CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTH RIDGE

Songs to the Muse:
A Graduate Voice Recital

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Music in Music, Performance

By
Sarah Salazar

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The graduate project of Sarah Salazar is approved:

______________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Deanna Murray  Date

______________________________________________  __________________
Professor Diane Ketchie  Date

______________________________________________  __________________
Dr. David Sannerud, Chair  Date

California State University, Northridge
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Abstract

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This document, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree in Vocal Arts, will explore the selected repertoire which was composed in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. With the artistic freedom and ability to stray from the musical norm, allows more compositional freedom. Through this abstract I will explore the different characteristics of each piece and how the usage of the text and underlying music points toward God, love and loss, or a specific person.

I chose to open my program with a set of Spanish art songs by Antonio Salazar. Both the musical setting and texts were composed and written by Salazar through different periods of his life. The first two songs, Portí and Sueño en el Puerto, were written in dedication to his wife. The meaning of the first song, Portí, describes a love so powerful, so pure, which can only be directed to one person. Salazar describes his love as being only for his wife. He describes that she brings life to his empty life and only she can bring comfort to him. Written as a waltz, this song exemplifies the love he had for his wife. The second song, Inspiración, was “homage to the muse which seemed to abandon him for a time.” This song describes of the muse no longer gracing him with its presence and no longer filling his life. He writes of the muse giving life to his dreams and filling his life with a thousand loves. One may think this song could have been written describing his wife as she had planned to leave him. This song describes the loneliness he felt when his wife left. The third song of the set, Sueño en el Puerto, was also written in
dedication to his wife and is written as a waltz. The text describes his relationship with his wife as if their relationship was in a dreamlike state. The second song prepares the listener to imagine the muse coming to life. As the song begins, Salazar describes the woman coming towards him and instantly losing his heart to her. Towards the end, the lover is awakened by the coming of dawn and realizes it was all a dream of the kiss he had just shared was simply nothing but a dream.

The next set exemplifies pieces from the era of German lieder. I selected to perform lieder by composers, Schubert and Strauss. They are two of the most appreciated composers of the 19th century. Schubert’s most famous art song, “Gretchen am Spinnrade,” opened this set and describes a woman caught up in her love affair with Faust. During the time Schubert began composing, he was extremely interested in the story of Faust and used the story as an inspiration to compose Gretchen am Spinnrade. This song is a dramatic representation of her turmoil as she thinks about the encounter she experienced with Faust. The listener can hear the spinning wheel, represented by the right hand on the piano, while the left hand is imitating the sound of the foot treadle being pressed. As the song continues, one can hear the building tension, and finally as the lyrics reach “sein Kuss” the spinning wheel suddenly stops. This pause in the music represents Gretchen reaching her climax of insanity. She quickly realizes she needs to return to spinning and the right and left hand start the spinning very slowly and then the pace gradually returns to the normal tempo. As she continues to spin, her turmoil increases and she suddenly realizes she will never be with him. The song ends with “Meine Ruh ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer” which represents her seeing the reality of her relationship with Faust.

The next two pieces performed, were composed by Richard Strauss. In the art song “Die Nacht,” the poet, Hermann von Gilm, sets the text to represent the powers of the night. The right
hand begins the accompaniment by the repetition of eighth notes, which is played throughout the entire song. This exemplifies the night settling in. Only when the verse ends, does the right hand venture off to a different rhythmic structure. The left hand underlies the steady rhythmic structure of the right hand by playing a melody representative of the daylight. When the right hand begins playing something other than eighth notes, only then does the left hand use eighth notes in the accompaniment. This is representative of the night finally taking over the wonders of the day. For example, at the text “und stielt die Garben weg vom Feld (and steals the sheaves from the fields),” the hands switch rhythmic cells and the harmony sounds as if the night has taken over musically, representing the taking away of the things which are mentioned in the first verse. The last verse describes the fear of the night and its power to take away the blessings of the day, that it may also have the power to steal his loved one. I chose to end this set with “Mein Herz ist stumm, mein Herz ist kalt,” another poem written by Adolph Friedrich Gref von Scheck and set to music by Strauss in 1888. Although set in A flat minor, the piece goes through many harmonic transitions of which are too sporadic to truly call key modulations. These modal changes create tonal ambiguity throughout the piece. As the text speaks of a silent cold heart, the accompaniment mirrors this perfectly. In the first statement of the heart becoming silent, the piano holds a strong, poignant chord of half notes. The melodic and rhythmic structure changes at the text, “At times, in its depths it stirs, and trembles and moves softly.” Here, the right hand begins playing in triplets to represent the stirring of the heart and to represent the hope that begins piercing through. At the realization the heart will never be young again; this triplet pattern stops and strong rhythmic and harmonic chords are played. The piece ends with the same structure from the beginning of the piece, “mein Herz ist stumm, mein Herz ist kalt.” This is the final realization that all hope is lost.
“Letter from Sullivan Ballou” was chosen to close the first half of the recital. The most beautiful thing about this text is that it was written directly to his wife, Sarah. The text was set to music by the American composer, John Kander, who, is most known for his Broadway musical successes and awards; specifically, the musical “Cabaret.” “Letter from Sullivan Ballou” is one of Kanders only non-musical and stand-alone pieces. Sullivan Ballou, a major in the Second Rhode Island Infantry Regiment, wrote the letter just one week before suffering mortal wounds from the first battle of Bull Run. He left behind not only his wife but his two children, Edgar and William. In his letter he describes his torment over being dedicated to his country and having to sacrifice being with his family. He writes of being honored to stand for the American Revolution, but he also speaks of his undying love for his wife Sarah. The letter speaks of his confidence in her abilities as a mother and asks her not to mourn over his death. Sadly, this letter was never mailed to Sarah, but was left behind with all of Sullivan’s personal belongings. He knew that if he did not survive the battle, the letter, along with his belongings would be given to his wife.

Opening the second half was Libby Larsen’s “Try Me, Good King.” The texts of these songs were all gathered from the gallow speeches, letters, and last words of King Henry the Eighth's wives. King Henry the eighth was more concerned with producing an heir to the throne than remaining faithful to his wife. In “Try Me, Good King,” Larsen exemplifies each wife through the usage of text painting and choosing texts which originated from each wife.

Larsen begins her song cycle with Henry’s first wife, Katherine of Aragon. Katherine of Aragon was married to Henry’s brother, Arthur. Unfortunately, Arthur passed away only five months of being wed to Katherine. In response to his death, Katherine was set to marry Henry, due to the fact that the marriage between Katherine and Arthur had not been consummated. After
Katherine’s failed attempts to produce a male heir, Henry began speaking to Anne Boleyn. As his disinterest began in Katherine, he started searching for ways to divorce her. The laws of the church prohibited him from annulling his marriage and he eventually took the matters of religion into his own hands. His marriage was successfully annulled but Katherine denied his supremacy over the Catholic Church and viewed herself as King Henry’s lawful wife. She held that thought until the day she died. Libby Larsen reflects the inner turmoil of Katherine perfectly. She uses steady rhythmic cells of eighteenth notes (on F3) throughout to represent the constancy of Katherine’s dedication to King Henry. Some also say this repetition is used to represent the tension between King Henry and Katherine of Aragon. Throughout the song, there is a pull between C natural and C sharp. This is used to represent the inner struggle between King Henry, herself, and God. Katherine of Aragon died with her love still heavily devoted in King Henry the Eighth.

The second wife, Anne Boleyn, was in an affair with King Henry during his marriage to Katherine. It is apparent in the text of the song that he would write letters to her. There’s a point in the text where Anne Boleyn mocks that he would write these letters; she states: “Do you not remember the words of your own true hand?” The letter then goes on to question him calling her his mistress and his friend. Anne Boleyn, at first, rejected King Henry’s advances, but soon after the success of the annulment of his marriage to Katherine, Anne soon became Henry’s wife. Anne would soon feel the dissatisfaction of being unable to produce a male heir. She had three miscarriages and Henry felt he needed to find a wife who would be able to give birth to a male heir to the throne. He soon ordered for her death by charging her with adultery and Anne was beheaded. Larsen represents the thought process of Anne at the time of her beheading by indicating a variety of tempo markings throughout the piece. In the beginning of the song, the
tempo is marked at 138, as Anne challenges and pleads to King Henry for a fair trial. The tempo marking changes to 80 as the texts begin reflecting on the supposed love Anne and King Henry. The tempo markings change many times throughout the piece. At the end of the piece, one can feel Anne’s preparation to face her death. The tempo slows as she reflects on the smallness of her neck. The song ends with the soprano being unaccompanied to represent Anne’s final words before she was beheaded.

Jane Seymour was King Henry’s most loved and appreciated wife because she was able to produce a male heir. Jane Seymour and King Henry had a very happy relationship but their relationship was also started while King Henry was still married to Anne Boleyn. Jane soon became pregnant and gave birth to a healthy baby boy, Edward. Unfortunately, Jane became very ill and died only a few days following the birth. In Larsen’s musical portrayal of Jane, she chooses to compose the music in a slower, reflective state. I feel the words are accompanied by a peaceful and smooth piano line. Jane passed away knowing she would not suffer at the hands of King Henry.

My favorite song in Larsen’s cycle is that of Anne of Cleves. There’s a story surrounding the origin of how Anne of Cleves and Henry came to marry. Upon the death of Jane Seymour, Henry was already searching for his new conquest. It is rumored he hired an artist to go and find the most beautiful and deserving woman. Upon the artist’s arrival with the paintings, Henry was assured that Anne of Cleves was the best match for him. Upon arrival to the King’s courts, there was an immediate disinterest in each other. But, it was all too late, for they had signed marriage papers prior to their meeting. King Henry would call Anne of Cleves his sister in embarrassment of being married to her. She was also looked down upon by the court and her looks were often compared to that of a horse. She was Henry’s one wife who was able to end her marriage with
Henry in peace. The divorce was simple and Anne of Cleves was never held accountable for her inability to produce a male heir. Larsen chose to represent Anne of Cleves through giving her an upbeat piece. The accompaniment reflects that of the trot of a horse and there are also notes imitating horse sounds. The music is playful and light, representing the ease at which Anne of Cleves found her freedom from King Henry.

The final piece in Larsen’s cycle is that of Katherine Howard. Katherine Howard was the youngest of his wives and her personality reflected her naivety. During her marriage she had an affair with a man name Thomas Culpepper and this affair would later be the turning point in her marriage with King Henry. Days after confirming her affair, King Henry ordered Katherine to be beheaded. She died at the young age of 21. Larsen reflects Katherine’s fear of dying through having an ominous and slow introduction. This slow melodic melody plays throughout the entire piece. I view this accompaniment as Katherine’s inner struggle and inner thoughts as she gives her final speech before dying. Her last words in the song are “I die a queen, but I’d rather die the wife of Culpeper.” As this part is sung, there is no accompaniment beneath the vocal line and I think this is representative of her being completely confident in what she is stating. The song ends with the piano imitating the sound of a head rolling. The last few measures of the piece are played by the piano, which signifies the death of Katherine Howard.

The final set of the program was composed from hymn settings and texts from the Bible. In Hank Beebe’s choral arrangement, “For the Mountains Shall Depart,” he uses texts from the Bible as the song’s lyrics. The lyrics reflect God’s unending grace and love and the confidence one can find in the Lord. Hank Beebe decided to combine a soprano vocal line with a four part choir. When the chorus enters, a feeling of redemption and confidence can be felt. The next piece, “Give Me Jesus,” is also a four part choral piece with a featured soprano solo. Inspired by
Jessye Norman’s 1991 Carnegie Hall performance, my friend Lucas Fehring transcribed the piece for the recital, as music was not found for the arrangement desired. “Give Me Jesus” is a simple hymn but set so beautifully. The combination of the choir with the solo soprano is particularly uplifting.

The last song of the set was “Ride on King Jesus,” from John Carter’s “Toccata.” This song represents the faithfulness, strength, and power found in Jesus Christ. The driving strength of the piano line represents the faithfulness and strength of the Lord. The vocal line is stirring and powerful throughout the piece.

In “Songs to the Muse,” each set reflected words and music which were inspired by a specific person, love and loss, or God. Each set had its muse. The first three sets represented love and loss of a loved one. “Try Me, Good King,” was a cycle written with inspiration from the words and letters from each of King Henry’s wives. The final set was inspired by giving glory to God. How blessed that we, as humans, are able to communicate the full gamut of emotion through music. We may speak different languages, but music is one language that we all share. Music has no borders or limitations, and that is why music is able to touch the lives of so many so deeply.
Program

California State University, Northridge
Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication
Department of Music
Present
The Master of Music Recital of
Sarah Salazar, Soprano
In Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Music Degree in Music Performance
From the Studio of Diane Ketchie
Accompanied by: Victoria Simonian
March 6, 2016
4:30 p.m.
Music Recital Hall

Portí
Inspiración
Sueño en el Puerto

Gretchen am Spinnrade
Die Nacht
Mein herz ist stumm, mein herz ist kalt

Letter from Sullivan Ballou

Intermission

Try me, Good King
1. Katherine of Aragon
2. Anne Boeyln
3. Jane Seymour
4. Anne of Cleves
5. Katherine Howard

For the Mountains Shall Depart
Give me Jesus
Ride on King Jesus

Antonio Arroyo Salazar
Franz Schubert
Richard Strauss
John Kander
Libby Larsen
Hank Beebe
Trans. by Lucas Fehring
John Carter