

EXPLORATION OF VOCAL REPERTOIRE IN PERFORMANCE

by

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Abstract

This project consists of a 25-minute vocal recital accompanied by a written component. The vocal recital includes repertoire from each of the four main periods of music history (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary) and works in English, Italian, French, and German. The written component consists of biographical information on each composer, character and musical analysis, exploration of technical aspects of the pieces, musical characteristics of composers and time periods, and translations of texts. Pieces that are part of a larger work of music, such as an oratorio or opera, include historical information and a synopsis of the larger work. When the author of the text of a piece can be identified, that information will be included alongside the composer. A condensed version of this thesis will be available to audience members as program notes at the time of the recital.

Chanson d'amour
Les berceaux

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Three Irish Folksong Settings
The Salley Gardens
The Foggy Dew
She Moved Through the Fair

John Corigliano
(b. 1938)

Thou art gone up on high
from *Messiah*

George Frideric Handel
(1685-1759)

From *Italienisches Liederbuch*
Schweig' einmal still
Nicht länger kann ich singen
Verschling' der Abgrund meines
Liebsten Hütte

Hugo Wolf
(1860-1903)

From *Le Nozze di Figaro*
Voi, che sapete
Via resti servita

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Performance Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sf6LG09j76c>

Introduction

Those studying music spend years anticipating and preparing for their senior recital. There are specific requirements guiding the selection of repertoire: the student must perform music from each of the four major periods in music history (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary), and in each of four main languages (English, Italian, French, and German). With these guidelines in mind, I selected five sets of pieces to perform at my recital. For my first set, I selected two pieces by Romantic composer Gabriel Fauré. The first, “Chanson d’amour,” I chose because it is a standard French piece that I was excited to interpret. The second, “Les berceaux,” I had studied in previous semesters and remained one of my favorite pieces for its low range and intense emotion. I was concerned about selecting a contemporary set, since I tend to prefer functional harmony to atonality, but I was inspired to begin searching for a duet between voice and flute when my instructor happened to mention one. I happened across a set composed by John Corigliano of three Irish folksongs, which I was immediately drawn to. I have Irish heritage, and the flautist that I hoped to perform with had previously travelled to Ireland with me. I also enjoyed the juxtaposition of folk songs with a contemporary flute line. The third set, comprised of only one piece, came once again from repertoire of previous semesters. I chose a piece from *Messiah* (Handel’s most famous oratorio) that I had performed with Appalachian State University’s Baroque ensemble, Collegium Musicum. Having given a historically informed performance, I felt attached to the piece, and enjoyed the challenge of its melismas and its alto range. The fourth set, containing three pieces from a collection of settings by German Romantic composer Hugo Wolf, I chose because of their intense and exciting textual translations. For my final set, my recital partner and I wanted to perform together, so we selected the comic duet “Via

resti servita” from Mozart’s *Le Nozze de Figaro*. I chose to complete the set by reprising an aria from the same opera that I had performed in previous semesters, the mezzo-soprano classic “Voi, che sapete.”

Gabriel Fauré

Gabriel Fauré was born in 1845 and began his musical studies at the age of ten, later studying composition with French composer Camille Saint-Saëns. To maintain a livelihood, Fauré took on duties as an organist at various churches before assuming the position of composition professor at the Paris Conservatory. As a composition teacher, Fauré encouraged his students to discover their own styles rather than emulating his. In 1905, he was appointed Director of the Paris Conservatory, a post that he eventually left due to old age.¹ Though Fauré’s works can be divided into three periods - early, middle, and late - there are not the same radical differences between these periods that are evident in the works of other composers. Influences on Fauré’s early works include Chopin, Mozart, and Schumann, while the composer’s later works foreshadowed Schoenberg’s atonal compositions.² Fauré is well known for his impressive contribution to *mélodie*, a form of French art song that gained popularity in salons.³ Art song can be defined as “a genre that melded poetry and music into a unique relationship in which piano and voice were closely linked to the poetic phrase, and

¹ Aaron Copland, "Gabriel Fauré, a Neglected Master." *The Musical Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1924): 573-86.

² Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³ Brent M. Gravois, “Scholarly Program Notes of Recital Repertoire” (2014). *Southern Illinois University Carbondale: Research Papers*. Paper 527.

the melody, harmony, and rhythm of the music were crafted to reflect the meaning and mood of the poems they interpreted.”⁴

Chanson d’amour

“Chanson d’amour” was composed and published in the year 1882 as the first of Two Songs, Op. 27, and falls at the very beginning of Fauré’s middle period of composition. Paul-Armand Silvestre, a French Parnassian poet who lived from 1837 to 1901, wrote the text. Parnassian poets focused on elegance, balance, and technical perfection in response to the emotionalism of Romantic poets. In Fauré’s use of the poem, he repeats the first stanza as a refrain. The form of “Chanson d’amour” is ABACA, similar to that of a five-part rondo. The refrain features a one-measure motive that rises in sequence and is repeated throughout the song. These rising sequences mirror the increasing adoration of the singer towards their love. The melodic lines are gentle in their simplicity, like a caress. In the first verse, Fauré introduces a number of chromatic pitches that destabilize the major modality and tonal center of F. This instability combined with a descending conjunct vocal line creates a sense of awe and eeriness that reflects the text, which speaks of the “strange grace” of the voice of the singer’s love. Perhaps surprisingly, the text “my hell and my paradise” is set to the outline of a major triad. In my interpretation, this setting suggests that the words are spoken fondly, as a tease or term of endearment.

The second verse expresses a sense of blissful contentment and excitement. The music once again shifts from the tonal center of F, first to D and then again to E before returning to F at the refrain. This progression of tonicizations creates another rising sequence similar to the one used in the refrain motive and evokes an image of blossoming love. Fauré

⁴ Lorraine Gorrell, *The Nineteenth-Century German Lied* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 1993).

also makes more frequent use of shorter note values in the second verse, which adds to the sense of movement and excitement. The final A section varies slightly from the first two in that the last phrase of text is repeated with one altered note. This alteration brings a sense of final resolution to the piece.

Chanson d'amour

J'aime tes yeux, j'aime ton front,
 O ma rebelle, ô ma farouche,
 J'aime tes yeux, j'aime ta bouche,
 Où mes baisers s'épuiseront.
 J'aime ta voix, j'aime l'étrange
 Grâce de tout ce que tu dis,
 Ô ma rebelle, ô mon cher ange,
 Mon enfer et mon paradis!
 J'aime tout ce qui te fait belle,
 De tes pieds jusqu'à tes cheveux,
 Ô toi vers qui montent mes vœux,
 Ô ma farouche, ô ma rebelle!

Song of Love

I love your eyes, I love your brow,
 Oh my rebel, oh my wild one,
 I love your eyes, I love your mouth
 Upon which my kisses will expire.
 I love your voice, I love the strange
 Grace of all that you say,
 Oh my rebel, oh my dear angel,
 My hell and my paradise!
 I love all that makes you beautiful,
 From your feet to your hair,
 Oh you to whom my wishes ascend,
 Oh my wild one, oh my rebel!

Les Berceaux

“Les berceaux” is one of *Trois mélodies*, which were composed in 1879, at the very end of Fauré’s early period of composition. The pieces were dedicated to Mademoiselle Alice Boissonnet, a young singer in Fauré’s harmony class to whom the composer felt drawn. The mutual attraction was short lived, as Boissonnet married another two years later.⁵ Sully Prudhomme (1839-1907), a French poet and essay writer who became the first winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901, wrote the text of “Les Berceaux.” He devoted most of the money he received to the establishment of a poetry prize, and in 1902 helped to found the *Société des poètes français*, the oldest poetry society in France. “Les Berceaux” was included

⁵ Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

in his first published collection of poetry, *Stances et poemes* (1865), which was inspired by an unhappy love affair.⁶

In the first stanza, the singer sets the scene, comparing the sway of the ships to the rocking of the cradles at home. The piano accompaniment mimics the swelling motion of the waves and the cradles. The second stanza is the most musically climactic, featuring an ascending melodic line that reaches the highest pitch of the piece, expressing the singer's grief and bitter frustration. This line is also an example of text painting; the ascending melody represents the alluring horizons spoken of in the text. The final stanza is more reflective, returning mostly to the melodic pattern of the first stanza with the addition of an ending section as the singer recognizes that, even as they sail away, the men will be tied to their families.

Les Berceaux

Le long du quai, les grands vaisseaux,
 Que la houle incline en silence,
 Ne prennent pas garde aux berceaux,
 Que la main des femmes balance.
 Mais viendra le jour des adieux,
 Car il faut que les femmes pleurent,
 Et que les hommes curieux
 Tentent les horizons qui leurrent!
 Et ce jour-là, les grands vaisseaux,
 Fuyant le port qui diminue,
 Sentent leur masse retenue
 Par l'âme des lointains berceaux.

The Cradles

Along the pier the great vessels,
 Which the swell bends in silence,
 Take no notice of the cradles
 Which the hands of the women rock.
 But the day of farewells will come,
 For the women must cry,
 And the curious men must
 Explore the enticing horizons!
 And on that day, the great vessels,
 Fleeing from the diminishing port,
 Feel their mass restrained
 By the soul of the distant cradles

John Corigliano

American John Corigliano is a contemporary composer born in 1938. He has lived in New York City all his life, and continues to reside there presently with his partner, Mark

⁶ "Sully Prudhomme." Encyclopædia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/> (September 03, 2018).

Adamo. As a child and early in his composing career, Corigliano suffered from a sort of stage fright, even when he was not the one performing. For the first 20 years of his career, he could not bear to be in the hall during a performance of one of his works.⁷ Early on, Corigliano learned orchestration by studying scores while listening to recordings, and later earned his bachelor's degree in music from Columbia University and continued his study of composition at the Manhattan School of Music. In 1964, his Sonata for Violin and Piano won the chamber music prize at the Spoleto Festival, which brought attention to his skill as a composer.⁸ Corigliano is now recognized for works across a number of genres and mediums, including concertos, chamber works, orchestral and band pieces, choral works, one opera, and three symphonies. His works have been recognized with numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Grawemeyer Award, several Grammy Awards, and an Academy Award.⁹

Three Irish Folksong Settings

In *Three Irish Folksong Settings*, which was first performed in 1988, Corigliano sought to explore the poetic side of Irish flute music, setting texts by authors W.B. Yeats ("Down By the Salley Gardens"), Padraic Colum ("She Moved Through the Fair"), and an anonymous author ("The Foggy Dew").¹⁰ In each setting, the voice carries the standard folk tune while the flute weaves around and through it. The pairing of voice and flute creates an ethereal timbre as the lines cross over each other, sometimes in harmony, accompaniment, or

⁷ Naomi Lewin, "John Corigliano On Composing At 80: 'An Adagio Is What I Look For.'" NPR, <http://www.npr.org/> (February 18, 2018).

⁸ "John Corigliano," Music Academy Online, <http://www.musicacademyonline.com/>.

⁹ "Biography," Composer John Corigliano, <http://www.johncorigliano.com/>.

¹⁰ John Corigliano, "Three Irish Folksong Settings (1998) - for Voice and Flute," Composer John Corigliano, <http://www.johncorigliano.com/>.

seemingly entirely independent. As suggested by the title, the piece is divided into three folksongs.

The Salley Gardens

The text of “The Salley Gardens” is reflective, remembering the presence and advice of a love that has now gone. Each verse follows the musical phrase structure AABA, with the first two phrases describing how they had once been, the third recalling their advice, and the fourth full of regret for not following that advice. The third phrase rests more in the upper tessitura and is unresolved, reflecting the singer’s decision to not follow the advice given. The vocal part alone is written in E major, but the flute part alters the tonality to an eerier, warmer E mixolydian by introducing the flat seventh. Each of the flute’s phrases are different, with the first repeating a simple two-note motive, the second made up of quick runs, and the third harmonizing with the vocal line before returning to a variation of the first phrase. The flute part may represent the memories of the singer as they tell their story: the shadowy presence of the lost love.

Down by the Salley Gardens
my love and I did meet;
She passed the Salley Gardens
with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy
as the leaves grow on the tree,
but I, being young and foolish,
with her did not agree.

In a field by the river
my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder
she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy
as the grass grows on the weirs;
but I was young and foolish,
and now am full of tears.

The Foggy Dew

This folksong is lively and quick with moments of soft stillness between the singer and their desire. The flute part enters hinting at E major, but the vocal line follows in mixolydian. The introduction and each of the interludes mimic the opening vocal line. The

flute part is full of quick grace notes and staccatos, which contribute to a feeling of skipping “down the hill”. Contrastingly, the slower sections in which the singer speaks to the fair maid feature longer legato notes with several fermatas and a feeling of free movement. The piece ends on a tender note with the two finally united, yet with the excitement of the story maintained subtly by the quiet runs in the flute.

A down the hill I went at morn,
 a lovely maid I spied.
 Her hair was bright as the dew that
 wets sweet Anner’s verdant side.
 “Now where go ye, sweet maid?”
 said I, she raised her eyes of blue,
 and smiled and said, “the boy I’ll
 wed I’m to meet in the foggy
 dew.”

Go hide your bloom, ye roses
 red, and droop ye lilies rare,
 for you must pale for very
 shame before a maid so fair.
 Says I, “dear maid, will ye be
 my bride?” Beneath her eyes
 of blue, she smiled and said,
 “the boy I’ll wed I’m to meet
 in the foggy dew.”

A down the hill I went at morn,
 a-singing I did go. A down the
 hill I went at morn, she
 answered soft and low:
 “Yes, I will be your own dear
 bride, and I know that you’ll be
 true,” then sighed in my arms,
 and all her charms, they were
 hidden in the foggy dew.

She Moved Through the Fair

Compared to the first two pieces, “She Moved Through the Fair” has a less clear sense of meter. Though the rhythms are simple, the many sustained pitches and intricate flute runs create a flowing motion for the piece. The tempo picks up after the first verse, leading into a section with more trills, accents, grace notes, and shorter note values, until gradually the lines decrescendo, lengthen, and return to the original tempo. This quicker section accompanies the text describing the young love moving through the fair as the singer fondly watches. The final verse, in which the young love comes softly to speak of their wedding day, presents a much simpler flute part that often moves in tandem with the vocal line, creating a sense of unity and peace. The work concludes with a major second between the sustained voice pitch and the flute, and the voice drops off as the flute sustains an unresolved pitch, as the lovers still wait for their wedding day.

My young love said to me,
 “my mother won’t mind,
 and my father won’t slight you
 for your lack of kine.”
 And she stepped away from me
 and this she did say:
 “It will not be long, love,
 till our wedding day.”

She stepped away from me
 and she moved through the
 fair,
 and fondly I watched her
 move here and move there,
 and then she went homeward
 with one star awake
 as the swan in the evening
 moves over the lake.

Last night she came to me,
 she came softy in,
 so softly she came
 that her feet made no din,
 and she laid her hand on me
 and this she did say:
 “it will not be long, love,
 till our wedding day.”

George Frideric Handel

George Frideric Handel was a German-born Baroque composer who spent the bulk of his career in London. He is most famous for his operas, oratorios, and anthems. As a child, Handel was discouraged from any involvement in music by his father, who was determined that George would study law. However, the young Handel managed to sneak a clavichord into a small room of the house, and through the instrument discovered music for himself. Though he initially attended law school to match his father’s wishes, he was inevitably drawn to music, and settled in London as a composer.¹¹

Messiah

Already a prolific composer of Italian operas, Handel had to adapt when these operas fell out of style in England in favor of the English oratorio, which is similar in musical structure to an opera, is an un-staged setting of a sacred text. After recovering from a stroke, Handel composed a 260-page oratorio in only 23 days. The text came from the King James Version of the Bible and from several psalms included in the Book of Common Prayer, following Jesus from the virgin birth to the prediction of the Day of Judgment. Handel’s oratorio *Messiah* was first performed in Dublin, Ireland on April 13, 1742, and the proceeds from the performance were donated to prisoners, orphans, and the sick. The oratorio has

¹¹ "George Frideric Handel: A Brief History," Mormon Tabernacle Choir, <https://www.mormontabernaclechoir.org/>.

since become one of the best-known works of Western choral music. Unlike in an opera, the singers of *Messiah* do not assume dramatic roles, but the work is divided into three parts with various scenes.

Thou Art Gone Up On High

The air “Thou Art Gone Up On High” comes from Scene 5 of Part II, which reflects the beginnings of Gospel preaching and consecrates the Passion of Christ. The text for this air comes from Psalm lxxviii (68), 18, which, in the King James Bible, reads “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.” The text “Thou art gone up on high” is regularly accompanied by an ascending melody, which is a significant example of text painting. God’s graciousness and majesty are reflected in the long melismas of “received” and “dwell.” “Thou Art Gone Up On High” is written in triple meter, which gives it the feeling of a dance, with the exception of hemiolas at cadence points, which bring further emphasis to the text (“even for thine enemies” and “that the Lord God might dwell among them”). The combination of impressive melismas, triple meter, and a minor tonality create a reverent and mysterious yet celebratory tone for the air. The air is written for alto voice, and the lower tessitura brings a warmth and breadth to the piece, and higher sections are used to emphasize important text.

Hugo Wolf

Hugo Wolf was an Austrian late Romantic composer who lived from 1860 to 1903. Despite his belief that larger works were the hallmarks of great composers, Wolf was best known for his *Lied*, or German art songs. He organized the lyrics of particular poets into anthologies that were somewhat reminiscent of song cycles, finding connections between

poems sometimes not explicitly intended by the author. Though Wolf was heavily influenced by Wagner, his early *Lied* was modeled after composers such as Robert Schumann.¹² The tonal ambiguity of the late Romantic period was heavily reflected in Wolf's works; the composer would move between two tonal areas to portray conflict, and used deceptive cadences, chromaticism, and dissonance to obscure the tonality of a piece. Wolf rarely set individual poems, instead setting collections of poetry. The following selections come from the second volume of the *Italienisches Liederbuch* (Italian Songbook), settings of Italian texts by anonymous poets translated into German by Paul Heyse, which was published in 1896. Wolf specifically selected the *rispetto* from Heyse's collection, a style of short Italian verse that typically has two stanzas that use strict meter and an *abab ccdd* rhyme scheme.

Schweig' einmal still

The text of "Schweig' einmal still" is extremely humorous, and is the driving force behind much of the musical characteristics of the piece. The singer is imploring another to "shut up," even going so far as to say that they would "prefer the serenade of a donkey" to the other's singing. The donkey's characteristic "bray" is present throughout the piece in the piano accompaniment, which is clunky and angular. The singer's first entrance is aggressive, beginning on the fourth beat of the measure as if interrupting something, on the second-highest pitch of the piece, with an intense cluster of consonants. The vocal line of "Schweig' einmal still" is extremely disjunct, including only 15 stepwise motions compared to 39 leaps. This angularity reflects the singer's frustration both musically and by mimicking a frustrated speaking tone. The tonal center of the piece is largely ambiguous, though A minor is implied

¹² Eric Sams and Susan Youens, "Wolf, Hugo," Oxford Music Online, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.52073, (2001).

through key signature, repeated occurrences of G# accidentals, repetition of A in the piano accompaniment, and the final cadence on an A minor chord.

Schweig' einmal still

Schweig' einmal still, du garst'ger Schwätzer dort!
 Zum Ekel ist mir dein verwünschtes Singen.
 Und triebst du es bis morgen früh so fort
 Doch würde dir kein schmuckes Lied gelingen.
 Schweig einmal still und lege dich aufs Ohr!
 Das Ständchen eines Esels zög' ich vor.

Shut up for once

Shut up for once, you horrible chatterbox!
 Your cursed singing disgusts me.
 And if you pushed on until tomorrow morning,
 You would still not manage a decent song.
 Shut up for once, and lay yourself on your ear!
 I would prefer the serenade of a donkey.

Nicht länger kann ich singen

“Nicht länger kann ich singen” is the most serious of the three pieces I have selected. It speaks of the strong wind making it hard to breathe and impossible to sing, as well as of time running away, loneliness, and uncertainty. These concepts are reflected in Wolf's musical setting of the text. In the first phrase, when the text speaks of the wind, the musical line jumps back and forth between pitches (F to B and then F to C) as if it is being buffeted by the strong winds. The uncertainty discussed in the poem is reflected in the tonal ambiguity of the piece, and by the lack of resolution in the vocal line. There are repeated instances of tritones, which add to the feeling of instability. The vocal range is relatively small, with the melody seeming to wander around within the span of an octave. The tempo is slow, mirroring the contemplative mood of the singer and their fears.

Nicht länger kann ich singen

Nicht länger kann ich singen, denn der Wind
 weht stark und macht dem Athem was zu schaffen
 Auch fürcht' ich, dass die Zeit umsonst verrinnt.
 Ja wär' ich sicher, ging' ich jetzt nicht schlafen.
 Ja wüsst' ich was, würd' ich nicht heimspazieren
 Und einsam diese schöne Zeit verlieren.

I can sing no longer

I can sing no longer, because the wind
 blows strongly and makes it difficult to breathe.
 Also I fear that time trickles by for nothing.
 If I were sure, I would not go now to sleep.
 If I knew something, I would not go walking home
 and lose this lovely time alone.

Verschling' der Abgrund meines Liebsten Hütte

The text and music of “Verschling' der Abgrund meines Liebsten Hütte,” the penultimate piece of *Italienisches Liederbuch*, pack quite a punch. Repeated descending

melodic lines in the voice part coupled with ascending runs in the piano accompaniment create the effect of “engulfing” or “devouring” as dictated by the first word of the text. The singer calls down lead bullets, or lightning, from the skies, while the left hand of the piano accompaniment resembles thunder interrupted by the bolts of lightning in the right hand. A majority of the piece is written in the vocalist’s upper tessitura, with the lowest melodic point accompanying the text of a poisonous serpent dwelling in the ground. The highest pitch (and one of the longest notes) of the piece dramatically accompanies the word “Tod,” or death. As in the previous two Wolf pieces, the melody is unexpected and chromatic, yet the most challenging aspect of this piece is sustaining and supporting the continuous upper tessitura.

Verschling’ der Abgrund meines Liebsten Hütte

Verschling’ der Abgrund meines Liebsten Hütte,
 An ihrer Stelle schäum’ ein See zur Stunde.
 Bleikugeln soll der Himmel drüber schütten,
 Und eine Schlange haue dort im Grunde.
 Drin haue eine Schlange gift’ger Art,
 Die ihn vergifte, der mir untreu ward.
 Drin haue eine Schlange, giftgeschwollen,
 Und bring’ ihm Tod, der mich verraten wollen!

Let the abyss devour my lover’s house

Let the abyss devour my lover’s house,
 And in its place let a lake foam this hour.
 Let lead bullets of the heavens pour over it
 And a snake dwell there in the ground.
 Let a venomous snake dwell there,
 That would poison he who was unfaithful to me.
 Let a snake dwell there, swollen with venom,
 And bring death to him who would betray me!

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart was born in 1756 in Salzburg, Austria. He was a prominent figure in the Classical era known for his operas, symphonies, concertos, and sonatas.¹³ He was tutored in music by his father, Leopold, from a young age, and showed tremendous early talent in composition as well as on the harpsichord and violin. The entire family would tour as a performing group showing off Wolfgang and his sister Maria Anna’s talents until the latter neared marrying age. In 1773, Mozart was appointed assistant concertmaster in Salzburg for a small salary. Becoming discontent, Mozart and his

¹³ "Biography," Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg, <http://www.mozarteum.at>.

mother Anna Maria set out in 1777 in search of better employment opportunities elsewhere. Following his mother's death in 1778, Mozart returned to Salzburg as court organist. In 1779, Mozart settled in Vienna as a freelance composer and performer. In 1782 he married Constanze Weber, with whom he had six children, two of whom survived infancy. Mozart met Lorenzo Da Ponte, a Venetian composer, poet, and librettist in 1785, and the two collaborated on *The Marriage of Figaro*, which received its premier in Vienna in 1786. The two collaborated a second time on *Don Giovanni*, another of Mozart's most famous operas. Mozart's financial situation worsened in the late 1780s, but he was able to recover somewhat during a period of increased compositional productivity in 1790. The composer fell ill and passed away in December of 1791 at age 35. The cause of his death remains uncertain.¹⁴ Mozart was commissioned to compose his first Italian opera, *Mitridate, Re di Ponto*, at age fourteen. Though he had little say in the subject matter of the opera, Mozart took seriously his job of working within the stylistic traditions of Italian opera, and the production was a success. After Giovanni Paisiello's successful operatic version of Pierre Beaumarchais's comedic play *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart suggested to librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte that they collaborate on its sequel, *The Marriage of Figaro*. The play itself had been banned in Vienna for political reasons, and so in transforming the content into libretto, Da Ponte removed many of the political references that had been found objectionable. The resulting opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, is now a staple of operatic repertoire.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Wolfgang Mozart Biography," Biography.com, <https://www.biography.com>, (April 28, 2017).

¹⁵ William Mann, *The Operas of Mozart*, (London: Cassell, 1977).

Le Nozze di Figaro

The Marriage of Figaro takes place in the late eighteenth century near Seville, Spain, in the palace of Count Almaviva. The Count has recently married Rosina, whose maid Susanna is betrothed to marry the Count's personal valet, Figaro. As the head of the house, the Count is at liberty to bed whoever he may choose, and has set his sights on Susanna. Meanwhile, a young page named Cherubino finds himself attracted to every woman in the castle, which angers the Count, who attempts to send him off to war. Susanna saves Cherubino, and as they plot with the Countess and Figaro to foil the Count's plans, Marcellina appears with a contract of marriage signed by Figaro. Figaro avoids the contract by displaying his birthmark, which reveals that he is Marcellina's long-lost illegitimate son.¹⁶

Voi, che sapete

"Voi, che sapete" is sung by Cherubino, a fourteen-year-old boy, in the quarters of the Countess, for whom he has written the piece. As a young boy, Cherubino is just coming to terms with his hormones, and finds himself infatuated with many of the women in the castle, particularly his godmother, the Countess. He is charming but mischievous, and is constantly irritating the Count. The Countess is saddened by the Count's disloyalty and infidelity, and enjoys Cherubino's performance greatly. The opening melody itself seems to reach out toward the audience with Cherubino's plea. As he begins to describe his emotions, the music mirrors his descriptions, falling into a high-low pattern. For example, the melody of "now is delight" is quick and in the upper tessitura, but is immediately followed by a lower melody of longer notes for "now is agony." The clearest example of text painting in

¹⁶ "The Marriage of Figaro Synopsis," NOVA Center for the Performing Arts, <http://www.novabillings.org>.

the aria comes just before the return of the opening text. As Cherubino describes his trembling and shaking, the vocal line becomes quick, repetitive, and fragmented, and rises in pitch to its eventual conclusion.

Voi che sapete

Voi, che sapete, che cosa è amor
 Donne, vedete, s'io l'ho nel cor!
 Quello ch'io provo, vi ridirò,
 È per me nuovo, capir nol so.
 Sento un affetto pien di desir,
 Ch'ora è diletto, ch'ora è martir.
 Gelo e poi sento l'alma avvampar,
 E in un momento torno a gelar.
 Ricercò un bene fuori di me,
 Non so ch'il tiene, non so cos' è.
 Sospiro è gemo senza voler,
 Palpito e tremo senza saper.
 Non trovo pace notte nè dì,
 Ma pur mi piace languir così!

You who know

You, who know what love is,
 Women, see if I have it in my heart!
 I will explain to you what I feel,
 It is new to me, I don't understand it.
 I feel affection full of desire,
 Which now is delight, now is agony.
 I freeze, and then I feel my soul ignite,
 And in a moment I return to freezing.
 I am looking for a blessing outside of myself,
 I don't know who holds it, I don't know what it is.
 I sigh and groan without wanting to,
 I shake and tremble without knowing it.
 I find no peace night or day
 But it pleases me to suffer this way!

Via resti servita

Preceded by recitative (a section of speech-like singing with more open accompaniment that furthers the plot), this duet is sung by Susanna and Marcellina, both of whom love Figaro.

While Susanna is to be his bride, Marcellina still remains hopeful that she can win him over, ignorant of the fact that she is actually his mother. Before the aria begins, Marcellina sees Susanna enter the room and pretends not to notice her presence, instead speaking of how she will win over Figaro. Just as Susanna moves to leave, Marcellina greets her. Under a thin guise of politeness, Marcellina and Susanna each insist that the other go first through the door, complimenting each other until Susanna points out Marcellina's older age. While Marcellina struggles to keep her cool, Susanna laughs at her effect on the "decrepit" woman. In the beginning of the aria, as each woman offers their service and shows the other through the door, the vocal lines mirror each other in a descending pattern, as though moving aside

for the other. The compliments become increasingly short and similar in melodic content, as though the women are firing back and forth at each other. As the song progresses, the spaces between replies shorten significantly, with Susanna nearly interrupting Marcellina. At the conclusion of the aria, Susanna seems to sing circles around Marcellina with her flowing triplets over steady, repeated pitches. The piece ends with Marcellina enraged and Susanna amused by her anger.

Via resti servita

To serve you

M: Via resti servita, madama brillante.	I remain to serve you my brilliant lady.
S: Non sono si ardita, madama piccante.	I would not presume, my fiery lady.
M: No, prima a lei tocca.	Please enter before me!
S: No, no, tocca lei.	No, no, you go first!
M/S: Io so i dover miei, non fo inciviltà.	I know my duty, I know my manners.
M: La sposa novella!	The newly married bride!
S: La dama d'onore!	The honorable lady!
M: Del Conte la bella!	The Count's beauty!
S: Di Spagna l'amore!	The love of the nation!
M: I meriti!	Your merit!
S: L'abito!	Your dress!
M: Il posto!	Your position!
S: L'età!	Your age!
M: Per Bacco! Precipito, se ancor resto qua!	My! I will lose control if I stay here.
S: Sibilla decrepita da rider mi fa.	That decrepit old woman makes me laugh.

Conclusion

Having completed the recital, I am confident that my research and study of the music in this program played an important role in informing my performance. Knowledge of composer background combined with textual and musical interpretation allowed me to engage with the music and to share that understanding with my audience through facial and musical expression. Feedback from audience members suggested that one of the best-received sets was *Three Irish Folksong Settings* by John Corigliano. I think that this piece was one of the most unique on the program, as it featured a duet between flute and voice without piano and juxtaposed simple folksong tunes with intricate and unexpected melodies. An abbreviated form of this thesis was shared with audience members in the form of program notes.

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