PRAISES AND ROSES:
THE GRADUATE RECITAL OF JESSICA BERNs COLORATURA SOPRANO

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Music in Performance

By Jessica Berns

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ABSTRACT

PRAISES AND ROSES:
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By
Jessica Berns
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The variety of styles, periods, and narrative texts in the songs of this recital can be unified when seen through the eyes of a young woman learning to express her love of God and nature and her first romantic experiences. Indeed, many of the songs in this recital use imagery describing the beauty of nature, and, specifically, the image of a rose is prevalent among the songs as well. The music in this recital spans from the baroque period to the modern era, beginning with Bach and ending with notable 20th century composer Ned Rorem, who is still living. Ultimately, this recital is unified through the music and text that is centered on this perspective of a young woman learning about love.

Composer Johann Sebastian Bach wrote more than 200 cantatas, most of them on sacred texts for the church by which he was employed in Leipzig. Cantata 51 for soprano and string orchestra is more unusual in that it is for solo soprano and trumpet with a chamber ensemble, whereas most of his other vocal cantatas are for SATB soloists. Much like the da capo style of the period in which the two arias in the cantata are written, the structure of the cantata overall is also in an ABA’ format, beginning with the joyous
praises of the first aria (in major key), moving to a more contemplative section of the recititative and second aria (in minor key), and finally returning to major key and the joyous mood of the opening with the concluding “Alleluljah!” In the context of the performance of this recital, the cantata was performed from the perspective of a young woman expressing her joy at praising God and expressing her dedication to following him. In the exuberant, joyful sections of the cantata, the “young woman” expresses this through runs, leaps, and brilliant high notes, which mirror her enthusiasm and passion. In the contemplative sections of the cantata, the character of the young woman expresses her steadfastness by singing long, sustained notes or slower runs in minor key. Both of these expressions are consistent with the style of the baroque period and of Bach’s music in general.

The three composers of French mélodie featured next exemplify the impressionist style of music in these compositions, as well as romantic notions of the beauty of nature combined with the experience of a dream-like fantasy. The first song, by Franz Liszt, expresses the desire to make life easier for the person to which the “young woman” sings. The poetry, by Victor Hugo, uses beautiful imagery of nature, including charming meadows, ever-shining skies, gardens full of flowers, and dreams perfumed by roses. The next mélodie, by Cécile Chaminade is from the perspective of a young lover who expresses her joy at the gloomy days having passed and being free to beckon her lover to be with her. The steady pulse of the accompaniment through repeated chords illustrates the solidity and security of the “young woman’s” happiness. The poetry, by Armand Lafrique, also features imagery of the beauty of nature, including a garden perfumed by roses and filled with birds, a comparison of her passion for her love to the burning power
of the sun, and a sky speckled with millions of stars. The final song, “Clair de lune” by Claude Debussy is perhaps the most quintessential representation of the impressionist period, with its twisting harmonies and ambitious piano accompaniment. Unlike the other two mélodies, the “young woman” in this song appears to be searching for something, indicated not only in the poetry, but also through the harmonic instability and unresolved lyrical arches through the piece. Yet through this feeling of unrest, the poetry of Paul Verlaine also weaves in imagery of nature along with the fantastical, comparing the soul to a landscape, melodies intertwining with light of the moon, birds dreaming in the trees, and fountains sobbing in ecstasy. Overall, these three pieces play with different kinds of love—the love of concern for a friend, the bloom of romantic love, and the contemplation of love and happiness in the abstract.

The piece that closes the first act is the famous “Flower Duet” from Lakmé by Léo Delibes. The scene is between Lakmé, a young Indian woman, daughter of the high priest of her village, and her servant Malika. Lakmé expresses her desire to go to the beautiful, sacred spot by the river and Malika replies that this is the time of day when she finally is able to see into the heart of the normally closed-off Lakmé. They then describe the beauty of this place, filled with jasmine and roses, singing birds, and running waters. Later, Lakmé confesses that she is terrified for the safety of her father, and Malika soothes her by speaking of the snow-white swans which inhabit the river to where they are heading. Musically, their awe and ecstasy at experiencing this beauty is expressed through soaring melodic arches and the consistent major-mode third based harmony between the two women. Ultimately in this piece, the beauty of nature and peace of
mind are thus equated equally, and the love of natural beauty is what bonds the two women, motivating them to sing together in harmony.

The next set includes three German lieder by Joseph Marx, Hugo Wolf, and Richard Strauss. In “Der beschidene Schäffer” composed by Marx with the poetry by Christian Felix Weisse, the “young woman” tells of a young shepherd who loves her very much but is too shy to be alone with her. In this piece, the frustration and angst of young love is highlighted by Marx’s clashing harmonies, off-beat dotted rhythms, and the tension in build-ups of melodic lines to high notes. In the next piece, “Auch kleine Dinge,” by Wolf expresses disproportionate joy that can come from little things, regardless of size. The anonymous poet begins by using the example of pearls, then olives, and finally the beauty of the rose, which all are small but loved nonetheless. Marx adds to the poetry by mirroring the dainty subjects in the text by musically “tip-toeing” with a repeated descending series of neighbor tones in the right hand of the piano. Finally, “Ständchen” by Strauss is from the perspective of a young man hoping to have his beloved sneak out of her parent’s home and come enjoy the beauty of the night with him. While the narrative thread of the recital is from the perspective of a young woman, this piece is a momentary reversal of perspectives; instead of telling the story from her perspective, the “young woman” experiences this different perspective as though watching a film. The poetry, by Adolph Friedrich von Schack, is full of imagery describing the beauty of nature and love, finally combining the two at the end of the text: “und die rose, wenn sie am Morgen erwacht,/ Hoch glühn von den Wonnenschauern der Nacht” (“and the rose, when she in morning awakes, glows most beautifully from the wonders of the night.”) Strauss sets this climactic moment after a period of harmonic and
melodic flux, climaxing into a high B-flat on “Hoch glühn,” highlighting the combination of the imagery of romance and natural beauty.

The set of English language art songs features three pieces from *Six Songs for High Voice* by Ned Rorem, an American 20th century composer. The first piece, “Pippa’s song,” poetry by Robert Browning, is an elation of beauty of nature and the peace and satisfaction that is found therein. Rorem sets the piece so that it builds by going higher and higher with each phrase of the text, finally climaxing both melodically and harmonically with a high-D above high C on “all’s right with the world.” The next, piece “Cradle Song,” is, though different in style, similar in effect to the elation of Bach cantata 51, in that the “young woman” expresses her passion and dedication to worshiping the baby Jesus through her coloratura and steady, rocking pulse of the six-eight meter. Lastly, “In a Gondola,” also with text by Robert Browning, expresses the “young women’s” first foray into sexual intimacy. The expressions of physical intimacy are all delicately expressed through flower imagery: for example, the “young woman” compares her body to a flower being kissed by a moth, and later stung by a bee. Rorem indicates the tentative nature of this experience by the shifting chords that change each beat and illustrates the rise and fall of sexual tension through the rise and fall of the melodic line, each phrase rising and falling, but also rising higher as the piece goes on, until the last phrase sinks back down as the poetry talks of falling asleep.

Finally, the recital concludes with the aria “Je suis Titania” from Ambroise Thomas’ *Mignon*. In the context of the aria, the actress Philline sings this aria after performing Titania in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, boasting of her acting
prowess and demonstrating her vocal ability. In the context of the narrative arc of the recital, this represents the final transformation of love for the “young woman:” the self-love that comes from self-confidence, which Thomas musically demonstrates through the extensive (and almost excessive) coloratura.

Overall, the narrative arc of this recital is shown to be of a young woman, at first innocent and naive, to a more experienced girl becoming a woman, who is stronger and surer of herself. She starts as a naïve girl from church, exulting only in what she has been taught, to experiencing her own realities through exploring love and nature. With the final set, she moves even more profoundly into her experiences of nature, God, and love, and with the final aria, shows that she has been transformed into her own person who can become and do anything.
California State University, Northridge
Mike Curb College of Arts, Media and Communication
Department of Music

present

Jessica Berns,
Coloratura Soprano

In her Master of Music Recital*

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A student of Dr. Deanna Murray

Carol Roberts, Accompanist

Mitchell Cooper, Trumpet
Jessica Anne Wallace, Mezzo-Soprano

Saturday, November 23, 2013, 7:30 pm
Cypress Recital Hall

*in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree in Vocal Arts Performance
I.

Cantata 51

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

1. Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!
2. Wir belten zu dem Tempel an
3. Höchter, mache deine Güte ferne alle Morgen neu
4. Alleluja!

II.

S’il est un charmant gazon

Franz Liszt

(1811-1886)

Viens, mon bien-aimé!

Cécile Chaminade

(1857-1944)

Clair de Lune

Claude Debussy

(1862-1918)

* "Flower Duet" from *Lakmé*

Léo Delibes

(1836-1891)
---Intermission---

III.

Der bescheidene Schäfer  
Joseph Marx  
(1882-1964)

Auch kleine Dinge  
Hugo Wolf  
(1860-1903)

Ständchen  
Richard Strauss  
(1864-1949)

IV.

From Six Songs for High Voice  
Ned Rorem  
(1923-present)

1. Pippa’s Song  
2. Cradle Song  
3. In a Gondola

* 

Je suis Titania from Mignon  
Ambroise Thomas  
(1811-1896)
Poetry and Translations

Cantata 51

Anonymous

1.

Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen!

Was der Himmel und die Welt
An Geschöpfen in sich hält,
Müssen dessen Ruhm erhöhen,
Und wir wollen unserm Gott
Gleichfalls jetzt ein Opfer bringen,
Dass er uns in Kreuz und Not
Allezeit hat beigestanden.

Shout for joy to God in every land!

All the creatures contained in heaven and earth
Must exalt his glory,
And to our God we would
Now likewise bring an offering
Since in affliction and distress
At all times he has stood by us.

2.

Wir beten zu dem Tempel an,
Da Gottes Ehre wohnet,
Da dessen Treu, so täglich neu,
Mit lauter Segen lohnet.
Wir preisen, was er an uns hat getan.
Muss gleich der schwache Mund von seinen Wundern lallen,
So kann ein schlechtes Lob ihm dennoch wohlgefallen.
We pray at the temple
Where God’s honor dwells,
Where his faithfulness that is renewed every day
Bestows upon the people a blessing.
We praise what he has done for us.
Even if our weak mouths have to babble about his wonders,
Yet can imperfect praise still please him.

3.

Höchster, mache deine Güte
Ferner alle Morgen neu.

So soll vor die Vatertreu
Auch ein dankbares Gemüte
Durch ein frommes Leben weisen,
Dass wir deine Kinder heißen.

Most High God, make your goodness
New every morning from now on.

Then to your fatherly love
A thankful spirit in us in turn
Through a devout life will show
That we are called your children.

4.

Allelulja!

Hallelujah!
Poetry and Translations, con’t

S’il est un charmant gazon

S’il est un charmant gazon, que le ciel arrose,
Où brille en toute saison, quelque fleur éclose,
Où l’on cueille à pleine main, lys, chèvre-feuille et jasmin,
J’en veux faire le chemin où ton pied se pose!

S’il est un rêve d’amour, parfumé de rose,
Où l’on trouve chaque jour quelque douce chose,
Un rêve que Dieu bénit, où l’âme à l’âme s’unit,
Oh! j’en veux faire le nid où ton coeur se pose!

If there is a charming lawn that heaven waters,
Where shines in every season some flower in bloom,
Where one can gather by handfuls lilies, honeysuckles and jasmines,
I want to make it the path for your foot to rest on!

If there is a dream of love, perfumed with roses,
In which one can find everyday some sweet thing,
A dream blessed by God, where soul unites with soul,
Oh! I want to make it the nest for your heart to rest in!

Viens, mon bien-aimé

Les beaux jours vont enfin renaître,
Le voici, l’avril embaumé!
Un frisson d’amour me pénètre,
Viens! mon bien-aimé!
Poetry and Translations, con’t

Ils ont fui, les longs soirs moroses,
Déjà le jardin parfumé
Se remplit d'oiseaux et de roses:
Viens! mon bien-aimé!

Soleil, de ta brûlante ivresse,
J'ai senti mon coeur enflammé,
Plus enivrante est ta caresse,
Viens! mon bien-aimé!

Tout se tait, de millions d'étoiles
Le ciel profond est parsemé,
Quand sur nous la nuit met ses voiles:
Viens! mon bien-aimé!

The beautiful days are at last returning
Even now, April is in the air!
A shiver of love penetrates me,
Come! My beloved!

They have fled, the long nights morose,
Already the garden is perfumed,
It is filled with birds and roses:
Come! My beloved!

Sun, from your burning intoxication,
I have felt my heart burst into flame,
Yet more intoxicating is your caress:
Come! My beloved!

All is silent, among millions of stars,
The sky endless and bespeckled,
When around us the night brings her veil:
Come! My beloved!
Poetry and Translations, con’t

Clair de Lune

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vieopportune
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

Light of the Moon

Your soul is a chosen landscape
Where charming masqueraders and bergamaskers go
Playing the lute and dancing and almost
Sad beneath their fanciful disguises.

All sing in a minor key
Of victorious love and the opportune life,
They do not seem to believe in their happiness
And their song mingles with the moonlight,

With the still moonlight, sad and beautiful,
That sets the birds dreaming in the trees
And the fountains sobbing in ecstasy,
The tall slender fountains among marble statues.
Flower duet from *Lakmé*  
Edmond Gondinet and Philippe Gille  
(1828-1888 and 1831-1901)

Lakmé: Viens, Mallika, les lianes en fleurs  
Jettent déjà leur ombre  
Sur le ruisseau sacré qui coule, calme et sombre,  
Eveillé par le chant des oiseaux tapageurs!

Mallika: Oh! maîtresse,  
C'est l'heure ou je te vois sourire,  
L'heure bénie où je puis lire  
dans le coeur toujours fermé de Lakmé!

Les deux: Sous le dôme épais, où le blanc jasmine à la rose s'assemble  
Sur la rive en fleurs, riant au matin,  
Viens, descendons/nous appellet ensemble.  
Doucement glissons de son flot charmant  
Suivons le courant fuyant  
Dans l'onde frémissante, d'une main nonchalante  
Viens, gagnons le bord,  
Où la source dort et l'oiseau, l'oiseau chante.

Lakmé: Mais, je ne sais quelle crainte subite,  
S'empare de moi,  
Quand mon père va seul à leur ville maudite;  
Je tremble, je tremble d'effroi!

Mallika: Pourquoi le Dieu Ganeça le protège,  
Jusqu'à l'étang où s'ébattent joyeux  
Les cygnes aux ailes de neige,  
Allons cueillir les lotus bleus.

Lakmé: Oui, près des cygnes aux ailes de neige,  
Allons cueillir les lotus bleus.
Poetry and Translations, con’t

Lakmé: Come, Mallika, the lianas in bloom
Throw already their shadow over the sacred stream
Which runs, calm and somber,
Awakened by the song of the chattering birds!

Mallika: Oh, mistress,
It is the hour where I see you smiling,
The blessed hour where I can read
Into the always closed heart of Lakmé!

Both: Under the thick dome where the white jasmine
With the roses are entwined together.
On the river bank in bloom laughing in the morning
Let us descend/it calls us together!
Gently floating on its water charming,
In shimmering waves, with a casual hand
Come, let us reach the bank,
Where the spring sleeps, and the birds, the birds sing.
Under the thick dome, under the white jasmine
Ah! Let us descend/it calls us together!

Lakmé: But, I know not what sudden fear takes hold of me,
As my father goes alone to their accused city,
I tremble, I tremble with fear!

Mallika: While the god Ganesha protects him,
To the pond where frolic joyously
The swans with wings of snow,
Let us go gather the blue lotus.

Lakme: Yes, near the swans with wings of snow,
Let us gather the blue lotus.

Both: Under the thick dome, etc.
Der bescheidene Schäfer

Mein Schäfer, ach! der ist bescheiden!
Er liebt mich, zärtlich liebt er mich!
Der Innbegriff von seiner Freuden,
sagt er mir öfter, sei nur ich.
Doch bleibt er allerzeit bescheiden.

Jüngst ließ die Mutter uns allein.
Was denkst du, ist als-dann geschehn?
Da stand er starr gleich einem Steine,
Guckt' in den Hut und wollte geh'n;
und ach! wir waren ganz alleine!

Mein Schäfer, ach! der ist bescheiden!

The Shy Shepherd

My shepherd, oh, he is so shy!
He loves me, tenderly he loves me!
The embodiment of his joy,
He says to me often, is only me.
But stays he always so shy!

Recently my mother left us alone.
What do you think happened?
He stood there stiff, just like a statue,
Looked at his hat, and wanted to go;
And oh, we were all alone!

My shepherd, oh, he is so shy!
Poetry and Translations, con’t

Auch kleine Dinge

Auch kleine Dinge können uns entzücken,
Auch kleine Dinge können teuer sein.
Bedenkt, wie gern wir uns mit Perlen schmücken;
Sie werden schwer bezahlt und sind nur klein.
Bedenkt, wie klein ist die Olivenfrucht,
Und wird um ihre Güte doch gesucht.
Denkt an die Rose nur, wie klein sie ist,
Und duftet doch so lieblich, wie ihr wißt.

Even little things can delight us,
Even little things can be precious.
Think how we gladly adorn ourselves with pearls;
They are heavily paid for, and yet are small.
Think how small is the olive’s fruit,
And is nevertheless sought for its virtue.
Think only on the rose, how small she is,
And yet, smells so lovely, as you know.

Ständchen

Mach auf, mach auf, doch leise mein Kind,
Um keinen vom Schlummer zu wecken.
Kaum murmelt der Bach, kaum zittert im Wind
Ein Blatt an den Büschen und Hecken.
Drum leise, mein Mädchen, daß nichts sich regt,
Nur leise die Hand auf die Klinke gelegt.

Adolph Friedrich von Schack
(1815-1894)
Mit Tritten, wie Tritte der Elfen so sacht,
Um über die Blumen zu hüpfen,
Flieg leicht hinaus in die Mondscheinnacht,
Zu mir in den Garten zu schlüpfen.
Rings schlummern die Blüten am rieselnden Bach
Und duften im Schlaf, nur die Liebe ist wach.

Sitz nieder, hier dämmert’s geheimnisvoll
Unter den Lindenbäumen,
Die Nachtigall uns zu Häupten soll
Von unseren Küssen träumen,
Und die Rose, wenn sie am Morgen erwacht,
Hoch glühn von den Wonnenschauern der Nacht.

Seranade

Open up, open up, but softly my darling,
So as to wake no one from sleep.
The brook hardly murmurs, the wind hardly shakes
A leaf on bush or hedge.
So, softly, my maiden, so that nothing stirs,
Just lay your hand softly on the door latch.

With steps as soft as the footsteps of elves,
Soft enough to hop over the flowers,
Fly lightly out into the moonlit night,
To slip out to me in the garden.
The flowers are sleeping along the rippling brook,
Fragrant in sleep, only love is awake.

Sit down, here it darkens mysteriously
Beneath the linden trees,
The nightingale over our heads shall dream of our kisses,
And the rose, when it wakes in the morning,
Shall glow from the wondrous passions of the night.
Poetry and Translations, con’t

Pippa’s song

Robert Browning
(1812-1889)

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world!

In a Gondola

Robert Browning
(1812-1889)

The moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made me believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide ope I burst.

Cradle song

16th century

O my deir hert, young Jesus sweit,
Prepare thy credil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee in my hert
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoir
With sang is sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my heart sall I bow,
And sing that richt balulalow!

In a Gondola

Robert Browning
(1812-1889)
The bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you enter'd gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so all is render'd up,
And passively its shatter'd cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

Je suis Titania from Mignon

Jules Barbier and Michel Carré
(1825-1901 and 1821-1872)

Oui, pour ce soir je suis reine des fées!
Voici mon sceptre d’or, et voici mes trophées!

Je suis Titania la blonde,
Je suis Titania, fille de l’air,
En riant je parcours le monde,
Plus vive que l’oiseau,
Plus prompte que l’éclair!

La troupe folle des lutins suit
Mon char qui vole et dans la nuit fuit!
Autour de moi toute ma cour court,
Chantant le plaisir et l’amour
La troupe folle des lutins suit
Mon char qui vole et dans la nuit fuit!
Autour de moi toute ma cour court,
Au rayon de Phoebé qui luit!

Parmi les fleurs que l’aurore fait éclore,
Par les bois et par les prés diaprés,
Sur les flots couverts d’écume, dans la brume,
On me voit d’un pied léger voltiger!
Yes, for tonight, I am queen of the fairies!
See my scepter of gold, and look at my trophies!

I am Titania, the fair,
I am Titania, daughter of the air!
Laughing, I traverse the world,
More lively than the birds, more quickly than lightening!

The impish troupe of spirits follows my chariot
Which flies and into the night flees!
Around me all my court races,
Singing of pleasure and love!
The impish troupe of spirits follows my chariot
Which flies and into the night flees!
Around me all my court races,
At the ray of Phoebe, which gleams!

Around the flowers, which the sunrise makes bloom,
Through the woods and through the colorful meadows,
Over the waves covered in foam, in the mist,
One sees me light-footedly fluttering!
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