

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MUSIC FOR THREE STAGES: PERFORMANCE
PREPARATION FOR OPERA, OPERETTA AND
RECITAL

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Music for Three Stages: Performance Preparation for Opera, Operetta and Recital began as three stand-alone performances: two operas, *Albert Herring* and *Die Fledermaus*, as assigned by my opera program, and a recital of music by composers who wrote operas, art songs and non-operatic large-scale works, which I programmed. Upon starting the process of preparing for these three performances, I hypothesized that each would require unique preparation techniques. What I discovered, however, was that instead of each being unique and isolated in preparation, each performance, along with other performances that I had throughout the year, highly informed my approach to each piece. Through the preparation of program notes, included in this dissertation, as well as the musical preparation of each performance, I concluded that preparing for these performances was a long arc over the course of the year, with much give and take among the styles of music and an integrated style of preparation, instead of the individualized preparations that I expected.

MUSIC FOR THREE STAGES: PERFORMANCE PREPARATION FOR OPERA,
OPERETTA AND RECITAL

by

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Supplemental Files

DVD: *Albert Herring* by Benjamin Britten

CD: *Music for Three Stages* Recital Recording

Laudate Dominum from *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*

Das Veilchen

Ach ich fühl's from *Die Zauberflöte*

W.A. Mozart

Cantilène from *Gallia*

Aimons-Nous!

Ah! Je veux vivre from *Roméo et Juliette*

C. Gounod

Agnus Dei from *Dona Nobis Pacem*

Dream-land

By All the Powers from *The Poisoned Kiss*

R. Vaughan Williams

Qui Sedes from *Messa di Gloria*

La Zingara

Prendi, per me sei libero from *L'Elisir d'Amore*

G. Donizetti

DVD: *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss Jr.

Introduction

As a doctoral candidate pursuing a DMA in Performance, my dissertation project consists of three large-scale performances. However, since I am a member of the Maryland Opera Studio, two of those performances were assigned to me by the faculty of the Opera Studio: the roles of Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring* and Adele in *Die Fledermaus*. For my third dissertation performance, I chose to present a full-length recital of songs and arias by composers who wrote art songs, operas and non-operatic large-scale works such as oratorios and cantatas. The following dissertation paper includes program notes for each of the three performances, in the order in which they were presented, as well as a chapter discussing the process of preparation for the three performances.

Chapter One: *Albert Herring* Program Notes

Albert Herring begins in the home of Lady Billows, patroness of the town's May Day Festival. Florence, her maid, is alone on stage, singing about how demanding working for Lady Billows is. Her thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of the May Day committee, Vicar Gedge, Superintendent Budd, Mayor Upfold and Miss Wordsworth. After some gossiping by the committee, Lady Billows arrives and the company sets about the task of picking a May Queen for the upcoming festival. The May Queen is the model for the other young women in the town and Lady Billows, wanting to promote virtue among the youth of the town, has offered up a prize of 25 pounds. The group suggests many girls from the town, but Florence reveals varying degrees of scandalous secrets for each of the girls and they are crossed off the list of hopefuls. When the group runs out of names, Budd suggests that they have a King of the May. Lady Billows initially ridicules Budd for the idea, but after Vicar Gedge speaks about Virtue, she relents. They elect Albert Herring, a local shop boy and loyal son to Mrs. Herring, as the first King of the May.

Scene two begins with some children in the town playing outside Albert's shop. They sneak into the shop and try stealing some apples when Sid, the local butcher's assistant, catches them and kicks them out. Finally, the audience gets their first glimpse of the aforementioned Albert. He enters the store and Sid teases Albert for being such a goodie-two-shoes when Sid's girlfriend, Nancy, comes into the shop. Sid and Nancy have some intimate moments with Albert looking on, and when they leave, Albert is left to

wonder why he bothers spending so much time doing what others tell him to do. After Emmie, one of the children seen earlier playing outside, comes by to shop, the May Day delegation arrives to tell Albert and his mum, Mrs. Herring, about his nomination. Mrs. Herring seems underwhelmed until she hears about the prize money, and then is ecstatic. Albert, however, is not as pleased. After the delegation leaves, he tries to stand up to Mrs. Herring, telling her he won't be the May King.

Act II is the highly anticipated May Day Festival. Florence, Sid and Nancy finish setting up the festival, and once Florence has left to have her picture taken with the rest of the delegation, Sid puts rum in Albert's drink while Nancy watches. Miss Wordsworth has one last practice with the school children who have prepared songs for the event, and finally the delegation arrives. Each of the delegation members gives a short speech to Albert and presents him with gifts. Vicar Gedge then asks Albert to say a few words. Albert, however, can't seem to find the words. After much encouragement from around the table and a quick "Thank you very much" from the May King, Albert drains his lemonade, with rum included. Almost immediately, he gets the hiccups, much to the chagrin of the delegation. They get him more lemonade, the hiccups subside and finally the feast can really begin.

Act II, Scene 2 is Albert arriving home after the May Day festival and feast. He is completely drunk. He sings a soliloquy that hops from subject to subject, including Nancy, Sid's girlfriend. He muses as to why she seemed to always be looking at him and talks about how pretty her name is. He then hears Sid, outside the shop, whistling below Nancy's window. Albert spies outside the shop window and sees Nancy come down and meet Sid and hears them talking about him. They discuss how he is still under the control

of his mum and needs to break free. Then they snuggle up to keep warm and share a kiss. They leave and Albert is left alone again, full of anger and frustration. He remembers his "virgin ransom" of 25 pounds from the May Day festival. He flips a coin to decide what to do. When the coin lands on heads, Albert leaves the shop, whistling the same call that Sid was heard whistling earlier. Mum arrives home, sleepy after her long day, closes up the shop and goes to bed, assuming that Albert is already sleeping.

Act III begins the following morning. Nancy is at the shop where the audience quickly learns through her conversation with Emmie that Mrs. Herring is in despair, having discovered that Albert is missing and assuming the worst. Sid enters, and he and Nancy quarrel. Superintendent Budd comes to the shop just long enough to get a photo, to send around to the police stations. Mrs. Herring comes out with the most recent photo she has of Albert and is visibly distraught. The Vicar and Miss Wordsworth arrive to offer condolences, and eventually Superintendent Budd, Sid and the Mayor return to the shop with Albert's May Day crown, which has been crushed by a cart. The entire company assumes that this means Albert has died, and sing the Threnody, in which each person sings the same music as an ostinato under individual solo lines. It builds to a huge climax during which each character reflects on life and death. As it ends, Albert comes home. The rest of the group demands to know where he has been, and he tells a dramatic tale of drinking and fighting. He finishes the story off by telling Mrs. Herring that she drove him to this. The May Day delegation leaves, and Albert is left alone with Sid and Nancy. The neighborhood children enter and they all sing happily that Albert is back home to stay, although a new man from his night's adventures.

Britten's comic opera *Albert Herring* is based on the Guy de Maupassant short story "Le Rosier de Madame Husson." He wrote it for the English Opera Group, a new chamber opera company formed by the singers and instrumentalists who premiered his previous opera *The Rape of Lucretia*.¹ Eric Crozier, the librettist and member of the English Opera Group, suggested the short story to Britten. He was not experienced as a librettist and so was surprised at how difficult the task was. Crozier set out "to be simple, to be sensible and to be singable."² After completing the libretto he realized how music could intensify a word's meaning in a great text or cause a simple word to fall flat in a less than adequate text. Britten enjoyed writing for the voices he knew well and when the ensemble of the English Opera Group reunited for *Albert Herring* it was more like a family reunion. However, the premier of *Herring* was not a success, and John Christie, the owner of the Glyndebourne Festival, where the opera premiered, refused to support a tour of the show, taking into consideration his dislike of the opera as well as the financial loss associated with the previously toured opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*.³ Despite its weak beginnings, the opera is performed often internationally, and its colloquial flavor of small town Britain, rather than deterring foreign audiences, is relatable to most with it's themes of oppression of the young and discovery of maturity.

¹ Seymour, Clair. *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 98.

² Britten, Benjamin, and Eric Crozier, writers. *Albert Herring, Op. 39*. Performed by Sylvia Fisher, Sheila Rex, Peter Pears, and Owen Brannigan. Conducted by Benjamin Britten. (London, 1964) CD, 3-4.

³ Seymour, *Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 99.

Chapter Two: *Music for Three Stages* Program Notes

This recital is the second of three dissertation performances, which examine the methods of preparation needed for different performance types, specifically opera, operetta and recital. Within this recital, however, I am also covering three performance genres: opera, art song and non-operatic large-scale works such as Masses, cantatas and oratorios. Being here at the University of Maryland, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge how much time I have spent preparing and performing opera roles and scenes with the Maryland Opera Studio. But, I have also continued to seek out concert performance opportunities with symphonies and chamber ensembles on campus and beyond. And my love of the art song recital has been nourished through several degree recitals.

This recital will feature four composers who have composed operas, art songs and non-operatic large-scale works, such as Masses and oratorios. In researching music for this recital, I did things the old fashioned way: I went to the library and strolled through the stacks. I first did an overview of the opera section and then went to the concert music section and just flipped through the Masses, oratorios and cantatas on those shelves. It was on these opera and concert music shelves that I found some musical surprises. For example, although Vaughan Williams' operas as a whole are not performed very often, I think most musicians are at least aware that he wrote operas, thanks in part to the popularity of his best-known opera *Riders to the Sea*. However, his opera represented tonight, *The Poisoned Kiss*, is unheard of by most. Another surprise was seeing Donizetti's name pop up in the section of the library dedicated to the Mass. And yet, there

he was, with not just one, but two complete Masses. Gounod surprised me as well with his cantata for soprano and choir. What has really interested me in the preparation of this recital is the level to which each composer retains a specific style across all genres. Gounod, in particular, shows a wide range when you compare the effervescent "Je veux vivre" to the plodding and heavy-hearted "Cantilene."

Poulenc was the initial inspiration for this recital. His *Gloria* has long been one of my dream works to perform and his art songs are so perfectly written for the voice. I knew of his operas as well, and so began there. However, there was not a suitable aria for my voice type that was really extractable for a recital format, and so Poulenc was put aside for the time being. Other composers that were initially on the radar were Puccini, Monteverdi, Verdi, Rossini, von Weber and Britten, since they met the requirements of having written in the three different genres. However, when it got down to the details, they were set aside. Either they didn't have soprano soloists in their concert works, or the work was not such that a small portion would make sense on the recital stage. In the case of Verdi and Rossini, I finally had to decide that there was only room for one 19th century Italian romantic opera composer on this recital and Donizetti charmed me so completely with his *Messa di Gloria* that he won out over the others. And so I whittled down one large idea to these four composers for this evening's performance.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs very little introduction for most classical music goers. A child prodigy as performer and composer, he is the embodiment of the Classical era and a master of every genre in which he wrote. He is an obvious choice when looking for a composer who wrote in the genres presented tonight. His *Vesperae solennes de confessore*, was written in 1780 in Salzburg, a time when he wrote several liturgical

works. As was his aim with much of his liturgical music at this time, he was ensuring that the piece was concise enough to be practically used within the liturgy. The vespers, a short evening service of psalms and Magnificat, could not get overly involved. The "Laudate Dominum" however, was the one movement of the work where Mozart did, in fact, take the extra time to draw out the text for musical purposes.⁴

Mozart's "Das Veilchen", a setting of the poem by Goethe, is Mozart's most famous art song. It is known for its perfect marriage of text and music resulting in a miniature drama telling the story of a violet who falls in love with a maiden, ending in the violet's happy demise.⁵

"Ach ich fühl's" is Pamina's aria from *Die Zauberflöte*, a singspiel, which includes spoken dialogue. She sings to her love Tamino, not understanding that he has taken a vow of silence and may not speak to her. She assumes his silence means he no longer loves her, and by the end of the aria she seeks death. Mozart wrote the opera for the resident theatrical troupe of Theater auf der Wieden. As a result, the roles, in particular the high coloratura of the Queen of the Night and the extreme low notes of Sarastro, were intended to highlight the strengths of the actors performing the roles.⁶

Charles Gounod is a composer who is most widely known as the composer of the operas *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette* and his setting of the "Ave Maria" to Bach's "Prelude in C Major. However, Gounod was known during his lifetime as a composer of a wide variety of genres. Most of his works are rarely performed, and some all but forgotten.

⁴ Eisen, Cliff and Stanley Sadie. *The New Grove Mozart*. (New York, Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2002), 41.

⁵ Kimball, Carol. *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. (Redmond, WA: Pst..., 1996), 56.

⁶ Eisen, *New Grove Mozart*, 54.

Gallia seems to fall into the latter category. When it was written, however, *Gallia* was a great success. Gounod composed *Gallia* as a response to the Franco-Prussian war, which led him to flee to England with his family and which later destroyed his home in France. The text of the work is pieced together from biblical passages describing Jeremiah and the invasion of Jerusalem.⁷

Gounod is regarded to be the father of the French *mélodie*, by scholars and composers alike.⁸ "Aimons-Nous" is one of the lesser known of his more than 200 songs. It is a strophic song setting of the poem by Jules Barbier. It uses nature as a parallel for the love of two people, the constant search for the unity of love and the overwhelming mystery of that love.

Roméo et Juliette is one of Gounod's most famous works, second only to *Faust*. "Je veux vivre" was a late addition to the opera, added in part because the soprano was unable to perform the more dramatic aria of Act IV in the premiere performance. It has since become one of the most often performed arias in the soprano repertoire.⁹

Ralph Vaughan Williams is one of Britain's most famed composers who is known for his orchestral works and songs. His *Dona Nobis Pacem* is another musical work written in reaction to war, a subject that was very close to Vaughan Williams and other composers and artists at the time. It was written in the early years of World War II with texts from the Catholic Mass, Walt Whitman poetry and the Bible. The first movement, "Agnus Dei", is textually part of the Liturgy of the Mass. Although the text is liturgical,

⁷ Huebner, Steven, "Gounod, Charles-François," accessed March 3, 2014.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40694>.

⁸ Kimball, *Song*, 160.

⁹ "Roméo Et Juliette (ii)," accessed March 4, 2014.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006772>.

the music, especially the dramatic dynamics in the vocal parts and the foreboding musical builds, evokes the drama of what is to come in the following movements.

Vaughan Williams believed that he would not master his skills as a composer by looking only to external influences in Europe, but by examining that which was closest to him, which led him to the study of folk music of the British Isles.¹⁰ "Dream-land" is a consummate illustration of the influence folk music had on Vaughan Williams and his deep connection with the common people. The text, by Christina Rossetti, describes a perfectly beautiful landscape that is reminiscent of a farm with its fields of corn, hills and plains. The through-composed melody has a folk-like element supported by the rolling chords in the piano.

Vaughan Williams is not immediately thought of as an opera composer, although his one act opera *Riders to the Sea* has found a place in the standard repertoire, albeit a small one. His opera *The Poisoned Kiss*, which he was composing at the same time as another opera *Sir John in Love*, has not found the same success. Part of the trouble came from the start of the composition, during which the librettist and he had difficulties deciding the overall tone of the work. After the death of librettist Evelyn Sharp, and with major revisions by Vaughan Williams and wife Ursula, the opera was completed as a romantic extravaganza following in the footsteps of Gilbert and Sullivan and John Gay operettas.¹¹ In it, a magician seeks revenge on his former lover, an empress, but is foiled when she outsmarts him, and love is found for everyone.

¹⁰ Kennedy, Michael, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 57.

¹¹ Williams, Ralph Vaughan, writer. *The Poisoned Kiss*. (Chandos, 2003), CD.

Gaetano Donizetti is best known for his operatic works such as *La fille du Regiment*, *Lucia di Lamermoor*, *Don Pasquale* and *L'Elisir D'Amore*. He wrote a variety of cantatas and two Masses, including the *Messa di Gloria* heard in part tonight. His writing in this piece is representative of his operatic style in the vocal line, but allows for more use of extended instrumental passages, as can be seen in the violin obligato, an equal partner to the voice in the movement.

"La Zingara" comes from Donizetti's *Composizioni da Camera*, a collection of songs for voice and piano. It is not to be confused with his opera or the Verdi song of the same name. This delightful song matches the virtuosity found in Donizetti's operatic arias on a smaller scale as the gypsy girl tells how she grew up and met her first love.

Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* is a standard in American opera houses. It is a charming, light-hearted opera in which Nemorino, the lead tenor, attempts to buy a magic potion to make soprano Adina love him, not realizing that the "potion" is actually wine. Nemorino, believing in the power of the potion, joins the military for the enlistment bonus to buy more. In the end, Nemorino doesn't need the potion to make Adina love him. In the aria "Prendi, per me sei libero", she tells him she has bought his military contract and gives him his freedom to stay at home where he is loved by all, including her.

Chapter Three: *Die Fledermaus* Program Notes

Strauß's *Die Fledermaus* opens on the house of Gabriel von Eisenstein and his wife Rosalinde. Alfred, a singer, is sneaking in the window to visit Rosalinde. The maid, Adele, has received a telegram from her sister, Ida, inviting her to an extravagant party at Prince Orlofsky's house. Rosalinde enters and sees Alfred just as he falls from his perch at the window. Adele uses the opportunity to ask for the night off under the false pretense of her sick Aunt Lieselotte. Rosalinde refuses and Adele leaves the stage. Eisenstein and his lawyer Blind enter and they, along with Rosalinde, sing the trio "Nein, mit solchen Advokaten" ("No, with such a lawyer") in which the audience learns that Eisenstein is to spend eight days in jail. He was originally to spend five days in jail for aggression towards a police officer, but his temper in court, which he blames on his lawyer, has earned him three more. Once Blind finishes telling Eisenstein all of the things he can do as a lawyer, he is ushered out by Rosalinde just in time for Adele to announce the entrance of Dr. Falke, but not without another attempt to get the night off to see her "sick aunt". Falke enters and tells Eisenstein of his plan to take him to a party at Orlofsky's where there will be beautiful women and plenty of champagne. They can go to the party, Falke says, and then Eisenstein can report to prison and Rosalinde will be none the wiser. They leave to get Eisenstein dressed and Rosalinde hears Alfred singing beneath her window. With her husband gone for eight days, she now has the freedom to reignite the tryst she and Alfred once had. Adele enters and, to her surprise, Rosalinde gives her the night off after all, to have privacy with Alfred. Eisenstein returns and the three sing the trio "So muß allein ich bleiben" (So must I stay alone) in which Rosalinde dramatically

tells Eisenstein how difficult it will be without him there. This charming piece goes between the expressive solo lines of Rosalinde to a playful dance in which the three sing the text "Oje, oje, wie rührt mich dies" (Oh dear, how upset I am) in a happy allegro showing everyone's true motives and feelings about the separation. Eisenstein and Adele leave, and Rosalinde is left alone to let in Alfred. Alfred sings to Rosalinde to drink and sing with him, and Rosalinde tries to resist. Frank, the prison director, enters unannounced to collect Eisenstein for his prison sentence. Seeing Alfred with Rosalinde, he assumes that Alfred is Eisenstein. Over the course of the rest of the finale, Rosalinde and Alfred, who initially denies being Eisenstein, convince the director that he is in fact Rosalinde's husband. After a lengthy series of farewell kisses, during which Frank says he is invited out for the evening and really must hurry, Alfred leaves to start the prison sentence of Eisenstein. Rosalinde is left on stage with a note that Falke left her earlier in the act.

Act II is an extravagant party at the home of Prince Orlofsky, the perpetually bored Russian playboy. There are many opportunities in this act for dancing, starting from the very beginning. Falke and Eisenstein enter the party and Falke tells Eisenstein of a mysterious masked Hungarian countess who is unhappily married, looking for diversion and should be arriving at the party any moment. Eisenstein is immediately hooked. Frank enters and Falke introduces him as the Chevalier Chargrin. Eisenstein, too, is impersonating a French nobleman under the name Marquis de Renard. Orlofsky welcomes his guests in the couplet "Ich lade gern mir Gäste ein" (I like to invite my guests), in which he aggressively tells the company that they must enjoy themselves and drink up. Adele enters the party and sees her sister, Ida, who tells her to pose as an

actress. When Eisenstein and Adele see each other, she thinks she is done for, until Falke introduces her as Freülein Olga. Adele then sings the couplet "Mein Herr Marquis" (My dear Marquis) admonishing Eisenstein for thinking she was a chambermaid. The party all laughs at Eisenstein's "mistake". Rosalinde enters, disguised as the mysterious Hungarian Countess in search of diversion, and she and Eisenstein sing the so-called "Watch Duet" in which Eisenstein attempts to woo her with his pocket watch. Rosalinde, wise to his tricks, instead steals his watch without a single kiss in return. Falke asks Rosalinde to sing a song of her homeland to try to entertain the bored Prince Orlofsky, and she sings "Csárdás." Orlofsky is still bored, but he suggests champagne, which leads the company into the finale of the act. Orlofsky, Eisenstein and Adele each sing verses praising champagne and are joined by the whole company on stage. Falke, seeing that everyone has paired off in the party, sings a toast encouraging everyone to be like brothers and sisters at the party. After a "Ballett", Eisenstein tries one more pass at the Countess, trying to get her to take off her mask, but to no avail. The clock strikes six, and Frank and Eisenstein both panic, calling for their hats and coats. The company laughs a goodbye to them and the act closes with the party still going strong.

Act III begins at the prison with an "Entr'act" followed by a "Melodram" performed by the inebriated Frank, remembering his evening with Olga and the Marquis. Frosch enters to give his morning report and says that Eisenstein, actually Alfredo in place of Eisenstein, has asked to see his lawyer. Frosch leaves to summon the lawyer, and comes back to let Frank know that two ladies are here to see him. Adele and Olga enter, Adele confesses that she is really a chambermaid and they propose to him that he support her acting career, given his special interest in her at the party. She sings her "Audition

Aria," portraying several different roles to prove her acting ability. Frank is impressed, but just then Frosch enters with Eisenstein. Frank sends the ladies with Frosch to "reception room" thirteen, and then sees Eisenstein, both startled at seeing the other at the prison. The men come clean to each other about their identities, but Frank doesn't believe Eisenstein's true identity since to his knowledge he already has Eisenstein in custody. Frosch reenters to announce the arrival of a lady to see Frank. He exits, and Blind, the lawyer, enters. Blind tells Eisenstein that he, Eisenstein, summoned him. Eisenstein realizes that he is being duped and takes Blind off stage. Frosch brings Alfred in, still thinking he is Eisenstein, and both are surprised to find the room empty. Frosch leaves to find out what's going on, and Rosalinde enters. Eisenstein comes back onstage, this time disguised as Blind, and he, Alfred and Rosalinde sing a trio in which Alfred and Rosalinde plead their case to the lawyer, unaware of the fact that it is Eisenstein. He reveals his identity towards the end of the trio and all three call for revenge. Falke enters with Frank and Orlofsky and Falke reveals that he has been the mastermind behind all of the drama of the evening. Adele and Ida are let out of the cell where Frosch had put them in lieu of a reception room, and the chorus joins the principals on stage for the finale. All parties eagerly agree that they played their parts in Falke's entertainment, even if they didn't know it at the time, and all is forgiven. Rosalinde sings a reprise verse of the champagne song from Act II and the show ends with everyone happily blaming the drink for their sufferings.

Strauß's *Die Fledermaus*, the third of his stage works, was first performed in 1874. He was already famous as the "Waltz King" for his instrumental works when Maximilian Steiner, a Viennese stage director, and Gustav Lewy, a music publisher, gave

Strauß a libretto for the work that would become *Die Fledermaus*. The story originates in the French comedy, *Le Réveillon*, which was a huge success on the Paris stages in the early 1870s. This play, with some opportunities for music interspersed into the action, got its foundation from the German play *Das Gefängnis* (*The Prison*) by Roderich Benedix, although it is a very skeletal beginning for the French play. *Le Réveillon* has, as the title may suggest, a *réveillon*, a joyous feast and party traditionally held on Christmas night, as the central festivity of the play. When the play moved to Vienna, in translation by Carl Haffner, Steiner knew right away that the *réveillon* would not connect with Viennese audiences. The work was originally performed as a play, but was not received well. Steiner and Lowe, hesitant to give up on the project given their initial investment in the work, offered it to Strauß. Once Strauß was on board, Richard Genée, conductor of the Theater an der Wien orchestra, wrote the libretto. *Die Fledermaus* was billed as a *komische Operette* (comic light opera). There is some debate as to the degree of success *Die Fledermaus* earned at its premier. Some sources say that despite Strauß's fame as the Waltz King, *Die Fledermaus* was not met with the wild success one might expect. It was not a total failure in its opening performances, but seemed to earn accolades as it was performed more.¹² Another source claimed that it was a wild success but that the timing of the premier in April prevented it from having a long run due to previously contracted touring companies for the summer. Regardless of the success of the premier, the operetta was performed 100 times in two and a half years. Between 1896 and 1921, the work was

¹² Strauss, Johann, *Die Fledermaus*, (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1980), 263.

performed almost 12,000 times on German-speaking stages.¹³ It has certainly earned its place as the "light opera of light operas" as it is still regarded.

Chapter Four: Performance Preparation

In setting out on my dissertation performances, an opera, a recital and an operetta, my aim was to examine the differences in preparation for these performances. Of course I knew there would be a similarity of preparation for each: translation and full understanding of the text, thorough technical work on the vocal line, and coaching the musical aspect of each. However, I thought each would require some distinct differences as well. In *Albert Herring*, I would sing in the same style and language all night, with several chances for a break off stage. In my recital, I would be singing music by four different composers representing four languages and four styles, and there would be minimal time off stage for breaks. In *Die Fledermaus*, I would be singing in one style all night, but with the inclusion of dialogue. What I discovered was that despite small changes and differences of planning for each of these performances, my process of preparation, due in large part to my work in the Maryland Opera Studio, has become a fairly streamlined amalgamation of the skills I have learned regardless of the style of music or nature of the performance.

The differences of preparation are brief, but worth acknowledging. My recital and *Die Fledermaus* required the most specific extra planning and strategy. In preparation for my recital, planning was incredibly important. I sang four sets of music, each containing and art song, an excerpt from a large-scale non-operatic work, and an opera aria by a

¹³ Crittenden, Camille, *Johann Strauss and Vienna*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134.

single composer. First, I had to assemble the program in a way that suited my need for symmetry and order, but also in a way that would be singable. I chose to have the biggest arias end each half of the program, so that I wouldn't have to worry about singing an art song in my lower middle voice directly after singing three high Cs, which is often a difficulty for me. In hindsight, having the arias at the end of the sets was challenging just because of the fatigue of having been on stage for half an hour already. One incredibly important technique I used for this recital was singing through sets of music to really practice the transitions between songs and between sets. I started about three weeks before the recital singing through a single set, two weeks before singing through two sets, and the week before was able to do two full runs of the recital. Now that it is behind me, I think I would have begun this process even earlier to really have those transitions solidified so that it was second nature by the evening of the recital. In *Die Fledermaus*, the dialogue did present the challenge I thought it would. I tend to get a lot of my ideas of what is funny from male comedians, so in the dialogue of this comedy, in which I played a chambermaid, I found myself naturally wanting to speak very low and throaty. I had to work to find a balance between a vocal production that would support the singing involved in the role and the humor that I wanted to portray in certain scenes. Luckily, in our preparation for the opera, we had many opportunities to run entire acts and the entire opera, so I was able to try out a variety of ideas for the dialogue.

Besides these two specific technical hurdles, I found that my preparation for all three of these works, and everything else I sang this semester outside of dissertation work, was very similar. Through my work in Maryland Opera Studio, I have probably grown the most from our scene study class, in which we sing arias for our peers and

teachers and they ask us questions: Where are you? Who are you talking to? Have you said these words before? The fun part of the class is that you don't answer the question directly, but instead sing the aria again and try to answer the question with your interpretation of the music. It has completely opened my mind to all of the possibilities in every aria. Furthermore, it has greatly affected how I treat every other kind of music I sing. For example, in the opening selection on my recital, "Laudate Dominum," from Mozart's *Vesperae solennes*, I had originally been singing it as though it were an incredibly beautiful melody. For my recital, however, I tried to give myself a deeper connection to the piece by asking myself some "scene study questions." The text of the piece describes the eternal mercy of God, so I looked for an image of a group of people to whom I could sing to really express God's mercy. I created a scenario for myself, much like I would for an opera aria. Each song on my recital had specific people and locations. The only difference between the arias and the other songs is that I had to provide more of the background information for the non-operatic songs since they weren't part of a larger story. Certainly the audience would not detect exactly what I was imagining during a concert piece, but I feel like each scenario I created gave me such a deeper connection to the music that it must have been a perceptible, if not identifiable, difference for the audience.

My work in the past three years on opera clearly influenced the other music on my recital. But my work on *Die Fledermaus* was influenced quite directly by my study of concert music. While studying the past three years, I have performed a fair amount of Bach, and have always enjoyed practicing his music. I was having particular difficulty with Adele's "Audition Aria" in Act III. Much of it lies in the passaggio and by the end of

the aria, I would always feel tight for the high notes. However, when a teacher suggested I just sing it the same way I sing Bach, I realized that I was singing it in a way that was not as technically exact as the way I approach Bach. I was trying to sing too loudly and make too big of a sound. When I started to sing it with the idea of Bach in my mind, it was immediately easier.

I also have a great love for new music. When working on a specific high note with a difficult approach for me, my primary voice teacher mentioned that I seemed to have no problem at all with the high Cs in a piece I had recently performed which was composed in the 1980s. It occurred to me that when singing this piece of music, I knew that no one in the audience had any idea what the piece was supposed to sound like. Without the pressure of audience expectation, I felt free and easy singing high Cs in fairly demanding approaches. However, in *Die Fledermaus*, in which much of the music is recognizable, there is an added mental pressure to perform those same high notes perfectly. Of course, this pressure is reflected in slight vocal tension, which makes the high notes more difficult. I found that by approaching the music as though no one had ever heard it before helped trick my mind into releasing that stress of performance.

In conclusion, what I discovered about my singing is something that I have known intuitively all along: every aspect of music that you study and learn influences your overall musicianship and technique. It is why I feel the best when I am singing a variety of types of music, because it helps me balance my strengths and weaknesses in each style. This year and these dissertation performances have helped to really isolate those strengths that cross over from each genre to another in such a way that I might more fully and directly utilize them in the future.

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