More Than Meets the Eye: The Senior Recital

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Across the country, in schools of music large and small, senior music majors perform senior recitals as they prepare to graduate. This practice is not even questioned by these students, especially if they are preparing for a performance career. The senior recital is the culmination of the music major's four years of college, and it is the chance to show the faculty what knowledge the student has gained from all of the instruction he or she has received. This was no different from the approach I took to my own senior recital, with one exception: I was preparing my recital and my honors thesis at the same time.

My decision to combine these two projects did not change my initial preparation for the recital in any way. There are certain unwritten guidelines for a voice recital that must be followed: there should be a broad representation of different periods of music, generally arranged in chronological order; the pieces should allow the student to demonstrate his or her strengths in style and range; and the languages of Italian, German, French and English should all be represented. I had begun selecting my music even before my junior recital had taken place; there were some pieces that I came across which struck me as perfect for my final recital at Ball State. Others were harder to come by; I found myself lacking in certain historical periods and looking at specific composers to try and fill in the gaps. Once the final program was selected, I knew that I had a good recital, one which allowed me to showcase my abilities, and also one that contained an entertaining group of pieces. What I did not know, however, was that I had created for myself the means for writing an interesting thesis.

I chose to research the pieces that I would be singing and write extensive program notes which would be distributed to the audience at my recital. Along with my research, I wrote my own translations for the pieces which were in foreign languages. At first this seemed to be an insurmountable task. My recital contained the works of eight different composers, and for some of these composers I would be performing at least four of their songs. I encountered some difficulty in locating material on some of the more modern composers, such as Thomas Pasatieri. Because he was born in 1945, he has not yet achieved a great deal of notoriety for his compositions.

For the most part, however, I was able to find a great deal of research material, and I found the research itself very interesting. I realized that knowing the background on the works I would be performing was adding to my ability to interpret these pieces. I also hoped that the audience would be as interested in what I learned as I was. I looked for unusual anecdotes and information
that the audience would not be likely to know. My goal was to add to their enjoyment in listening to the music as I had added to mine in learning it. I feel that after completing this thesis, I will have a greater interest in the music that other musicians choose to program on their recitals, and I will always wonder what interesting facts can be found behind the music itself. There is certainly much, much more than meets the eye in every piece of music, and in that information is a wealth of knowledge that can create an even more enjoyable recital.
Alessandro Scarlatti wrote, according to varying sources, between 500 and 800 cantatas for solo voice, of which *Su le sponde del Tebro* is one. The solo cantata was one of the most popular musical forms of Scarlatti’s time, for the simple reason that the voice was the only instrument of the late 16th and early 17th centuries that could perform advanced literature. (The violins of the time did in fact have the same capability; however, the instrument had not yet been explored in that capacity.) These cantatas were usually written for solo voice and continuo, although violins or trumpet (or, rarely, both) were sometimes added; another singer was also added on occasion. The cantatas tended to be about 15 minutes long and were concerned with mythological and secular subjects. Often the speaker is lamenting a lover’s betrayal and is pleading to the gods for release from his or her grief and sadness. Although the dramatic content is similar to that of early Baroque opera, the scope of the cantata and the intended performance setting were different. The solo cantata was never staged and clearly involved fewer performers and much less time.

The form of the cantata generally consisted of alternating recitatives and arias, with some instrumental interludes called *sinfonias* added if more than continuo was being used. *Su le sponde del Tebro* does conform to this pattern. The cantata dates from the early 18th century and is a good example of the typical “lost love” subject matter. The shepherd Aminta is mourning his betrayal by his lover Cloris. As was common in these cantatas, the recitatives are used as narration which advances the story, and the arias are Aminta speaking. Scarlatti uses a typical convention in this work, and that is using harmony to represent the dramatic content of the arias. One can hear the frequent suspensions, especially in the Largo movement, which represent the pain of Aminta. Another attractive feature of this cantata is the use of the trumpet. In the first aria, “Contentatevi,” the singer and trumpet imitate each other, giving the trumpet equal importance with the singer.
Su le sponde del Tebro

Recitative

On the banks of the Tiber, where the Latin goddesses made strings of hair into bows, There, faithful Aminta, despised by Cloris, Cried to the heavens, to the earth: "I am betrayed!"

Aria

Be content, oh faithful thoughts, to remain to guard my heart. I am assaulted by worry's giant warriors, and sorrow is their leader.

Recitative

Sad, weary and sighing from the grief that oppressed him, Turning to his eyes, thus he spoke:

Largo

Unhappy eyes, now that we are alone, Open the way for weeping and allow my heart To send my sorrow to my eyes.

Aria

Say at least, cruel stars, When did my breast offend you, That you make it a refuge for sorrow. Already a martyr of love, in faithful tears he is compelled to hope alone.

Recitative

To the breeze, to the heavens, to the winds Thus the gentle shepherd spoke, And again the faithful one implored of the cruel breeze, But knowing at last that tears or prayers could never soften a heart of stone, The disillusioned lover, resolute and constant, thus spoke to his heart:

Aria

Cease weeping, poor afflicted heart, So despised by fate, Do not in strictness remain the pity of a faithless one.

Cosi fan tutte was the third opera which Austria's Emperor Joseph II commissioned of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, following the successes of Le Nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni. The two-act opera premiered on January 26, 1790, at Vienna's Burgtheater. The subject, which was supposedly based on events that had recently taken place in the Viennese court, was supplied
by Joseph II, who hired Lorenzo da Ponte to write the libretto. Although Da Ponte’s libretti for Le Nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni are certainly exceptional, Edward J. Dent feels that this libretto was his best, because although the plot was exceedingly simple, Da Ponte was able to construct an elaborate comedy out of the story (190).

The plot centers around the Neapolitan officers Ferrando and Gugliemo, who are engaged to the sisters Dorabella and Fiordiligi, respectively. The old bachelor Don Alfonso makes a bet with the two men that their fiancées will someday be unfaithful. Because the soldiers are certain of their lovers’ fidelity, they agree to the bet. They pretend to be called away to war, much to the sadness of their ladies, but later the same day the men return disguised as Albanians. Under this pretense, Ferrando begins to woo Fiordiligi, and Gugliemo pursues Dorabella. The sisters are appalled at the advances of the Albanians, but Despina, the ladies’ maid, convinces them that it would be harmless to flirt and spend time with them. Although they resist for quite some time, eventually both women admit that they are in love with the Albanians and begin to plan their wedding. Just as the couples are about to marry, the soldiers are heard returning from battle. The men disappear and reenter as themselves, and the truth is quickly told. The opera ends happily as the true couples are reunited.

Cosi fan tutte is known as an ensemble opera; there are fewer arias than most operas and considerably more duets and larger ensembles. One of these is “Fra gli implessi in pochi stanti,” which takes place in Act II. Because she is so troubled by her attraction to the disguised Ferrando, Fiordiligi has decided that she and Dorabella will go to the front, disguised as soldiers, and find their fiancés. That way they will be able to escape temptation. However, Ferrando interrupts and begins to try to dissuade her, saying that if she plans on leaving she should kill him first with his sword. At first Fiordiligi protests, but then she gives in and admits her love for Ferrando. The singers imitate each other throughout the duet but do not sing together until the final section, signifying Fiordiligi’s acquiescence to Ferrando’s advances.

La Rondine was commissioned in 1915 by Otto Eibenschütz and Heinrich Berte, who managed Vienna’s Karlstheater. They suggested that Giacomo Puccini write an operetta, a medium which Hungarian Franz Léhar had helped to make popular in Vienna. The Austrians submitted a
libretto to the composer, but Puccini rejected it as too frivolous. The next subject to come from Vienna was accepted and became the libretto for La Rondine, or The Swallow, as written by A.M. Willner and Heinz Reichert.

The story centers around Magda, the mistress of a wealthy Parisian banker. Magda leaves the banker to live with the penniless poet Ruggero. They are very much in love and want to marry, and Ruggero writes to his family to ask their permission. Ruggero’s mother answers that he has her consent as long as his bride is “good, meek and pure.” Magda then must confess her impure past, and she leaves Ruggero because she does not meet the conditions set by his mother. She sadly returns to the banker and her life in Paris.

As work on the operetta progressed, Puccini became tired of it, finding it superficial; however, he continued to write. Gradually La Rondine was reshaped into an opera rather than an operetta, but Puccini was still bored with the work. He did finish it, though, by the spring of 1916. Because his native Italy was by then at war with Austria, Puccini attempted to break his contract with the Viennese. La Rondine opened in Monte Carlo in March 1917 after the Italian publisher Sonzogno bought the production rights from the Viennese. Initially the opera was well received, but the success was not long-lived. Despite the periodic revisions made by Puccini, La Rondine never became a standard in the opera repertoire.

In the aria “Chi il bel sogno di Doretta,” Magda is in a cafe, telling her friends about one of her romances, after they have been discussing love. It is in this cafe where she will meet Ruggero.

Richard Strauss produced over 200 lieder in his lifetime. Many of these were contained in 22 groups of lieder published between 1885 and 1901 (Op. 10-49), although some songs were composed earlier than this period and some later. Most of Strauss’ lieder was composed for his wife, Pauline, who was a successful soprano. The couple toured England, continental Europe and the United States performing the lieder, with Strauss accompanying on the piano. The Strausses performed abroad for over twenty years, until the end of World War I, when Pauline began to grow eccentric and unpredictable on stage.

The highly romantic music of these songs lent itself well to orchestration, and many of Strauss’ lieder were indeed orchestrated by the composer himself or by others. Some of the songs
were also arranged for chorus, band, solo instruments such as piano, or small instrumental ensembles.

Strauss chose to set works by the German lyric poets to music. Sometimes, although not always, these poets were lesser known; this is in fact the case with two of the poets represented in the works performed on this program. “Nichts” and “Allerseelen” were the poetry of Hermann von Gilm, a poet from the region of Tyrol who is not well-known today. The songs were published in 1885, in *Lieder aus Letzte Blätter* (Op. 10), a group of eight songs using von Gilm’s poetry. The 1889 set entitled *Schlichte Weisen* (Op. 21) contained five songs, including “All’ mein Gedanken,” with poetry by Felix Dahn, who was an even lesser known lyric poet. “Mit deinem blauen Augen,” written on a poem by Heinrich Heine, was published in 1905, in *Liederen*, a group of six songs whose poets were all different from each other. Heinrich Heine, in contrast to von Gilm and Dahn, is considered the most widely read German poet. In addition, there are approximately 3,000 musical settings of his poems, including those by Schubert, Schumann, and Strauss. His first literary work was a set of poems entitled *Gedichte*, published in 1821 while he was taking some time away from his work toward a law degree. Between 1819 and 1824, Heine attended the Universities of Bonn and Göttingen working toward a degree in law. Although he completed his degree in 1824, he abandoned a career in law and devoted his life to writing. He used his poetry to demonstrate his strong political feelings and his opposition to many ideologies such as capitalism.

*All’ mein Gedanken, mein Herz und mein Sinn* (All my thoughts, my heart and my sense)

All my thoughts, my heart and my sense, there where my beloved is,
They wander there.
They go their ways despite walls and gates,
No bars, no ditch can stop them.
They go as the little bird goes, high through the trees,
Needing no bridges over water and chasm.
They find the village and they find the house,
They find her window from all that are there,
They knock and call: “Open up, let us in,
We come from your sweetheart and greet you well.”
Allerseelen (All Souls’ Day)

Put on the table the fragrant mignonette,
Carry the last red asters here,
And again leave us the spoken words of love,
As once in May.
Give me the hand that I secretly squeeze, and when one sees it mine is the same;
Give me only one of your sweet glances, as once in May.
It blooms and smells today on each grave, a day this year free from death,
Come to my heart that I may have you again, as once in May.

Mit deinem blauen Augen (With your blue eyes)

With your blue eyes you see my love,
My dreaming appears to my senses so that I cannot speak.
On your blue eyes I always thought to wait:
A sea of blue thoughts flow over my heart.

Nichts (Nothing)

I should mention, you say, my king in the kingdom of song?
You are foolish, I know her at least from you.
Ask me the color of the eyes, ask me of the tone of voice,
Ask of walking and dancing and carriage, ah! and what I know of it!
Is the sun not the source of all life and light?
And what is there to know of the same sun, I and you and all?
Nothing, nothing.

According to Keith W. Daniel, Francis Poulenc is thought by some critics to be the last
great composer of the French art song, following Fauré, Debussy, Ravel and Duparc (243). He
composed 152 songs, many of these on French surrealist poetry. Poulenc tended to write very
short songs; on average, his songs are around thirty measures long. The piano accompaniments
are not showy, but they do require lyrical treatment of the melody. In Poulenc's songs, the piano
and the voice parts are equally important. As in the piano, the vocal melodies tend to be lyric and
rather tonal, although Poulenc used frequent modulations and meter changes, as they suited the
text. He took great care in setting a poem to music that fit the mood of the words.

The Airs Chantés were composed in 1927 and 1928. They utilize the poetry of Jean
Moréas, a classical French poet. In Journal de mes Mélodies, Poulenc wrote the following about
these songs: “I am always astonished at myself for having been able to write these four songs. I
detest Moréas and I chose these poems precisely because I found them suitable for mutilation...
Have I been punished for my vandalism? I fear so, because this song [Air Champêtre] that irritates
me is said to be a ‘hit’” (25). Despite Poulenc’s distaste for these compositions, they continue to be frequently performed by singers.

**Air Romantique** (Romantic Song)

I went into the country with the storm wind,
Under the pale morning, under the low clouds;
A dark raven escorted my voyage,
and my steps echoed in the pools of water.

The lightning on the horizon flashed its flame,
And the north wind doubled its long groanings;
But the storm was too weak for my soul
Who covered the thunder with its beating.

From the skin of gold of the ash tree and of the maple,
Autumn composed its sparkling spoils,
And the raven, always in relentless flight,
Accompanied me without changing my destiny.

**Air Champêtre** (Rustic Song)

Beautiful spring, I want to remember without ceasing,
How one day, led by friendship,
Delighted, I contemplated your face, oh goddess,
Half hidden under the moss.
Had he remained, this friend for whom I weep,
Oh nymph, attached to your worship,
To yet mingle with the breath that touches you
And to respond to your hidden waves!

**Air Grave** (Grave Song)

Ah! flee at present, unhappy thoughts! Oh! anger, oh! remorse!
Memories that have pressed at my temples with the embrace of death.
Paths full of moss, vaporous fountains, deep caves,
Voices of the birds and of the wind, uncertain lights of the savage undergrowth,
Insects, animals, future beauty,
Do not push me back, oh divine nature--I am your servant.
Ah! flee at present, anger, remorse!

**Air Vif** (Lively Song)

The treasure of the orchard and the festive garden,
The flowers of the fields, of the woods, bursting forth with pleasure,
Alas! and over their head the wind swells its voice.
But you, noble ocean, that the assault of torment cannot ruin,
Indeed with more dignity, when you lament,
You lose yourself in dreams.
Vincent Persichetti was born in Philadelphia in 1915, a child of Italian and German immigrants. He was interested in music even as a toddler, when he learned how to operate his parents’ player piano. At this young age, “Persichetti decided someday he would write music and make it appear on the keyboard where he wanted it to” (Patterson 3). He enrolled at the Combs Conservatory in Philadelphia to study piano at the age of five and began studying theory at age eight. His first work, a serenade for winds, was written and performed in 1929, when the composer was 14.

Persichetti was a professional organist and organ teacher for many years, in addition to being a professor of composition at the Combs Conservatory, the Philadelphia Conservatory and the Juilliard School of Music. Persichetti was also a diverse composer, writing for keyboard (piano, organ and harpsichord), band, orchestra, and voice and chorus. Many of these works were commissioned and were well received.

The composer wrote quite a few vocal and choral pieces, and he very much wanted to be known as a composer for voice. He loved poetry and set poems of those such as Carl Sandburg and Sara Teasdale for voice and piano. Persichetti also composed several major choral works, including a magnificat and a piece entitled The Creation for chorus and orchestra. In addition, he wrote one opera, The Sibyl. None of his vocal works are regularly performed, and although they are worthwhile compositions, they have not received the acclaim that Persichetti has earned from his instrumental pieces.

A Net of Fireflies was commissioned in 1970 by a soprano named Carolyn Reyer. Ms. Reyer was a doctoral candidate at West Virginia University and performed the work on a recital in May 1971, in Tully Hall in New York City. Unfortunately, the reviews of both the work and the performance were not very favorable. Critics found nothing exceptional about the songs, and they stated that the poetry, seventeen Japanese haiku, was too short to be set effectively. However, this performer found these pieces to be charming and well written.

The five of these songs to be performed are set to the haiku of five different Japanese poets and translated into English by Harold Stewart. Ho-o (1917-?), the author of “Its Netted Trail,” was apparently a minor poet as there was little information available about him. Buson, or Yosa Buson (1716-1783), was better known as a painter than as a poet. However, he did write haiku including “Beneath the Net,” and he was considered to be part of the Haikai Restoration movement
in Japanese poetry, which took place in the second half of the 18th century. This group felt that the modern poetry was trite and without soul; they also believed that the subject matter was too trivial. They wanted to restore Japanese poetry to the art form that it had been in earlier centuries.

The third poet, who wrote "Firefly," was Basho (1644-1694). His real name was Kinsaku Yozaemon; he took his pen name from the basho or banana plant outside the hut where he wrote his poetry. Basho is considered to be one of the most influential writers of Japanese haiku in his simple reverence of nature and his style of poetry. As a teenager he served as a page for a feudal lord; this was where he learned about haiku, which was a hobby for sophisticated men at that time. Basho passed in and out of obscurity during his career; he would disappear for years at a time, traveling to find spiritual consolation, and would later surface by publishing a new collection of poetry.

The poet of "After the Death of Her Small Son" was a woman, Kaga no Chiyo (1703-1775). She came from a fairly affluent family, where she learned poetry as a child. She had a happy marriage which was ended with her husband's early death. Her poems reflect the sadness in her life, as shown in the piece to be performed.

The last poem, "Dewdrop," was written by Yataro Kobayashi, whose pen name was Issa ("cup of tea" in Japanese). He came from a farm family and learned about haiku from a villager at an early age. He had a difficult life; he did not get along with his family and was forced to leave his home at fourteen. He also was married three times but found little happiness until the end of his life. His first wife and their four children all died; his second marriage ended in divorce. His third marriage was a happy one, but Issa's own death came only three years after his marriage. His poetry records the suffering that filled his life with casual observation of the events which he experienced and with simplicity.

The accuracy of the Stewart translations is somewhat questionable. In the process of the translating and in making the stanzas rhyme, it is possible that the true meaning has been obscured. For example, compare the following translation by Stewart with another version of the same poem:

Dewdrop (Stewart)
This world is but a single dewdrop,
Set trembling upon a stem,
And yet... and yet...

**** (Stryk)
The world of dew
Is the world of dew,
And yet... and yet...
Although the two translations have similarities, such as the same last line, the Stryk translation seems to be more fitting of Issa’s simple style than the Stewart translation. Stewart’s more ornate language complicates the poem’s message: that nothing is necessarily what it appears to be.

**** Traditionally, haiku are not given titles. Stewart has added titles to his translations while other authors generally do not do so.

Thomas Pasatieri is a lesser known American opera composer, born in 1945. He began to teach himself to play the piano and also to compose, and by the age of 18 he had written 400 songs for solo voice. He began studying composition at Juilliard at 16 and was a student of Vittorio Giannini and Vincent Persichetti. He chose to compose mainly opera, and as a composer he firmly believed in the Italian bel canto style of operatic singing and in keeping the music faithful to the dramatic content of the subject. His use of unusual harmony shocked critics, but despite this fact he has had many successful operas produced in the United States. Pasatieri has apparently been inactive in the world of opera for approximately the past ten years; however, one recent endeavor of his was to orchestrate the film score for Disney’s animated motion picture, The Little Mermaid.

The Goose Girl is a children’s opera which premiered in Fort Worth, Texas, on February 15, 1981. The story of The Goose Girl is based on the Grimm fairy tale of the same name. The plot centers around a princess, the daughter of a widowed queen. The queen had promised to send her daughter to marry a prince in a far-off country. To get there, the princess would ride her horse Falada, who had magic powers and was able to speak; the maid that accompanied her would ride an older horse.

Before the princess leaves home, the queen pricks her finger and lets three drops of blood fall on a handkerchief. She gives it to her daughter, saying that it will comfort her along the way. After a sad goodbye, the princess and her maid depart. After a while the princess grows thirsty and asks her maid to get some water from a stream. Boldly the maid replies that she is no longer a servant and does not have to follow orders. As the princess drinks from the stream she sighs, and the drops of blood comfort her.

The two resume their journey, and later the princess again becomes thirsty. Her request is answered as rudely as before. As she drinks she weeps, longing to return home. Once again the drops of blood comfort her. When the princess kneels for a last drink, she drops the handkerchief,
but in her distress she does not notice. The maid does, however, and she realizes that she has power over the princess. The maid insists that the princess ride the old horse and wear the maid’s clothes, swearing the princess to secrecy once they arrive in the prince’s court or she will be killed. At the palace the prince is fooled by the maid’s fine clothes and thinks that she is the princess. The real princess is left outside, and when the king (the prince’s father) asks the maid who she is, the maid answers that she is just a poor girl she picked up along the way. The king suggests that she help Conrad, the boy who tends the geese.

After the prince and the maid are married, the maid has the horse Falada killed in fear that the horse will tell the truth about her. When the princess finds out, she bribes the knacker to hang Falada’s head on the gate that she passes each day. Each time she passes there, she says, “Alas, Falada, there you hang.” The head answers, “Alas, Princess, there you walk. If your mother knew her heart would break.”

After a few days Conrad reports the princess’ behavior to the king. The king watches and sees for himself, and he asks her why she does this. The princess replies that she will be killed if she tells. The king says that to unburden herself she should tell the fireplace, and as she does he listens. He tells his son about his false bride, and they provide the princess with beautiful clothes and a feast. The maid does not recognize the princess in her beauty.

At the end of the feast, the king asks the maid what punishment a servant who deceives his master deserves. She replies that he should be killed. The king decrees that she has issued her own punishment, and the prince and princess are married and live happily ever after.

The aria “Bubbles, beautiful bubbles” takes place at the beginning of the opera, when the princess is contemplating her new life with the prince in his faraway land.

The opera The Tender Land was commissioned in 1953 by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, in honor of the 30th anniversary of the League of Composers. It premiered in April 1954 but was poorly received. Aaron Copland and his librettist, a painter who wrote under the pseudonym of Horace Everett, revised the opera by adding a third act and improving the dramatic content of the plot. The final version of the opera was presented in May 1955.

The Tender Land is set in the 1930s, at the time of the spring harvest. The story deals with a farm family, consisting of Ma Moss, her daughters Laurie and Beth, and her father, Grandpa
Moss. Laurie, who is about to graduate from high school, is the heroine. She has lived on the farm all her life, under the over-protective rule of her grandfather, and she dreams of what the future may hold away from the farm.

Two drifters, Top and Martin, come by the farm wanting odd jobs, but Grandpa is reluctant to hire them. In addition, because two men were reported to have molested several girls in the area, Ma immediately suspects Top and Martin. Despite these suspicions, the men are allowed to sleep in the shed for the night. That evening also happens to be the night of Laurie’s graduation party. While the guests are joining in a square dance, Martin begins to court Laurie. Their happiness is ruined when Ma and Grandpa accuse them of molesting the local girls. The sheriff explains that the real criminals were already arrested, but Grandpa still orders the drifters to leave in the morning. Neither Martin nor Laurie is able to sleep that night, and she begs him to take her with him the next day. Martin is reluctant at first, but eventually Laurie persuades him. However, when Top hears of Martin’s plan, he convinces Martin that it would be no life for Laurie. The two men leave quietly before daybreak, and Laurie wakes to find Martin has left without her. She is filled with despair and decides to leave the farm anyway. Ma pleads with Laurie but then realizes it is her daughter’s choice to make.

The aria “Laurie’s Song” takes place in Act I as Laurie and Ma prepare for the graduation party. Laurie is thinking of her future and of all there is to see in the world beyond the farm.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


All translations were written by Lori Seitz.