

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Muses and Life: A Graduate Voice Recital

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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by

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ABSTRACT

Muses and Life: A Graduate Voice Recital

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Master of Music in Music Performance

The graduate voice recital of Ji Yun Choe, soprano, consists of eleven art songs, a chamber trio, and three opera excerpts by nine composers spanning three centuries of music in four languages—German, French, Italian, and English. It is presented in collaboration with a pianist and several guest artists. The first half of the program showcases music inspired by the love of muses: Pauline de Ahna for Richard Strauss, Madame Marie-Blanche Vasnier for Claude Debussy, and Elisa for Aminta in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Il Re Pastore*. The second half comments on life and death from different perspectives through the music of Franz Schubert, Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi, and twentieth-century American composers Ned Rorem, Richard Hundley, and Lee Hoiby. An original arrangement of a *bel canto* opera aria written by Choe followed by a sing-along of a famous *brindisi* (drinking song) close the recital, highlighting the dichotomy of life's pains and joys.

The recital opens with four German *lieder* (songs) by Richard Strauss (1864-1949)—“Ständchen,” “Breit über mein Haupt,” “Schlagende Herzen,” and “Ich schwebe.” Performed in the order of their composition, the set traces Strauss' evolving conception of love as Pauline da Ahna entered his life. Composed around 1886,

“Ständchen” (“Serenade”), Op. 17 No. 2, renders a moonlight tryst in the words of poet Adolph Friedrich von Schack (1815-1894) accentuated by Strauss’ perpetual sixteenth-note arpeggios in dreamy F-sharp major tonality and improvised repetition of measure 81 extending the “climactic” high note on the word *hoch* (brightly). “Breit’ über mein Haupt” (“Spread over my head”), Op. 19 No. 2, is a setting of another Schack poem, from *Lotusblätter* (Lotus Leaves), in which the narrator expresses his desire for only the dark locks and radiant eyes of his beloved. Composed in 1888, it is dedicated to soprano Emilie Herzog of the Munich Opera, of whom Strauss requested voice lessons for his student, Pauline da Ahna. “Schlagende Herzen” (“Beating Hearts”), Op. 29, No. 2, composed in 1895, shortly after Strauss’ marriage to Pauline on September 10, 1884, is a setting in brilliant G major of a poem by Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865-1910). It tells of a boy, with a gold ring on his finger and many flowers in hand, joyously rushing to his beloved, while a maiden standing between meadows and fields eagerly awaits her beloved’s arrival. Lastly, Strauss was enjoying family life with his wife Pauline and son Franz Alexander “Bubi” (born April 12, 1897), when “Ich schwebe” (“I float”), Op. 48, No. 2, was composed in 1900. The song speaks of young contented love with its harmony dominated by sixths and a lullaby-like lilting waltz rhythm that recalls the recently-departed Johann Strauss II (1825-1899). Ironically, it is a setting of a poem by Karl Henckell, who was involved in the socialist movement censoring art and literature against the excesses of sentimental romanticism. Richard preceded Pauline in death by only eight months, after 55 years of an often tumultuous but happy marriage; theirs was a testament to “opposites attract.”

Next, the theme of muses continues with Claude Debussy (1862-1918) who composed many of his early songs with a specific soprano voice in mind, that of his “*fée mélodieuse*” (melodious fairy) Madame Marie-Blanche Vasnier. An older married woman whom he accompanied at voice lessons, Madame Vasnier was the love and muse of Debussy’s youth, to whom he dedicated over twenty songs including the four songs gathered posthumously in *Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse* (Four Songs of Youth). Composed between 1881 and 1884, these four songs— “Pantomime,” “Clair de lune,” “Pierrot,” and “Apparition”—contain pointed narratives that are more consistent in style with post-romanticism and pre-impressionism than his later impressionist works. The fluid suggestive metaphorical lyrics are the words of symbolist poets Paul Verlaine, Théodore de Banville, and Stéphane Mallarmé.

Debussy set nearly a third of all his songs to Paul Verlaine’s poems, including the first two songs of *Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse*, “Pantomime” and “Clair de lune.” “Pantomime” introduces reincarnations of 17th-century *commedia dell’arte* stock characters in short paradoxical vignettes narrated by the singer that are tied together by the piano seemingly taking on the character of a comical unwitting observer strategically trying to sneak past. “Clair de lune” composed in 1882 is Debussy’s first setting of Verlaine’s popular poem that likens a soul to the music and dance of fanciful masked balls and folksy Bergamo (Italy) mingling by moonlight, causing to sob with ecstasy, the tall slim fountains among the marble statues (“*et sangloter d’extase les jet d’eau, les grands jets d’eau sveltes parmi les marbres*”). The sexual imagery is not lost on Debussy in his three settings of the poem: two for voice and piano and his famous piano suite, *Suite bergamasque*.

“Pierrot” composed in 1881 is Debussy’s first setting of Banville’s poem. In this brisk darkly-humorous song, Pierrot, the sad-clown stock character, returns in a narrated vignette tracing his contemplative walk along the Boulevard of the Temple, having just performed at Harlequin’s wedding to Columbine, Pierrot’s love interest. A street girl entices Pierrot in vain while the moon above with evil intentions casts light upon her dear friend, Jean Gaspard Deburau, the mime famous for his portrayal of Pierrot. Deburau once swung his cane in rage at a boy who called him Pierrot, killing the boy. The menacing undertone in the piano accompaniment overlaid with a taunting recurring theme based on a popular children’s tune, “Au clair de la lune” (“By the light of the moon”), seems to reference that infamous incident.

Lastly, “Apparition” is Debussy’s 1884 setting of a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, the same poet whose words inspired Debussy to compose his revolutionary orchestral tone poem, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun). “Apparition” is a first-person narrative of a man dreamily recalling the blessed day of his and his beloved’s first kiss and the seeming appearance before him of the fairy of his youth. The piano accompaniment paints the ethereal, passionate tone of the scene in its rippling high arpeggios, juxtaposed duple and compound rhythms, rich textures, soft reiterated chords, and resonant open-fifths that seem to ascend into the heavens.

Closing the first half of the recital is the aria, “L'amerò sarò costante” (“I will love her, I will be constant”), from Act II of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s two-act *opera seria*, *Il Re Pastore* (The Shepherd King), based on the 1751 libretto by Pietro Metastasio. “L'amerò sarò costante,” is a *rondo* in form and a duet between a soprano castrato, Aminta, and a solo violin with the orchestra (reduced to piano). The shepherd

Aminta, in love with the shepherdess Elisa, is discovered to be the rightful heir to the throne of Sidon. King Alessandro of Macedonia decree that Aminta must marry Tamiri, the daughter of the overthrown ruler of Sidon. However, Elisa begs King Alessandro to return Aminta to her, to which Aminta declares to him his love for and devotion to Elisa with "L'amerò sarò costante." Moved by their impassioned pleas, King Alessandro consents to their marriage and Aminta is crowned the new king of Sidon.

The second half of the recital begins its commentary on life and death with *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (The Shepherd on the Rock) D. 965, a German *lied* for voice, clarinet, and piano composed by Franz Schubert (1797-1828) for the friend he never met in person, the famous soprano Pauline Anna Milder-Hauptmann. Grouped into three sections, this chamber work begins with a lone shepherd on a mountain listening to the echoes reverberating from far below. Despair and loneliness overtake him as he bemoans his separation from his beloved by winter, then hope returns at the realization that spring will come and with it, his beloved. Sadly, Schubert never saw the coming spring, nor Pauline Anna. Composed in October 1828, *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* is the last *lied* and work Schubert penned; he died that month from typhoid fever, or possibly syphilis, at the age of 31.

The commentary continues next with a set of three songs by twentieth-century American composers Ned Rorem (born October 23, 1923), Richard Hundley (1931-2018), and Lee Hoiby (1926-2011). Rorem's "The Silver Swan" is a 1949 text setting of a famous madrigal composed by Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625) that beautifully and succinctly depicts the legend of a mute swan that sings as she dies. "Will There Really be a Morning?" is a 1987 setting by Richard Hundley of the words of American poet

Emily Dickinson (1830-1866), a recluse usually in white clothing who rarely left her home in Amherst, Massachusetts. The whimsical nature to many of her poems often contrasts her frequent preoccupation with the subject of death. Lee Hoiby set to music Theodore Roethke's poem "The Serpent" in 1979 specifically for soprano Leontyne Price, who sang his songs in recital for over thirty years. "The Serpent" tells of a serpent pursuing a singing career and the birds' futile attempts to make him stop singing. Irregular compound meter synchronized to the natural inflections of the words is used throughout. The vocal line undulates, mirroring the slithering movements of a snake, while the perpetual eighth notes in the piano evoke the birds' emotional and physical states.

Second to last on the program is an arrangement Choe wrote for string quintet, piano, and voice of "Eccomi in lieta vesta...Oh! quante volte," Giulietta's *romanza* with *recitativo secco* from Act 1 Scene 2 of the 1830 opera, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, by Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). While the opera "borrowed" most of its music from Bellini's unsuccessful 1829 opera, *Zaira*, Giulietta's *romanza* borrows from his promising first opera, his 1825 opera *Adelson e Salvini*. All three operas are settings of librettos by Felice Romani (1788-1865). In this version of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet story from an Italian source, Giulietta is in her room dressed in her wedding gown, lamenting her forced marriage to Tebaldo and longing for her beloved Romeo.

Not wanting to close on a depressing note, Choe concludes the recital with "Libiamo ne' lieti calici," a famous duet with chorus from the first act of *La Traviata* (The Fallen Woman), an opera by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) set to a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave (1810-1876) that premiered in 1853. "Libiamo" is a *brindisi*, a

lively drinking song, initiated by Alfredo Germont, a young man in love with the hostess of the late-night party, Violetta Valéry, who joins in the singing along with her guests. Violetta is celebrating her recovery from illness, but the coughing fit after the revelry suggests otherwise. Performed with string quintet, pianist, and tenor, the audience is encouraged to sing along with a countertenor from the house joining in mid-way, singing the popular melody with the soloists to the end. Thus ends Choe's last hoorah with her CSUN music family, with all joined in celebration of music, collaboration, and friendship. May love continue to inspire and music offer joy and communion to all.

PROGRAM

Ständchen Op. 17 No. 2 Richard Strauss
Breit über mein Haupt Op. 19 No. 2 (1864-1949)
Schlagende Herzen Op. 29 No. 2
Ich schwebe Op. 48 No. 2

Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse Claude Debussy
Pantomime (1862-1918)
Clair de lune
Pierrot
Apparition

L'amerò, sarò costante Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
from *Il Re Pastore* (1775) (1756-1791)

Kevin Breeding, violin

- INTERMISSION -

Der Hirt auf dem Felsen Franz Schubert
(Shepherd on the Rock) (1797-1828)

Demetrio Escobar, clarinet

The Silver Swan Ned Rorem
(b. 1923)
Will There Really be a Morning? Richard Hundley
(1931-2018)
The Serpent Lee Hoiby
(1926-2011)

Eccomi in lieta vesta... Oh! quante volte Vincenzo Bellini
from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1830) (1801-1835)

Luna Choi, violin
Jeong-ah Moon, violin
Kevin Breeding, viola
Thomas Lovasz, cello
Isaac Green, bass

SING-ALONG PLAY-ALONG FINALE

Libiamo ne' lieti calici (Brindisi) Giuseppe Verdi
from *La Traviata* (1853) (1813-1901)

Kailin Chen, tenor
Andy Leggett, countertenor
String Quintet
AUDIENCE join in!

- RECEPTION -

NOTES AND TEXTS

Supplemental materials in support of this abstract uploaded to the ETD system include:

1. PDF of printed program distributed at the recital
2. Video recordings of recital performance