verdi.

Additional recommendations include the development of curriculum guides for all major dramatic voice types including the Spinto Soprano, Dramatic Soprano, Dramatic Tenor, Heroic Tenor, and Dramatic Bass. Finally, a curriculum guide concerning song cycles of Wagner with an emphasis on proper vocal technique as preparation to effectively sing the arias and roles in the Ring Cycle has considerable potential to be of great use to all dramatic voice types.

**Conclusion**

*Vocal Health and Repertoire for the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano: A Suggested Course of Study* has combined the theories of those who are well known in the field of vocal pedagogy with those who are renowned in the fields of opera and vocal performance to provide well-rounded insight as to the challenges in repertoire
assignments, technique, and vocal development for those who are or teach the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano voice. The result is a guide that is useful to both teachers and students who wish to better understand how to approach and teach the rare voice type of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano.
# APPENDIX

## SOURCES USED FOR ART SONGS AND ARIAS

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