Many Modes of Mezzos:
Witches, Bitches, and Little Boy

An Honors Thesis Recital

by

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I want to thank Dr. Mei Zhong for the countless hours of lessons over the past four years. I also want to thank her for never giving up on me and for constantly pushing me to test my abilities. Thank you for being the best voice teacher I could have ever hoped for, I will never forget the past four years under your tutelage, and can honestly say that I have you to thank for my voice sound today.

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Abstract:

This Senior Honors Thesis Recital is a culmination of four years of voice lessons. It is an example of the different emotions, roles, and languages a mezzo-soprano is able to sing. It is an example of what I have learned and accomplished through voice lessons, choir, and music classes at Ball State. You will hear Italian, French, German, and English songs, along with many different genres and emotions in the CD of my recital. Each piece has lyrics provided and a translation for the songs in French, German, and Italian, located in the written rationale.
Mezzos, for those who do not know, are a specific type of soprano, or high female voice type. Mezzos, in general, have a warm or dark, rich quality to their voice in comparison to sopranos and coloratura sopranos who tend to have light, flute-like sound to their voice. This honors recital was all about the mezzo voice and songs both written specifically for a mezzo to sing, and songs that frequently fall to mezzos to sing.

Preparing my pieces for the recital was a time consuming task. Some of the pieces, such as the “At the Zoo” trilogy were from my freshman year of voice lessons. Other pieces were from as recent as the fall semester of my senior year. When choosing pieces, my voice teacher, Mei Zhong, and I had to keep in mind a need for a diversity in languages, music genres and songs that would fit my voice. When I say that the song choices had to fit my voice, I do not just mean that the specific range of the notes had to sound good when I sang them. I mean that the tone quality of my voice had to fit the song and I had to be able to convey the emotions and visualize the scene of the piece. Each piece required a large amount of time to memorize, and had to be practiced with different accompanists over the years. This happened up until my senior year, during which I started practicing with the accompanist (pianist) who would be playing with me during my recital. Each piece was chosen from my repertoire to fulfill a specific task: to add another style, to add another language, or to add another role a mezzo sings. Each song has a different story to tell, and while some of the stories may be similar, none of them is completely the same. The songs mainly differ in language and genre, although most of the composers are different as well.

There are four different languages demonstrated in my recital: Italian, French, German, and English. The Italian songs consist of: “Ombra cara amorosa”, “Ombra Mai Fu”, and “Se a te d’intorno scherza”. The French section is comprised of two arias: “Connais-tu le
pays” and “L’amour est un oiseau rebelle”, better known as Habanera. The songs exemplifying German mezzo literature are: “Verborgenheit” and “Ich Liebe Dich”. The English can be divided into several categories: art songs, contemporary, jazz, and aria. The “At the Zoo” trilogy is considered an art song, and is recently composed, comparatively speaking, so may even be considered contemporary. The Ned Rorem pieces, “To a Young Girl” and “Early in the Morning”, are very much contemporary, or 20th century pieces. The jazz or swing pieces consist of “Speak Low” and “Someone to Watch Over Me”. The final piece is “I Have Dreamt”, which is an aria from Wuthering Heights.

My first song, “Ombra cara amorosa”, is from the opera Antigona. In a previous scene, Antigona’s two brothers fight one another, resulting in the death of Polynice. This song, an aria, is Antigona mourning for her brother. She sings of the peace he will enjoy “Tu tranquilla godrai”, and mourns that death has not come for her yet “Ahi! che non giunge ancor per me la morte.” This song exemplifies a mezzo’s role as a tragic maiden in Italian arias.

Ombra Cara Amorosa from Antigona – Tommaso Tretta

Ombra cara amorosa, ah! Perché mai
Tu corri al tuo riposo ed io qui resto?
Tu tranquilla godrai
Nelle sedi beate ove non giunge
Né sdegno né dolor, dove ricopre
Ogni cura mortale eterno obblio,
Né più rammenterai
Fra gl’amlessi parterni il pianto mio
Né questo di dolor soggiorno infesto!
Io resto sempre a piangere
Dove mi guida ognor
D’uno in un altro orror
La cruda sorte.
E a terminar le lagrime,
Pietosa al mio dolor,
Ahi! Che non giunge ancor
Per me la morte.

Shade dear loving, ah, why ever
you run to your rest and I here remain?
You, peaceful, will enjoy
In the dwellings blessed where not arrives
Neither anger nor pain, where covers again
Every care mortal eternal forgetfulness.
Nor more will you remember
amid the embraces paternal, weeping mine
Nor this of grief dwelling harmful.
I stay always to weep
where me leads every hour
from one into another horror
The cruel fate.
And to end the tears,
Merciful to my sorrow,
Alas! That not arrives yet
For me the death.

The second song, “Ombra Mai Fu”, is a recitative and aria from Handel’s opera Serse. A recitative is the speech-like portion at the beginning of the song, it tells what is happening,
while the aria is the languid, flowing second half that tells what the character is feeling. In this particular piece, the singer is King Serse. He is singing of his love for a tree, which in this case symbolizes women. This is a great example of a “pants role”. A “pants role” is a part in which a woman plays a man. A castrati would originally have performed this “pants role”, a practice that very rarely exists today. The role can also be sung by a countertenor, a voice part that is very difficult to find.

_Ombra mai fu from Serse_ –George Frideric Handel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frondi tenere e belle</th>
<th>Tender and beautiful branches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Del mio platano amato,</td>
<td>Of my beloved plain tree,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per voi ripienda il fato.</td>
<td>For you fate brightly shines;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuoni, lampi e procelle</td>
<td>Thunder, lightning and storms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non l’oltraggio mai la cara pace.</td>
<td>Never disturb your majestic calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Né giunga a progranarvi austro rapace!</td>
<td>Rapacious winds do not reach out to defile you!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ombra mai fu
Di vegetabile
Cara ed amabile
Soave più.

“Se a te d’intorno scherza” is the third piece in my program and is the last Italian piece I sang. In this piece, the gender role is not as distinct, but there is a distinctly different emotional role. This song is a joyful one, talking of love, love for one person, but like most songs of love in Italian, it seems there is a “but” to this happiness, for something must occur before the singer can truly be happy. In summary, the singer is saying, “Please accept the message of longing and love that I am sending to you.”

_Se a te d’intorno scherza_ - Gaetano Donizetti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Se a te d’intorno scherza</th>
<th>If to you around plays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un nuovo zeffiretto,</td>
<td>a new little breeze,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non resti, oh Dio, negletto!</td>
<td>Not may it remain, oh God, neglected!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’accogli: è un mio sospir.</td>
<td>Accept it; it is my sigh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quel zeffiro respira</td>
<td>That breeze breathes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin che ti giunga al core;</td>
<td>Until that you it reaches at the heart;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>È un messager d’amore,</td>
<td>it is a messenger of love,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di gioia, e di martir.</td>
<td>Of joy, and of martyrdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Connais-tu le pays” was chosen for my recital partly because it added a French element, and partly because the role is actually written for a mezzo to sing. In this opera, the character Mignon has been taken from her homeland, which she doesn’t remember, and has been traveling. In this song, she is singing about a dream she had, causing her emotions to go from wondering if such a place could really exist, to a sadness and longing to go this land and live there for the rest of her life.

*Connais-tu le pays from Mignon* - Ambroise Thomas

Do you know the land where the orange blossoms?

The country of the fruits of gold and roses red,

Where the breeze is softer and lighter than a bird,

Where in any season bees buzz,

Where smiles and shines, like a blessing from God,

An eternal spring under a sky always blue!

Alas! That can not I follow you

To this happy shore where the fate exiled me.

There! That is where I want to live,

Love, love and die!

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“Verborgenheit”, or “Seclusion”, is another sad song about pain and loss, a theme you will see repeated throughout mezzo music. This song was chosen for its range, which allows my voice to really shine, and the language, German, of which I wished to sing at least two songs.

*Verborgenheit* - Hugo Wolf

Oh world, let me be!

Entice me not with gifts of love

Let hits heart in solitude have

Your bliss, your pain!
Was ich traure, weiß ich nicht
Es ist unbekanntes Wehe;
Immerdar durch Tränen sehe
Ich der Sonne liebes Licht.

Oft bin ich mir kaum bewußt,
Und die helle Freude zückt,
Durch die Schwere, so mich drücket
Wonniglich in meiner Brust.

Oft, es ist unbekanntes Wehe;
Immerdar durch Tränen sehe
Ich der Sonne liebes Licht.

Laß, o Welt, o laß mich sein!
Locket nicht mit Liebesgaben,
Laßt dies Herz alleine haben
Seine Wonne, seine Pein!

What I mourn, I know not.
It is an unknown pain;
Forever through tears shall I see
The sun’d love-light.

Often, I am scarcely conscious
And the bright joys break
Through the pain, thus pressing
Delightfully into my breast.

Oh world, let me be!
Entice me not with gifts of love
Let his heart in solitude have
Your bliss, your pain!

"Ich Liebe Dich" is a song of love. There is no sadness or death in this song, only an all-consuming love. This created a nice break from the sadness and longing in the past few pieces and created a contrast with the other German piece. This contrast allowed me to demonstrate my ability to express different emotions in the same language.

**Ich Liebe Dich - Edvard Grieg**

Du mein Gedanke, du mein Sein und Werden!
Du meines Herzens erste Seligkeit!
Ich liebe dich vie nichts auf dieser Erden,
Ich liebe dich in Zeit und Ewigkeit!

Du mein Gedanke, du mein Sein und Werden!
Du meines Herzens erste Seligkeit!
Ich liebe dich vie nichts auf dieser Erden,
Ich liebe dich in Zeit und Ewigkeit!

Ich denke dein, kann stets nur deine denken,
Nur deinem Glück ist dieses Herz geweiht,
Wi Gott auch mag des Lebens Schicksal lenken,
Ich liebe dich is Zeit und Ewigkeit!

My thoughts of thoughts, my very utmost being.
Thou only art my heart’s felicity!
I love thee more than all else under heaven.
I love but thee through all eternity!

For thee alone my ev’ry thought is burning
Happy my heart if good I bring to thee!
Where’re God wills my path in life be turning
I love but thee through all eternity!

The next two pieces were the beginning of the second half of my recital. They represent the contemporary/20th century part of my English songs. They are a contrast in several ways to the previous pieces. They tell a story, but from an androgynous point of view; there is no discernable gender, and in “Early in the Morning”, the story is more about how this person’s day went than some overwhelming emotion they are experiencing.

**To A Young Girl - Ned Rorem**

My dear, my dear I know
More than another
What makes your heart beat so

**Early In The Morning - Ned Rorem**

Early in the morning
Of a lovely summer day
As they lowered the bright awning
Not even your own mother
Can know it as I know
Who break my heart for her
When the wild thought
That she denies
And has forgot
Set all her thoughts a stir
And glitter in her eyes.

At the outdoor café
I was breakfasting on croissants
And café aulait
Under greenery like scenery
Rue Francois Premier.

They were hosing the hot pavement
With a dash of flashing spray
And a smell of summer showers
When the dust is drenched away.
Under greenery like scenery,
Rue Francois Premier.

I was twenty and a lover,
And is Paradise to stay
Very early in the morning
Of a lovely summer day.

The next three pieces were chosen for their lightness and comic relief. With so many songs heavy in emotion and foreign language, it was as much a break for me to sing these songs as it was for the audience to hear them. They were also chosen for their point of view, since they are sung from the child’s perspective, a viewpoint previously unheard in my songs.

*At the Zoo: -Arthur Walter Kramer*

**I. The Porcupine**
It must be hard for you porcupine
To dress when the day begins
I’m glad there aren’t any clothes of mine
A needin’ so many pins.

But when I’ve been saucy and horrid, too.
Or up to some naughty prank
If I could only wear clothes like you
I’d be awfully hard to spank.

**II. The Snake**
A snake’s the funniest thing I know.
So dreadfully incomplete
Without any arms where hands can grow
And not any legs for feet.

But I wish I could crawl on the ground that way
Or shin up the apple trees.
And not have nusrise get mad and say
There’s holes in my stockin’ knees!

**III. The Giraffe**
You thin giraffe, if I was you
I’d have a hard time I spec’
For nusrise would make a great to do
A washing my face and neck
But when the jam and the cookie jar
Are hit on the highest shelf
I wished I was as tall as you creatures are
Instead of my tiny self
The next two songs were chosen for their ranges, which were suited perfectly for my voice, allowing me to sing with my full tone quality. They were also chosen for their genre, jazz/swing/Broadway, which until then had been unexplored in my recital. Choosing these pieces helped me to round out the different genres of music I was performing, further showing the different styles I had learned over the past four years.

**Speak Low from One Touch of Venus**
Kurt Weill and Ogden Nash
Speak low when you speak love
Our summer day withers away
Too soon, too soon

Speak low when you speak love
Our moment is swift like ships adrift.
We’re swept apart, too soon

Speak low, darling speak low
Love is a spark, lost in the dark
Too soon, too soon.

I feel wherever I go that tomorrow is near
Tomorrow is here and always too soon
Time is so old and love so brief
Love is pure gold and time a thief.

We’re late, darling, we’re late
The curtain descends, everything ends
Too soon, too soon.

I wait, darling I wait
Will you speak low to me
Speak love to me and soon.

**Someone to Watch Over Me**
George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin
There’s a saying old, says that love is blind
Still we’re often told “Seek and ye shall find.”
So I’m going to seek a certain lad I’ve had, in mind.
Looking ev’rywhere, haven’t found him yet.
It’s the big affair I can not forget.
Only man I ever think of with regret.
I’d like to add his initial to my monogram
Ah me, where is the shepherd for this lost lamb.

There’s a somebody I’m longing to see.
I hope that he, turns out to be
Someone who’ll watch over me.

I’m a little lamb who’s lost in the wood
I know I could, always be good
To one who’ll watch over me
Although he may not be the man some girls think of as handsome
To my heart he carries the key.
Won’t you tell him please to put on some speed
Follow my lead, Oh how I need
Someone to watch over me.

“I Have Dreamt” is the final English song of my recital and the only English aria I sang. This song follows the pattern of sorrow that you have begun to see prevails in mezzo song literature. The song does end on a happy note though, which made it more fun for me to sing. The contrast of the triplet vs. duple rhythms in the piano and voice parts added a level of
difficulty to the piece, which give the singer the opportunity to show they can sing a smooth
erhythmic line against the rhythm of the accompaniment.

**I Have Dreamt from Wuthering Heights- Bernard Herrmann**
I have dreamt in my life dreams
That have stayed with me forever
And have gone through and through me
Like wine through water
And have altered the color of my mind

I dreamt once that I was in heav’n
And that heav’n did not seem to be my home
And I broke my heart with weeping
To see the heath again
And the angels flung me back to earth,
And Wuthering Heights
Where I awoke
Sobbing, sobbing, for joy.

My final song was the icing on the cake, so to speak: a French aria, showing my skills in singing in a foreign language, which was full of triplets in the voice part versus the duplets in the piano, once more showing my skills at rhythms. The emotions of the piece further showed my abilities at singing, with the main emotion being seduction. This song was also written specifically for a mezzo-soprano to sing, and further showed a different role that a mezzo is often asked to sing.

**L’amour est un oiseau rebelle (Habanera) from Carmen- Georges Bizet**
L’amour est un oiseau rebelle
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
Et c’est bien en vain qu’on l’appelle,
S’il lui convient de refuser.
   Rien n’y fait, menace ou prière,

L’un parle bien, l’autre se tait,
E ce’st l’autre que je préfère
Il n’a rien dit; mais il me plait.

   L’amour est enfant de Bohème,
   Il n’a jamais, jamais connu de loi,
   Si tu ne m’aime pas, je t’aime;
   Si je t’aime, prends garde à toi!
   Mais se je t’aime, si je t’aime, prends garde à toi!

Love is a rebellious bird
That nothing can tame
It is really in vain that we call it
If it suits it to refuse
Nothing will call it, threats, menace, or pleading.
One speaks well, the other remains silent
And it’s the other that I prefer
He said nothing, but he pleases me.

Love is a child of Boheme.
He’s never known, known any laws
If you don’t love me, I love you
If I love you, watch yourself.
If I love you, I love you, watch yourself.
L’oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
Battit de l’aile et s’envola;
L’amour est loin, tu peux l’attendre;
Tu ne l’attends plus, il est là!
Tout autour de toi vite, vite,
Il vient, s’en va, puis il revient;
Tu crouis le tenir, il t’évite;
Tu crouis l’éviter, il te tient!

The bird that you were thinking to catch
Flapped it’s wings and flew away
Love is far away and you can wait for it
You wait for it no longer, it is there!
All around you, quickly, quickly.
If comes, it goes away, then it returns
You think it to hold, it you avoids.
You think it to avoid, it you holds!

Overall, my pieces were chosen because they were already in my repertoire and demonstrated the different roles a mezzo can play, the different languages in which they can sing, and the different emotions they can be asked to portray. They did all this, as well as demonstrating my mastery of these songs and therefore my growth and accomplishment through four years of lessons.