THE CROSS-POLLINATION OF MUSICAL IDEAS ACROSS THE SACRED AND SECULAR SOLO VOICE GENRES

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Performance

By

Danielle Stein

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The abstract of Danielle Stein is approved:

_________________________________________                ______________
Professor Judith Scott                                      Date

_________________________________________                ______________
Dr. David Sannerud                                            Date

_________________________________________                ______________
Dr. Deanna Murray, Chair                                     Date

California State University, Northridge
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ABSTRACT

THE CROSS-POLLINATION OF MUSICAL IDEAS ACROSS THE SACRED AND SECULAR SOLO VOICE GENRES:

A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL

By

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Master of Music in Performance

The synthesis of the human voice and an instrument provides an unparalleled communicative exchange, it is one we have perfected and evolved over years of musical development. Aided by the sentiments of a text well supported by music, two artists can create a world of musical colors, imagery, and expressions warranting highly emotional reactions from their listeners. The music and poetry of songs function concurrently to create an effect of expression. Whether the text be sacred or secular, its declamation is of the utmost importance and is best reinforced and exalted through carefully crafted musical compositions. Church songs/hymns and secular art songs have often influenced one another in various genres. Monody has long been a transfer of liturgical information and of paramount importance in the church. Its influence has been felt in its secular
contemporaries and vice versa with secular melodies making their way into the church hall affixed with new sacred texts. Many vocal composers have written for both the sacred performance venue and the secular performance hall, allowing a flow of influence between the two genres. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one such composer, writing deftly in both styles and allowing the cross-pollination of either’s influence.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born into an Austrian musical family and trained from a young age as a keyboardist and composer. He was a well-reputed prodigy and toured with his father and sister performing and composing for many years of his youth. Composed during his years of travel and performance (1762-1773), Mozart’s Exsultate, jubilate has become one of the most popular of his early works. Regularly performed by sopranos of the light lyric voice fach, the religious motet has become standard repertoire for both church recitals and secular recitals. The sacred work premiered on January 17, 1773, in the Theatine Church of San Antonio Abate, Milan, following the successful performance of Mozart’s opera Lucio Silla and just ten days before the young composer’s seventeenth birthday. Mozart, well adept at writing sacred music by this time in his career, allowed the influence of his development in Italian opera to infiltrate the composition of the Exsultate, jubilate.

The operatic solo motet was originally written for Venanzio Rauzzini, the primo uomo castrato and star of the recently premiered opera, Lucio Silla. Rauzzini, a former Munich court singer, was known for his flexible soprano voice and impressive range. The Exsultate, jubilate aptly displays both, calling for a litany of virtuosic techniques-leaps, trills, coloratura passagi- all while adhering to a clear declamation of the jubilant text. The
Latin text, while sacred, is of unknown authorship and has no origin in the liturgy. The bright mood is immediately established in the rejoicing first and title movement of psalm-like praise which is followed by a recitative that recalls the celebrations of Christ’s nativity. Then a slow movement with long-breathed lines, a prayer appealing to the Virgin for peace and consolation, comes before the final, jubilant and virtuosic “Alleluja”. Mozart’s sacred motet is operatic in nature and reveals the blossoming maturity of the composer’s style, one that would define the peak of Viennese classicism.

American art song is a secular genre often influenced by its sacred contemporaries, gospel and contemporary American church song. Many American composers are prolific in both genres; this leads to an obvious influence transpiring between sacred and secular songs. Some American composers have chosen to reside in a secular arena although correlations and connections to religious American music can be heard. Richard Hundley is an American composer of secular art song with a large sphere of American music influence. Born in Cincinnati in 1931 and raised in Kentucky, he attended the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and continued his musical education in New York. His numerous songs are now regularly performed and have received several awards. Hundley is one of only twelve composers recognized as a “standard American composer for vocalists” by the International American Music Competition. An impassioned lyricist, Hundley says, “The chief source of my inspiration in my songs are the words themselves, and I try to recreate the emotion I experienced on first reading the poems. My ultimate aim is to crystallize
emotion.”

Influenced by his teacher, Virgil Thomson, Hundley’s vocal lines support, carry, and give new meaning to the text, displaying the hallmarks of the sacred tradition within a secular arena.

A gifted composer of melody, Hundley breathes life into his texts with his compositions. “Come Ready and See Me,” with a text by James Purdy, displays the beautiful melodic contour befitting the Broadway stage, a strong influence for Hundley. Its arpeggiated accompaniment does not detract from the text but rather propels the motion and emotion forward with its movement. “Sweet Suffolk Owl” is an excellent example of text painting with its gentle syncopations and strategic melisma as Hundley gives life to the witty, anonymous Elizabethan verse accompanied by buoyant, heavy chords. “Strings in the Earth and Air” displays Hundley’s gift for long, extended melodic lines as singer and pianist weave through the manifestations of music in nature and human love portrayed in James Joyce’s text.

The high romantic German Lieder were heavily influenced by the Kirchenlieder (Church Songs) that preceded them. The strophic forms, with simple melodies, and an adherence to the importance of the text all have roots in the sacred genre. Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s Einfache Lieder are an amalgam of strophic and through-composed form, with simple melodies that proffer the meaning of their secular texts. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, an Austrian composer of late-romantic Lied, was most often associated with his symphonic film scores of the 1930s and 1940s. His rich, late-romantic style is rife with chromaticism.

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2 Ibid. 282.
and blossoming melodies. Korngold’s career began as a child prodigy with numerous concert and chamber compositions. The *Einfache Lieder* (Simple Songs) were composed during his teen years.

The first two pieces of the *Einfache Lieder* are texts by the great Romantic German poet Joseph von Eichendorff. “Schneeglöckchen” contains a soaring, lush melody with hints of atonal wanderings, while "Das Ständchen" provides a light-hearted, albeit wistful, break with its brisk tempos and light rhythms. Both Eichendorff texts provide double meanings which are skillfully displayed in Korngold’s music. The superficial implication resides at the forefront of the music in the melody and declamation of text while the subtextual and existential connotation is hinted at and burgeoning in the accompaniment and subtle turns of the melodies. "Liebesbriefchen" is one of Korngold’s most touching melodies with its text, by Elisabeth Honold, expressing a tender devotion between distant lovers. The song, a modified strophic form, builds in intensity until the final bloom in the text’s grandest moment which then subsides into a gentle morendo to close.

The songs of the French late romantic Maurice Ravel represent a transition between the established *mélodies* of Claude Debussy and the vocal music that follows, the compositions of Les Six. Ravel’s musical language was very original, neither completely impressionistic nor completely modernistic. His writing was a fantastic amalgamation of contrasting styles. Ravel created elegant and subtle melodies with rich and complex harmonies. Dance rhythms are common throughout, as well as the influence of exoticism and medievalism. The *Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques* originated as folk songs
gathered by Ravel’s friend, M.D. Calvocoressi, during a trip to the Greek Islands. Calvacoressi translated the songs into French while Ravel harmonized the melodies and worked to retain their folk qualities. These charming pieces paint a vibrant scene of Greek peasant life complete with references to church and cultural traditions.

The authentic Greek melodies are supported by the piano accompaniment which is highly economical, yet highly expressive. “Chanson de la mariée” (The Song to the Bride) is a supplication to a small bird, a partridge, a plea for intercession in love. The folk tune is accompanied by the expressive background of the piano, which, in turn, seems to be playing a toccata for itself alone. Droning harmonies and a recurring melody marked by Eastern-inflected melismas and turns create a sense of excited urgency in this prayer. “Là-bas, vers l’église” (Yonder, by the church) is more a meditative homage to the church rituals of the local residents than a traditional chanson. The melody leans on the characteristic lowered second of the Phrygian mode, a type of minor scale that evokes Semitic traditions. The piano replicates a guitar or other similar string instrument. “Quel Galant m’est comparable” (What Gallant compares with me) is a colorful song of a youth who proposes to a girl, evidently not on his knees. The interplay between the “Gallant’s” theme of arrogant arpeggios and jangling percussion in the piano with the interludes of silence reveals the young man’s reception. “Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques” (Song of the Mastic Gatherers) is a beautiful chanson of lyrical meditation and an expression of longing: “Joy of my heart and soul, you are more beautiful than an angel.” Open chords and modal intonation define the piano. Romanticizing the laborious process of collecting
the medicinal gum from the Mastic tree, the melody owes its mystical tone to the raised fourth degree of the Lydian mode, another departure from standard major and minor scales. “Tout gai!” (Everyone is joyous!) is a charming and petit song that pulses with the joy of life and a lively peasant dance rhythm. Its celebratory and jubilant “tra-lai-la” closes the song set.

Song throughout the eras has evolved and developed, influenced by concurrent sacred and secular genres. To the performers and the audience, the synthesis of the sustained voice declaming text while supported by accompanying music can be an extremely effective mode of transmission for ideas, cultural references, and sentiments. The stylistic renderings of a song can reveal much about its influence, whether it be folk, sacred, or operatic. When assembling a recital, stylistic influence and sentiment weigh heavily in the selection process. Choosing songs for a graduate recital can prove daunting to the performers and mentors as piecing together a complete work of art from a multi-year process of effort and growth provides challenges in repertoire selection. Creating a recital encompassing the full spectrum of the expression of the human voice throughout the western art genres, including secular and sacred texts, revealed the obvious influence between the solo singing genres.
Bibliography


A Master’s Recital

Danielle Stein
Soprano

With
Carol Roberts, piano

From the studio of Judith Scott

April 6, 2014
4:30 PM
Cypress Music Recital Hall

In partial fulfillment of the Masters of Music degree in Voice Performance.
Program

I. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Exsultate, jubilate
   I. Exsultate, jubilate
   II. Fulget amica dies (Recitativo)
   III. Tu virginum
   IV. Alleluja

II. Richard Hundley (1931-)

Come Ready and See Me
Sweet Suffolk Owl
Strings in the Earth and Air

Intermission

III. Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

Einfache Lieder
   Schneeglöckchen
   Ständchen
   Liebesbriefchen

IV. Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques
   I. Chanson de la mariée
   II. Là-bas, vers l’église
   III. Quel gallant m’est comparable
   IV. Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques
   V. Tout gai!