

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

EXPLORATION OF EXTREME EMOTION

An Abstract submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Music

in Performance

By

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ABSTRACT
EXPLORATION OF EXTREME EMOTION:
A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL

By

Trisha Rivera

Master of Music in Performance

The intention of my Mater or Music recital is to explore the extreme emotion depicted in operatic music. Composers use various aspects to assert these emotions, including text, melody, harmonic progression and dynamic markings. As a singer, my job is to understand the intention of the composer and dutifully try to present it in the clearest way possible. I will look at the various compositions in my recital and their use of extreme emotion using the different avenues discussed earlier by the composer. These findings will increase my understanding of the music and help me to explore the emotions within.

The exploration of emotion is vital to the understanding of music. It allows a performer to give the audience a clear and well informed interpretation of the music presented. When choosing material for a Masters recital, it is important to create a flow and sense of commonality among the music. I have always been drawn to music that successfully melded the emotion of text with the music in an effective and believable way, and this was the goal for my masters recital. I found that the music I was interested in had a common theme of extreme emotion, whether it was joyful, sad, fearful or angry.

There was a balance within the melody and text that allowed my exploration of these emotions to be at the forefront of my preparation. I feel that to be connected to a piece is the most important goal as a singer and in exploring the works of these composers, I was able to fully grasp the intention and direction they called for.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one of the greatest composers of all time. His music has such a natural flow to it, expressing all emotion with ease and mastery. His operas are widely performed today and he is known not only for this work, but for his symphonies and piano concertos. Mozart was also known for his concert arias, where he wrote for specific singers or performances. These mostly consisted of arias for soprano, in fact only one exists that is written for the contralto voice. Mozart originally wrote "*Ombra Felice, Io ti lascio,*" recitative and aria for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, in 1776, for a castrato who was visiting Salzburg. The text was taken from an opera seria libretto, Arsace, and was most likely for concert use. The scene tells of Arsace, the king's chief of staff, saying goodbye to the king's wife, his lover and mistress. He wonders if he will ever see her again and also curses his cruel fate that he has to leave her. The aria is written in rondo form, allowing the singer to embellish the melody as the piece moves forward. The mood alternates between loving goodbyes brought forth with smooth melodic lines sung in slower tempo and despair and anger in the faster sections. The contrast between these emotions allows the listener inside of the mind of the subject. Exploring these different emotions not just once, but over and over again throughout the piece shows the struggle between acceptance and outrage. The choice to sing this concert aria as a Mezzo-Soprano was not only musically intriguing, but artistically challenging as

well.

Johannes Brahms, 1833-1897, was able to master the use of setting emotion to music through his harmonic textures, melodic lines and a clear relationship between the text and the music. He mixed the allure of romanticism with the structure used in classical music. The poetry he chose to set to music was always enhanced by his hand, adding to the beauty found in the text. In searching for music that explored emotion, Brahms became a clear choice as he so eloquently merged the settings of text with the music.

"*Auf dem Kirchhofe*" was a clear opening piece for the German set as it grabs the listeners attention with clear imagery of the subject. Published in 1888, it represents high Romanticism completely with its fascination of death, projection of the inner emotion and turmoil of the soul, and an exploration of conflict. Brahms clearly has two different settings in this song and uses multiple ways to explore them. The tension created by using C minor and C major is compounded with the roll of the chords at the beginning of the phrases, followed by the church like hymnal chording at the second half of the song. This is a perfect example of looking into the extremes of different emotions. The subject matter, an overgrown church cemetery on a stormy day, is described through the music. The singer describes the turbulent storm using an arched melody, but then settles with a smoother line while describing the gravestones and the weathered lettering, wilted flowers, and overgrown ivy surrounding them. The music picks up again using the rolled chords and the description of the storm is again followed by a settling when looking at the graves below. The music suddenly takes a dramatic turn, and in a hymn like way describes a calming and peace that takes place in the eye of the storm. The words

"Gewesen," and "Genesen" speak of healing and acceptance. The first meaning "we were," while the second plays to rebirth and healing. This piece shows the peace that occurs in death and uses the imagery of the storm to show the hardships of life and the calm that occurs when one dies. These two extremes are laid out beautifully by Brahms as he uses sadness and beauty as one.

"*Die Mainacht*" Op. 43 No. 2 was written in 1866 and was published in 1879. The text was written by Ludwig Heinrich Christoon Holty. This was one of Brahms' most loved songs and serves as a great example of the Romantic Period song-diary creations. The form used in this song is the strophic form, which is used often by Brahms. This allowed him to create a forward moving piece, while staying true to the classical tradition. This piece shows the incredible ability Brahms had of creating hauntingly beautiful music. Music that reflected the memories of the past. Memories with such beautiful sadness that the listener is brought to tears. The lyrics speak of the beauty in nature and that in those moments it brings the person in the song to tears. That this beauty must remind them of memories they are trying to suppress but cannot. "Hidden in the foliage a pair of doves coo. Their delight to me; but I turn away, seek darker shadows, and a single tear runs down my face." Without making it obvious, the listener gets the impression that the song is about the memories of lost love or what might have been. The exploration of these emotions are perfectly seen in the music. Brahms uses diminished chords when describing the cooing doves. He uses the climax and the ending of the piece to express crying with a word held through many measures, allowing the singer to build in sound and let that sound fall again, ending the song where it began using the same

chords as in the introduction.

Brahms reflects on the intensity of love and admiration in his song, "*Dein blaues Auge*." Your blue eyes is the translation and throughout this short piece is used to describe the stillness and coolness of the gaze. Brahms uses the music to create the imagery of the couple gazing into each others eyes as well as the descent on the word, "still," showing contemplation. The use of 4/4 meter shows a simplicity in the beauty of the eyes that Brahms speaks of. Eighth notes are used as a pulse in the right hand in conjunction with the steady beat of the left hand. There is simplicity in the musical arrangement which highlights the sweetness of the text. The length of this song speaks to that simplicity, lasting only two minutes. The fluidity of the vocal line allows the singer to create a smooth interpretation of the melody. The use of dynamics in the accompaniment calls for a softening as the piece continues and ends with the idea of resolve and hope that is expressed through the dynamics use in the piece. In choosing this work, I felt that it explored another extreme in emotion, one that the other songs did not. That of simplicity and sweetness, love in a pure form uninhibited by past memories or loss.

Brahms showed his ability to use folk like traditions with the depth of romanticism and structure of classicism in his piece, "*Von ewiger Liebe*." The verse like quality of this piece uses narration to describe a conversation between a boy and a girl. The first to speak is the boy, representing eternal love. He states that if she is ashamed by him, they should no longer be together. Brahms used the melody and accompaniment to show the trepidation and insecurity of this section. The use of 3/4 meter creates a heavier setting and the melody has shorter lines throughout this first section of the piece. Brahms uses a

change in meter and a key change to help shift the mood of the piece at measure 79. Here the key changes from B minor to B major, as well as a change in meter from 3/4 to 6/8. The change in meter helps move the piece along in a less stagnant way. The melody becomes smoother with longer lines and a clear crescendo at measure 108 to show the resolve of the girl's belief that love is enduring and eternal. She speaks of love being stronger than iron and steel and the listener gets a clear sense of this through the music and text. Brahms chooses to end with the girl's dialogue as a statement of love conquering all. It leaves the listener hopeful and believing in love. The singer is able to use the fluidity of line and use of crescendo to express the resolve of this character. The beauty of this piece is in the extreme of each section. One filled with doubt and fear of the possibility of eternal love, and the other with joyful resolve. It is truly a gorgeous work that encapsulates much of what makes Brahms' music so timeless.

Ernest Chausson was born in 1855 and sadly died in 1899 as his career was beginning to flourish. He studied law but at the age of twenty five began his training in music at the Paris Conservatory. Beginning his work as a composer much later in life, he studied intensely in order to write with the refinement and understanding of harmony that he did. Much of his earlier works resembled Wagner and Massenet, whereas his later works show his growth in subtlety and sonority. "*Chausson Perpetuelle*," 1898, was written only shortly before his death in 1899. The music is set to the poem written by Charles Cros and tells of the love for an absent lover. Written for voice, piano and orchestra, this piece explores the perpetual movement by continually moving forward in harmonic development, only repeating the introductory accompaniment in verse seven. The free

form of this piece creates a suspended reality for the listener and emphasized the dream like state of the abandoned lover. The text uses the extreme emotion of wanting to end one's life to show the intensity of this love discussed and brings the listener into the mind of the lover. The subject of ending one's life because their lover has gone away was an appropriate depiction of the intense emotions surrounding love. As Brahms used love as a way to find resolve and hope, Chausson used it to show the other extreme. He was able to do so with hauntingly beautiful music and although the action of ending one's life is unsettling, he creates a sense of resolve and peace in the voice of this work.

Born in Vienna in 1926, Joseph Horovitz is a composer and conductor. He has written many orchestral works, chamber music, ballets and has written for television on several occasions. He is known for his work in instrumentation, yet his 1970 composition, "*Lady Macbeth, A Scena*," stands out as an exceptional and challenging piece. Written for a Mezzo-Soprano and piano, this work takes the text from many of the monologues in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth, and invites the listener into the deteriorating mind of Lady Macbeth. I found this work to be the epitome of the exploration of extreme emotion, as she descends into madness by the end. The singer is challenged with this incredibly rhythmic and atonal melody, yet this only adds to the mood of the piece. Horovitz uses the piano to show the sharp change in mood, creating the sense of a ticking clock, a slamming door, the wind, or the crazed mind of Lady Macbeth. She is desperate for power and this work perfectly depicts what those desires do to her thinking. Love and admiration for her husband are quickly overturned with her need for power, and every decision following is done so in a crazed haze of emotion. Horovitz perfectly balanced

the text with the music and did so in a way that allowed the emotion to be at the forefront of this work.

The commonality of these works are in the success of the composers' ability to show emotion, not only in the music, but through the marriage of text and harmonies. Each piece explores a different emotion and a different reason for that emotion. There are commonalities within the moods, but all are uniquely approached. In preparing to perform, I was able to gain an understanding of the goals of the composer through my studies of the scores and the text. These composers masterfully laid out a blue print through their melodic lines, dynamic markings, and harmonic intention. In trying to study emotion at its most raw, I was able to gain a better understanding of the need for exploration. Music takes a direct path to our souls, and as listeners our goal is to be carried away in these emotions for a short time, to escape the every day repetitions and get a glimpse into the extreme.

PROGRAM

I

Ombra Felice, Io ti lascio..... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
1756-1791

II

Auf dem Kirchhofe Johannes Brahms
Die Mainacht 1833-1897
Dein Blaues Auge
Von ewiger Liebe

III

Chanson Perpetuelle Ernest Amedee Chausson
1855-1899

IV

Lady Macbeth..... Joseph Horovitz
1926-present

