

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE MERCURIALITY OF SONG:
APPROACHING AND EXECUTING
HISTORICAL, INTERPRETIVE, AND
PREMIERE WORKS

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The spectrum of vocal music spans time, genres, styles, and is infinitely vast. New works are ever evolving and expanding, new artistic ideas are revealed from older works, and interest renewed from the tried and true. As a vocal musician in present day, I aspired to find a common thread amidst the boundless spectrum of works to be performed—whether I was hearkening back to a time of old, dissecting pieces by composers who have opened the door to personal artistry, or learning to sing a new work never performed or heard before. *The Mercuriality of Song* unearths more differences than commonalities in preparation, despite the fact that my voice remains the constant—differences which were expected, often surprising, but nevertheless new and rewarding in their challenges. Three performances (a world-premiere, a lieder recital, and an early music recital) comprise the basis for my investigation into comparing methods and processes of different periods via program notes, laying the foundation for initial preparation from an historical context. An amalgam of genres and stylistic differences along with performance planning culminate this exploration of vocal discovery and implementation.

THE MERCURIALITY OF SONG: APPROACHING AND EXECUTING
HISTORICAL, INTERPRETIVE, AND PREMIERE WORKS

by

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Introduction

This dissertation project is comprised of three stand-alone performances to include two solo recitals and one world-premiere, for which I was a featured soloist. Pursuant to my candidacy and subsequent completion of the DMA degree in Vocal Performance, the latter was suggested as a project and approved by the Voice Faculty to be deemed creditable and musically advanced enough to fulfill one of three performance requirements. The two solo recitals were programmed by myself by way of early music and German Romantic Lied so that I might encompass the breadth and scope of genres and traditions necessary to implement the purpose of this project, as declared in my prospectus. When I was invited to premiere the work *The End of Knowing* by Robert Beaser, my thesis was serendipitously accomplished by touching on three distinct periods and categories of song from baroque to avant-garde. Coincidentally, or perhaps inevitably, these three performances comprised the touchstones of my initial musical influences before I even became a music major, defining the trajectory of my academic and professional career as a singer and thus bringing me back to the foundations from which I began. This allowed me, in turn, to continually explore how I might sustain some semblance of consistency with my development as demonstrated in a field of ever-changing vocal music. The following paper includes program notes for each respective performance by date of presentation in chronological order, with a final chapter dedicated to the journalistic examination of how the performances were prepared.

Chapter One: *The End of Knowing* Program Notes

(a world-premiere performance of a new work by Robert Beaser)

Coined as a “song-symphony” for soprano, baritone and wind ensemble, *The End of Knowing* is an expansive and eclectic work, evocative of a song cycle in its thematic trajectory and reminiscent of Mahler’s and Wagner’s orchestrated songs. This piece was commissioned by a consortium of 27 concert bands across America, to include professional ensembles and those of high-level universities. The composer Robert Beaser, currently on the composition faculty at Julliard, describes this work as “a dramatic meditation on the nexus of religion, politics, and the fragile human condition.”¹

This thirty-minute opus gathers texts and lyrics from seven poets with topics traversing the past three centuries. When Beaser was initially approached to participate in contributing a new piece to the wind ensemble repertoire, he was hesitant until he started with the impetus to write a piece which not only originated from a poignant and personal source, but a work that could reverberate to and register with anyone in the circumstances in which we live today. According to him, the concepts held in this composition juxtapose the most personal of private and intimate associations and relationships to a greater stage of spirituality as defined by religion, and philosophy as determined by politics; Beaser’s narrative arc, characteristically found in song cycles,

¹ “Work of the Week – Robert Beaser: The End of Knowing,” accessed March 4, 2016. <http://www.schott-music.com/news/archive/show,10751.html>

joins what appear to be disturbing, incongruous disparities as a whole, to become a staggering, delicate cohesion.

In the first song of the set, *Follower* (set to a poem by Seamus Heaney), a baritone voice is summoned as the nostalgic youth forced to confront an unforgettable past relationship with his father. The piece begins as a complaint of sorts, building in intensity as the frustration of trying and never being able to meet the expectations of his father is suddenly deflated when the baritone realizes his father is now old, weak, and unavoidable. With the second movement, *Slumber Song* (set to text by Alfred Noyes' *Slumber Song of the Madonna*), Beaser introduces the soprano voice as the mother Mary singing a lullaby to her baby, resembling an Anglican Christmas carol. This tune does not refer in any way to the Christian tradition and thus serves as a universal hymn from mother to infant.

Joseph Brodsky's *A Martial Law Carol* takes a giant departure from the previous movement, setting the scene in 1980s Poland during the clash of the Solidarity Union (a catholic supported pro-democracy group) against the over-reaching communist-ruled government. Referencing a fairly recent event in Polish history, this dark period saw the government unjustly imprisoning and subsequently executing their citizens. Beaser alludes to hints of a klesmer band along with snide vocal portamentos and drunken motifs to alert the absurdity of Poland's politics and ambition of totalitarianism. In the fourth movement for soprano, *A Dream* (penned by American poet Gjertrud Schnackenberg) conveys the unending torment of a daughter trapped in a nightmare, where she collapses into her father's grave in her struggle to drag him back to life.

The baritone voice returns as a solo for *Tichborne's Elegy*, a poem written by Chidioc Tichborne to his wife in the last hours of his life. In 1586, Tichborne found himself awaiting his execution in the Tower of London, time he spent jotting down his last will and testament in verse. He had been accused and convicted of participating in the conspiracy of Anthony Babington, a plan concocted to assassinate Queen Elizabeth and replace her with the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots.² This song is set with a frenetic, transient aura, that despite his acceptance of death conveyed in words, Tichborne's anticipation of death is still greatly to be feared. Yet, experiencing death can be all too bizarre, as is shown in the second to last movement. In *An Experiment*, the unnervingly cold and calculated acceptance of death by guillotine is recounted in Theodore Worozbyt's poem about the chemist Antoine Laurent de Lavoisier. It was rumored that Lavoisier insisted on performing one final experiment, desiring to know how long the brain functioned upon being immediately severed from the body—this being determined by counting how many times his eyes would blink after his head was separated.³ Consequently, they numbered between 13 and 15 times.

The last movement, joining the Soprano and Baritone once more in duet, is a setting of a James Joyce poem entitled *A Flower Given to my Daughter*. This tune is unfettered, pure, and almost stark in its simplicity. Beaser was hoping to remind the listener that in the end, after a half hour of over-evaluation and analysis of a myriad of philosophical issues, which time and time again anguish humanity to its own detriment, we are brought back in healing by the bonds of family, love, and life itself.

² King, John N. *Voices of the English Reformation: A Sourcebook*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 300.

³ Johnson, George. *The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 59.

Chapter Two: *Beethoven, Schubert, Wolf* Program Notes

(A performance of *An die Ferne Geliebte* op. 98 by Beethoven, selections from *Schwanengesang* by Schubert, and selections from *Mörrike-Lieder* by Wolf)

With *An die Ferne Geliebte* ('To the Distant Beloved'), Beethoven was never aspiring to write what has gone down in history as the first true song-cycle.⁴ While he is usually celebrated as a composer who pursued innovation, his segued settings of six poems by Aloys Jeitteles display a refreshing simplicity, derived in large part from their dependence on folk-songs.

An die Ferne Geliebte is mainly strophic, save for variations in tempo that distinguish certain stanzas. This reliance on repetition makes the music readily accessible, giving listeners a recognizable folk-tune that presents the poetry clearly. (Similar musical tendencies appear in his arrangements of Scottish folk-songs from around the same time, and tangible folk-melodies also turn up in his late quartets.) The song cycle is exemplary of Beethoven's straightforward, populist style, at once direct and intimate; it is evocative of Schiller's famous ideal of universal brotherhood as expressed in the 'Ode to Joy.'⁵ The cycle explicitly promotes the unpretentiousness of music in the final song, when the singer vows to 'sing what I have sung, what, from my full heart,

⁴ Kimball, Carol. *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. (Redmond, WA: Pst..., 1996), 59.

⁵ Solomon, Maynard. *Beethoven Essays*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 209.

sprang without the pomp of art.’ Throughout their changing moods and pastoral settings, the songs are unified by one collective notion: the torment of a distant love can be shared (and overcome) by all.

‘Schwanengesang’ (‘Swansong’) is the sentimental title under which the publisher Tobias Haslinger issued Schubert’s final fourteen songs shortly after the composer’s tragically early death.⁶ Seven of the poems are by Ludwig Rellstab, six are by Heinrich Heine, and the somewhat anomalous final text is by Johann Gabriel Seidl. There is no indication that Schubert intended the songs to be gathered together as a cycle, and they exhibit no straightforward narrative trajectory. However, it is notable that most of them deal with distance, whether it be geographical, historical, or psychological. The connection with *An die Ferne Geliebte* is manifest (and it is said that the Rellstab texts were first intended for Beethoven), but distance and solitude for Schubert are more sinister, inflected with the frisson of alienation: hope is always suspect, happiness only fleeting, and the familiar trappings of courtship are made strange and horrific through the intervention of the uncanny. Alienation reaches its terrifying summit in ‘Der Doppelgänger,’ in which the singer is appalled by the unbearable image of himself; the strange and the familiar meld to form a ghastly compound. Here, and in ‘Ihr Bild,’ Heine’s mordant ironies are matched by Schubert’s stark settings – bereft of all extraneous notes, they are musical remnants of loss. But elsewhere the composer sweetens the poet’s bitter words, tenderly enlivening the pleasures that they condemn to the past.

⁶ Clive, H.P. *Schubert and His World: A Biographical Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 71.

As throughout *Die Schöne Müllerin*, the rippling piano accompaniment in ‘Liebesbotschaft’ evokes a babbling brook. The singer bids the stream to carry greetings to his beloved, and the piano cossets his voice with its ebbs and flows while murmuring echoes of his melody. Dreamy detours through distant keys enact the singer’s fond imaginings of his beloved before the song wends its way back to the opening figure, just as he hopes to return to her. ‘Frühlingssehnsucht’ recapitulates ‘Liebesbotschaft’: nature again acts as a vessel for the lover’s longing, with the piano once more echoing the ends of his phrases. The uncertainties that nag the singer at the end of each stanza momentarily dampen his spirits, but the question marks are finally replaced with an exclamation mark as he exuberantly declares his faith in his beloved. ‘Aufenthalt’ depicts the wanderer in his most vulnerable, unassuming and deliberate state of torment, the conflict of avoiding being drowned by the raging river or overcome by the flood of his grief in the driving triplet against duplet patterns.

The *pianissimo* opening of ‘Kriegers Ahnung’ is full of somber foreboding; a soldier tells of his fear of battle and longing for his loved one over the piano’s muffled tattoo. Memories of better times merge into restless anticipation of the fight, but Schubert’s return to the grimness of the opening at the final ‘gute Nacht!’ intimates that only death will bring repose; the resonances with the composer’s terminal condition are haunting. Likewise, the epic journey of ‘In der Ferne’ ends dramatically and fiercely in the minor. More directly than Heine, Rellstab here conspicuously thematizes the woes of the wanderer, and Schubert responds with the music of formidable weight and power; the words ‘Mutterhaus hassenden’ (‘hating the family home’) are famously underpinned with

a jarring instance of parallel fifths in the piano, a breach of harmonic etiquette in the cause of emotional immediacy.

‘Ständchen’ is the most popular song of the set, a winsome serenade in which the piano imitates the soft pluckings of the suitor’s guitar and once again echoes his imploring, along with the nightingales. But the leafy moonlit grove harbors sorrow as well as longing; desire and melancholy intermingle there, beautifully rendered in the music’s vacillations between major and minor. The same kind of interplay animates ‘Ihr Bild,’ although Schubert’s means are economical in the extreme. This time, the piano’s echoes of the vocal line are ghostly and subterranean until the shocking violence of the final gesture.

If solitude is the unifying theme throughout this program, this characteristic aptly defines Wolf’s musical agenda as well as the “Mörike” songs selected for this program. Hugo Wolf stands alone in fecundity, having composed 300 songs in the brief span of six years. Even more impressive is the fact that this stint of composition was not consistent, to include months and years where not a single note was written.⁷ Besides his own personal conflicts with health concerns and distractions as a music critic of his time, he was still fervently dedicated to the medium of the Lied—this stripped-down version of chamber music comprised of a mere singer and pianist, in the heyday of the grandiose Wagner and his sweeping orchestrations along with contemporaries like Bruckner and Mahler who followed suit—so much so that he composed his first major songbook, the 53 *Mörike-Lieder*, in just a few short months.⁸ Yet, it is not the swiftness and quantity of

⁷ Kimball, *Song*, 117.

⁸ Youens, Susan. *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), x.

music he composed that impresses to this day, but the genius in precision, beauty, and quality that again sets his work apart. Wolf stood alone in choosing not to compromise the integrity of the simplicity that Lieder provided with just a vocalist and pianist duo; he was on a mission to achieve all the colors and textures that a full orchestra could provide with a keyboard and a lone voice.

‘Der Tambour’ is a primitive example of using humor to bring to light the absurdity of war through the eyes of a young boy, a juxtaposition of concepts common to Wolf’s interests. He evokes a dream-like military march where the young drummer-boy’s longing for home is poked fun at through obvious illustrative musical strokes. ‘Gebet’ avoids the complexity of Wolf’s other songs by setting the mood with a hymn-like introduction from a church organ. This prayer, in pure humility, asks nothing of the singer in range or dynamics, but plainly requests ‘modest contentment’ by ending the vocal line on the third of the dominant, unresolved. The piano, equal in melodic responsibility, takes over in finality by carrying the listener into the heights. As he was able to vividly set the stage in the previous two songs, so does Wolf once again prepare the scenery in ‘Auf einer Wanderung’ an expansive, romantic song on par with a symphonic opera aria. The jaunty opening motif, akin to film scoring, conjures up a setting of a wanderer ambling down a quaint cobblestone street, perhaps near Stephansdom, in the heart of Vienna. Wolf meticulously provides the set pieces, the effects, and the emotion all wrapped up in one perfect lied from the budding roses surging towards the highest ‘höherem Rot’ to the lyrical beauty of ‘wie liegt die Welt so licht’ in stunning variation of the opening theme.

This program is bookended by arguably the first pertinent contributor to lieder (with what is often hailed as the first song-cycle), and the last exponent of the craft before his contemporaries would evolve song into orchestrated works. Carrying the torch with perhaps the greatest recognition in the genre is the composer of *Schwanengesang* (widely considered the father of lieder), his final posthumously published collection. Beethoven, Schubert, and Wolf, this triumvirate of lieder composers spanning the late classical to late romantic period, historically marked pivotal destinations with their works in the overall development and evolution of the German Lied.

Chapter Three: *Purcell, Händel, Bach* Program Notes

(A performance of songs by Purcell, selections from *Messiah* by Händel, and selections from two Passions and Cantatas by Bach)

Abraham Cowley was a leading English poet, born in the City of London and barely a generation before Henry Purcell. A prolific writer, many of his works were published posthumously to greater dissemination compared to the smaller world for which he wrote. “Cowley’s public, it should be remembered, was the court, the aristocracy. Cowley was a court poet.”⁹ And such is the nature of popularity in the closed circles of the upper social-echelon, where it be fleeting and short, in due part to the fickle and variable tastes of a specific public. At some point in his career, fame reached its highest heights and would subsequently fall when court popularity, with its pomp and vanity, should lose acceptance as well. His Pindaric Ode *Begin the song and strike the living lyre* best contrasts this high English craft against the end of said art by proclaiming (and projecting) the end of his time: “Till all gentle notes be drowned / In the last trumpet’s dreadful sound.”

Purcell’s setting of this poem is rife with early word painting, even while successfully maintaining an antiquated feel with its monadic tendencies. The song commences with a declamatory directive, followed by an arpeggiated chord depicting the

⁹ Yarnall, Emma A. *Abraham Cowley*. (Berne: Staempfli, 1897), 90.

strum of the “living lyre.” Soon as the deceased arise, the vocal line follows in suit. The rather obvious “long sluggards” are lengthened and syncopated to lend an effect of lazily singing behind the beat. The “scattered atoms” are more defined in a three beat pattern, albeit set to a “Scottish Snap” as though being flung in all directions. As they “come back to their ancient home,” levity is returned to the melody for the plants and creatures of earth. This lyricism for the birds, fishes, and trees is immediately replaced with a flourish of melisma for billowing “clouds on high.” Purcell appears to have had no other option on the shaking mountains but to rumble and “run about, no less confused than they” as the melody takes unexpected interval leaps until the last arioso section.

My dearest, my fairest and *Sound the Trumpet* are two duets, the former from a collection of six vocal duets, and the latter a third movement from an ode for Queen Mary II of England’s birthday.¹⁰ Both these duets were composed for two countertenors originally, but are presented in higher keys here by soprano and baritone. They are also typically performed without any need of reference to a larger musical source, as the simplicity of text allows them to be performed as stand-alone numbers.

Continuing this program with English influence are some bass selections from Georg Friedrich Händel’s *Messiah*. It should be noted that while the success of this oratorio is commonly associated with the locale of the British Isles, it was in Dublin, Ireland (not London) that this work premiered.¹¹ In fact, Händel’s *Messiah* never reached London until two years later.¹² Still it is this enduring work, which has become a staple

¹⁰ Buelow, George J. *A History of Baroque Music*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 345.

¹¹ Weiss, Piero., and Richard Taruskin. *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 245.

¹² Lee, Lavina. *Handel’s World*. (New York: Rosen Publishing, 2007), 49.

of holiday seasons around the world that continues to captivate and renew a sense of musical wonder—perhaps transporting listeners back to the majesty and awe experienced over 250 years ago. The role of the bass voice is reserved for the announcer as God’s mouthpiece (much like Bach utilizes the same fach for Jesus), and as is exemplified by his introduction with the recitative “Thus saith the Lord” in true declamatory fashion. Händel incorporates coloratura of a lower tessitura to really bring out how the Lord “will shake” repeatedly all nations, the heavens, the earth, the sea, etc. until the “desire of all nations shall come” in one very long, rising tension of a melodic line. This recitative too utilizes, much like Purcell’s *Begin the song*, elements of arioso alternating to semi-recitative to implement drama and text painting unabashedly.

The aria *But who may abide the day of his coming*, is regularly performed by a countertenor or alto, for which Händel originally composed the tune. In the aftermath and dwindling tradition of the castrati,¹³ this aria was then reassigned to a bass, only to find resurgence as a countertenor number in modern times. For the intent of presenting recitative followed by its succeeding aria, this selection will be sung in the bass range. The word “furiously” has the capability of inciting a literal sense of the word in music, be it in the percussive and jagged orchestration by the composer, or in the physical performance dictated by the composer. Händel appears to have applied both these characteristics in the bass aria *Why do the nations so furiously rage together* whereby the string players must visibly saw away at their instruments with urgency, and simultaneously forcing the vocalist to nearly convulse with animosity in producing the near-incessant melismatic triplet patterns. At times, the orchestral accompaniment

¹³ Weiss, *Music in the Western World*, 225.

provides a rumbling tremor just below the melody, akin to the seething wrath of those rulers who “take counsel against the Lord.” This aria is arguably the most raucous in the messianic narrative portrayed in Händel’s work, and its ferocity is only heightened by its proximity to the glorious *Hallelujah* chorus, which follows soon after.

Betrachte, meine Seel’ is the only complete and officially designated arioso in either of Johann Sebastian Bach’s two ubiquitous passions, *St. John Passion* (from which this arioso hails) and *St. Matthew Passion*. It is quite easy to get caught up in the simplistic beauty of this tune, as it provides a respite from the preceding heated political drama culminating with the climactic scourging, as narrated by the Evangelist. The text is laden with opposing ideas, forcing the listener to consider with “anxious delight” the suffering by thorns that yield the blossoming of the primrose. Broad themes of light and dark, good and evil surround this seemingly basic and pure song, further exemplified by the intertwining pairs of viola d’amore moving in harmony and dissonance all at once.

The two most difficult arias for the bass voice in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* are reserved towards the final scenes of this massive work: *Komm süßes Kreuz* and *Mache dich mein Herze rein*. They each express an aspect of Christ’s journey from opposing ends of the spectrum, yet both carry the necessity of hope in their resolve. *Komm süßes Kreuz* yearns for resignation, depicting the staggering steps of a physically defeated man using every what little strength remains to carry the burden of the world. *Mache dich* is composed in a 12/8 Siciliano, an effect Bach regularly uses to add a heartbeat-like pulse to numbers as he does in the very opening chorus without the use of any actual percussion. In *Mache dich*, this effect translates into an almost dance-like quality where the ritual burial of the crucified body is not a dirge or funeral march, but a celebration.

Ellen Hargis, acclaimed early music soprano and instructor, aptly described this song as quite possibly one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written—not just in melody and composition, but because of the role the song serves in the narrative. Her theorized imagery of Bach’s intent in this song is most fitting, summoning the scene of sweeping bandages wrapping Jesus’ body with each swell of a lush triplet phrase.

This recital ends with a Bach Soprano-Bass duet from one of his most cherished sacred cantatas, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (BWV 140) which is to be performed on the 27th Sunday after Trinity.¹⁴ The preceding recitative, as the voice of Christ, attempts to provide consolation to the soprano soul. This spiritual pairing is commonly found in Bach’s sacred cantatas, offering Bach an opportunity to set music to a dialogue with God, and this duet was specifically chosen as having all the elements of a quintessential Bach duet featuring this sacred “couple.” A single oboe initiates the song with a jaunty, playful line. The text of “Mein Freund ist mein / und ich bin sein” is parted as the dialogue itself by Bach, presenting a call-and-answer arrangement between what could be mistaken as a secular love duet. But the melodic structure signifies a clear message of faith in Bach’s compositional objectives. He begins with the vocal lines separated and at moments singing in harmony, yet distanced intervallically. In the final section before the da capo does the soul as the soprano voice become one with the bass voice of Christ when we see a canonic interplay and eventually coming to sing the same melodic line.

¹⁴ Wolff, Christoph. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 280.

Chapter Four: Performance Preparation

The model for this dissertation would not have been possible had two factors outside of my control, not been presented and fulfilled so that I might even consider compiling the performance archive I did over this past academic year. The initial offer from Dr. Kevin Sedatole (Director of Bands at Michigan State University) to invite me to premiere a new work allowed me to organize and construct what I considered would become a valuable account of my performance experience for this dissertation. After it was approved for inclusion in my dissertation, my aim in programming my next two recitals would be influenced by my exploration of recital and performance preparation.

Premiering a new work has clear benefits, albeit with many challenges. Considering first the benefits, when one has the opportunity to premiere a work—especially in close collaboration with the composer during the preparation—there is a freedom of expression along with trial and error, albeit within the confines of what the composer dictates. With Mr. Beaser, his involvement was intense, extremely informed, and necessary. He had a very clear idea of how he envisioned the final product to sound and used many descriptors, at times esoteric, to attempt to explain his intentions and in order to draw them out of the musicians playing his work for the first time. But even before arriving at the interpretive stage, I had to go through what most people dread when given a new, modern piece of vocal music: learning the notes. When a brand new manuscript score is presented to most people with the expectation of cracking it open and

starting from measure one, it can be quite daunting, especially with “new” music. Rapidly changing meters, awkward intervals (at times tonal and but often atonal), and keys with unconventional instrumentation are all major deterrents for most vocalists looking to simply sing. My initial background in music began with piano and one of the specific advantages I discovered at a young age (and sometimes to my detriment) was that I have absolute pitch. This gave me an immediate leg up when it came to preparing this work at the outset, and even better assistance when it came time to the actual performance. The most glaring disadvantage of preparing a new work for a premiere may be the fact that there simply is no reference or previously existing standard on which to compare and uphold. Most singers today can reference art songs, arias, and chamber tunes by means of a plethora of sources, specifically with the advent of the Internet. Preparation for a premiere performance forces one to start from scratch and rely on the basics, the roots of vocal and musicianship training, to familiarize oneself with a song or work yet to be heard. The advantage that I possessed with my ear as a vocalist allowed me to almost memorize eccentric key changes and difficult tunings, and as a result afforded me the chance to imbue as much musicality into the piece as I could. Once I felt self-assured enough to enter the next stage of coaching and eventual collaboration, working with the combined powers of the other musicians allowed us to work as a collective unit in hopes of satisfying the demands of the composer. After two days of individual sessions discussing and dissecting the work with Mr. Beaser followed by evening rehearsals of the entire work, the premiere performance inevitably took place. And if there was only one objective to be reached, it was that the composer was pleased.

My next phase of performance preparation took me into the late Classical Era, wending through Romanticism and into the late Romantic Period. Preparing for my first dissertation recital, which was comprised entirely of German Lied, may have appeared self-serving when in fact I was beginning to challenge myself. These were works I had always longed to present at some point in my musical endeavors but never did either because the lieder was not well known or too often performed. As a vocalist, my preference of genre would have to lie in the realm of the Lied, in that this medium simply makes the most sense to me. At the risk of providing an exhaustive historical analysis on the development of the lieder tradition, I can only surmise that my love for these German romantic songs is that they are beautiful—and its here with this mindset that my preparation for this recital began.

The German language and the diction that comes with it speaks much louder to me than any other major international languages. Thus, practice was secondary to the affect of emotion and communication I hoped to achieve in this recital. Vocal prowess and training are indeed essential to any successful recital, but my aim was to transcend the immediacy of presenting a spectacle or athleticism with the voice; I strived to present warmth and intimacy, though it may be jarring and tragic at times. I would be remiss if I did not mention how much I relied on Professor Cossa's weekly guidance and focus to help me maintain the stamina even required to sustain an hour's worth of vocal music. But because I immersed myself as often and profoundly as I could with this repertoire in the short amount of time that I had, I could comfortably rely on the foundation of training given me by my teacher and focus on the text and musical partnership with pianist. Rehearsals and collaborative discussions about interpretation ensued, until the dress

rehearsal. It is then that my approach to the music solely became about giving away all I had prepared, to part with it until the next opportunity to present it would come along.

My second recital and final dissertation performance was a test of endurance and reliance on a substantial portion of physical strength occasionally asked of a singer's body. This hour program of early and baroque music required 45 minutes of actual singing, with the most amount of notes I have crammed into one recital to date. Presenting early and baroque music can often seem perfunctory, repetitive, or just too pedantic. But as I would learn in preparation, it is predominantly about focus with the mind as well as pacing. From the long melismatic runs in the Händel to the near-perpetually unwinding phrases in the Bach sung with minimal opportunities to breathe, this recital preparation was a training session of vocal agility more than anything else. I instinctively sought out moments of musical expression where the composer warranted it, but early music and baroque adheres to a different school of expression based on delineated traditions and rules. Nevertheless, I did not try to manipulate my voice or its production so drastically as to sound like an early music specialist, but my preparation guided my stylistic choices all within the limits of what my voice was capable of generating. I have never purported to have, nor have I been told I possess a large voice by all means. But baritone coloratura requires a different attack in preparation, determining how I would technically achieve the runs heard in *Begin the song* and *Why do the nations*. The most apparent stylistic vocal choice I made was to incorporate much more straight tone in these works. My personal opinion tells me the music simply calls for it, whether it be on fast moving triplets where there is no room for a couple vibrato shakes or on suspensions—these moments require the beauty of a finely tuned note over

vocal projection and gravitas. And in doing so, the urge to press or squeeze the sound is tempting especially after thirty minutes of straight tone singing. My torso was compensating to relieve as much of the tension as I could, hoping to focus the ornamental manipulation anywhere away from my vocal folds. Preparation reminded me to ease into sixteenth-note runs, sit back on trills, and to maintain support with my torso and legs. To be clear, I did not, nor could I completely eradicate vibrato from this recital from a technical standpoint, rather I aimed to transition into a more *leggiero* production with an emphasis on trying to focus each note as one might do in a choral setting.

In conclusion, after having evaluated and reflected on my three performances, I must agree with the French critic Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr: “plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose”—“the more it changes, the more it’s the same thing.” As an art, music and its performance provide an aspect of beauty in life that is ephemeral; much like a three-star Michelin chef’s countless meals which are to be consumed by its audience, a florist knowingly assembling arrangements only to have them enjoyed for a couple days, or the colorful and vibrant sand mandalas of the Tibetan monks meticulously created over days only to face its inevitable, ritualistic destruction to signify the ephemerality of life and world. Food, flowers, and Tibetan designs change. Yet, it is the power of this standard of beauty, the beauty that is to be experienced, that sets it apart from that which is created to last for ages. And it is this method of appreciation and enjoyment that has remained the same. Performing music in these recitals within these three periods of music, baroque, romantic, and modern, showed me that as much as these genres have changed in innovation, the approach to its performance and consequent ephemerality have stayed the same. And though my perspective may have changed

throughout all three of these performances, I remained the same. It was my voice, my body, me as the vessel that delivered these performances based on a notion of musical splendor which has channeled to me from teachers and life experiences, only to be prepared in creation for the next set of participating eyes and ears. My appreciation for historical tradition and the necessity for novelty seem to have melded into one unifying concept after these three performances. More importantly, these performances, which spawned from my formative years as an undergraduate student, could be revisited with a new mindset and a mature set of tools. I have returned to where I began, much like the song cycles I presented, and in essence, I have drastically changed at the same time. In the end, for me it is neither the song itself that is mercurial, nor the singer or any other component in the preparation—it is solely the performance and all performances to come after that is meant to change and improve. This year's worth of experiences for me, accomplishing these recitals and concerts, are also fleeting. But it is what I will remember, all that I have learned, and the experiences I now commit to memory, that culminates for me the beauty in these performances.

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