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GRADUATE RECITAL ABSTRACT

Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music

Katherine Elizabeth Beane  
University of Northern Iowa  
May 2015

This Recital by: Katherine Elizabeth Beane

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Voice

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for the

Degree of Master of Music

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Date

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Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member

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Dr. Korey Barrett, Thesis Committee Member

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Date

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Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, Interim Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Abstract by: Katherine Elizabeth Beane

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## ABSTRACT

On December 8, 2014, mezzo-soprano Katherine Beane and pianist Dr. Robin Guy presented a recital of song literature in Davis Hall at the University of Northern Iowa. The program opened with four Lieder selected from Robert Schumann's collection *Myrthen*. Unlike the other collections Schumann composed in his "Song Year," *Myrthen* does not form a cohesive song cycle but is merely a collection of unrelated songs. The texts are by many different poets, ranging from the low-brow to those who are considered the most important poets among Schumann's contemporaries. Among Schumann's works, the songs of *Myrthen* are often overlooked in favor of the proper song cycles, but these Lieder are nonetheless gems that are worthy of both performance and study.

The first Lied of the collection, "Widmung" is one of *Myrthen*'s most recognizable songs, as singers of all levels frequently select it for performance. Its rounded binary structure reveals two distinct moods in the poetic verse. The A section features a joyous and exuberant ascending arpeggio in the piano and buoyant leaps in the vocal line, evoking the excitement of love. The B section modulates surprisingly through a common tone from G-flat major to D major, as the texture of the piano switches to warm block chords. The vocal line of the B section sits lower in the singer's range and becomes more conjunct. The effect is of calming warmth and the peace love brings to the heart – a reflection of the B section's opening text, "Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden."

Second in the set, "Du bist wie eine Blume" immediately recalls the mood of the B section from "Widmung" with second-inversion block chords in the right hand of the

piano. Triplets and grace notes in the vocal line convey sweetness and delicacy in the simple and graceful setting of a simple and graceful poem. Pulsing chords of the accompaniment, a hallmark of Schumann's, provide forward momentum that stops abruptly at the climax of the song, when the sixteenth note chords are suddenly broadened into quarter notes. This transformation reveals an interpretation of the text, "Betend, daß Gott dich erhalte, so rein und schön und hold." The poet is essentially praying for the impossible – as beauty, purity and delicateness are temporary like the flower, what the poet wants is to stop time. The effect in the music is of arrested momentum, or the stopping of musical time.

The four stanzas of the next Lied, "Was will die einsame Träne," are formally divided in an ABBA structure. While the text of the A verses occur in the present, the B verses are bittersweet reminiscences of the past. The A verses feature sweepingly plaintive melodies and relatively stagnant chordal piano textures that reflect the feeling of being trapped by the memories expressed in the poem. The contrasting B verses are characterized by more motion in the piano, as well as ascending major scalar patterns in the vocal line. Although the memories are clearly cloaked in grief, the major scalar patterns also recall a happier time. Upon the plaintive return of the final A verse, all joy is forgotten and replaced by the single lonely tear.

The poem of "Lied der Suleika" was assumed to have been penned by Goethe because the titular Suleika is a character from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. However, modern scholarship has revealed Goethe's mistress, Marianne von Willemer, to be the

more likely author.<sup>1</sup> Although most of *Myrthen*'s Lieder are settings of poems written from the male perspective, "Lied der Suleika" is a rarer example of a clearly female perspective. The opening arpeggio in the piano reminds the listener of "Helft mir, ihr Schwestern," a popular Lied from Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben*, which was also composed in 1840. The two Lieder also share a mood of joyous, loving anticipation. Unlike "Helft mir, ihr Schwestern," however, "Lied der Suleika" barely has any introduction at all, as the voice enters after only a single beat. This non-prelude enhances the sense of excitement, despite a relatively slow tempo marking. The vocal line rests primarily in the middle and upper voice, and the phrases gracefully sweep throughout the range. Throughout the Lied, Schumann employs his characteristic lyricism to illustrate the delicate love of a woman.

The second set on the program features the second *Fêtes galantes* cycle, composed by Claude Debussy in 1904 on poems by Paul Verlaine. Greatly eclipsed in fame by Debussy's first *Fêtes galantes* cycle, these songs are rarely performed as a set and only slightly more often excerpted to be sung individually. Although several sources refer to the songs in this set as nonrelated to one another, a broader interpretation of the poems suggest the sad narrative of a doomed relationship, from reminiscences of lusty, youthful attraction to a truly bitter end. At the time of their composition, the composer had been engaged in a passionate extramarital affair and was preparing to permanently leave his wife. This particular circumstance may explain the cloud of melancholy that hangs over these songs, as even the exciting beginning of a relationship can sour in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jon W. Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

memory once the relationship has died. Debussy was well known as a composer of miniatures; some of his best-known works are piano preludes and other character pieces for piano, and the songs of *Fêtes galantes* follow in the tradition of these miniatures, carrying a great dramatic weight despite their brevity.

“Les ingénus” begins with an air of mystery through a very sparse texture and pianissimo dynamic. The text of the first stanza is almost erotically sensual, as the poet describes the shifting hem of the long skirts worn by the young women in his memory. The tonal ambiguity coupled with the ethereally sparse texture, however, lend an air of uncertainty to the mood, foreshadowing the unhappy end to come. The mood remains calm until the singer begins to recall glances of the women’s necks. The melody rises gradually in pitch level, dynamic level, and tempo until the climax on F to end the line, “And this delight filled our young, foolish eyes.”<sup>2</sup> The excitement is short-lived, however, as the remainder of the song regains an ethereal texture and returns to the lower tessitura and at a pianissimo dynamic level, once again evoking the falling autumnal evening and a lover’s whisper.

“Le faune” begins with an extended prelude that, as Barbara Meister has noted, introduces three discrete musical ideas: “the flutelike cadenzas, the open fifth rhythmic figure in the bass, and the augmented chords which float above this insistent drumlike beat.” The rhythmic figure particularly evokes footsteps, albeit uneven ones. Although the faun in the title is revealed to be of terra-cotta, the mysticism of the mythological creature suggests this sort of movement. The indicated dynamic level in this song never

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Meister, *Nineteenth-Century French Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 366.



risers above piano. The crescendos and decrescendos that are indicated are subtle, rather than dramatic. The whisper-like character adds an intimacy that reflects the personal nature of the ending sentiments, which predict for the first time the “sad ending” of the couple’s liaison.

The text of “Colloque sentimental” is by far the darkest and heaviest of these songs. In contrast to the other poems of Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*, which are generally more light-hearted, this one seems especially grotesque. As Barbara Meister has written, “the principal protagonist in this dialogue is totally unable to arouse a sentimental or even nostalgic response from her former lover.”<sup>3</sup> The sad story, however, is told through a narrator, whose verses begin and end the song. The singer faces the challenges of singing three distinct characters: the narrator and the two estranged lovers. Debussy wrote each character into its own register – the narrator occupies the mid-range, the hopeful lover occupies the upper range, and the detached lover occupies a lower range. The contrast created by these ranges facilitates the differentiation between the lovers during the dialogue.

Including the five *Neruda Songs* of 2005, much of American composer Peter Lieberman’s song output was written for his wife, the great mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberman. Although little has been written about these songs, Lieberman himself penned the liner notes for the CD release *Lorraine Hunt Lieberman Sings Peter Lieberman: Neruda Songs*. The texts are selected from Pablo Neruda’s *100 Love Sonnets*, and Lieberman writes that, “each of the five poems. . . seemed to me to reflect a different face

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 367.

in love's mirror."<sup>4</sup> Originally composed for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, these songs were intended to be performed together as a cohesive unit and are therefore considered a song cycle, although they do not necessarily tell a narrative. Lieberson composed this work after learning that his wife had been diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, and she recorded it with the Boston Symphony Orchestra just months before she succumbed to the disease. These are the last songs he wrote for her.

The first of the *Neruda Songs*, "Si no fuera porque tus ojos tienen color de luna," features a playful and coquettish text, in which she lists for the object of her affection all of his most wonderful qualities, with a flirtatious claim that she could not possibly love him if he did not exemplify all of these qualities. As she begins her list, the vocal line steadily rises in semi-sequential patterns and simultaneously accelerates, giving the music an added sense of excitement. When the music pulls back again, the opening melodic motif returns, indicating that she has brought herself back under control. Even though some of the textural variety of the orchestrated version is lost in the piano version, the stylistic contrasts in the piano provide auditory indications of different sections. The musical sections do not typically coincide with the poetic sections, but rather provide commentary on or atmosphere for certain sensual images. For example, the first departure from the opening material occurs at "when autumn climbs up through the vines." Here, a new rhythmic motive accompanies a distinctly new legato melodic motive, which sweeps

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Lieberson, Liner Notes, *Lorraine Hunt Lieberson Sings Peter Lieberson: Neruda Songs*, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (mezzo-soprano), Boston Symphony Orchestra, James Levine (conductor), Nonesuch, 2006, compact disc.

passionately upward, signifying the rising autumn. Each subsequent image is similarly treated with new and descriptive melodies and textures.

The second and third of the *Neruda Songs* were not performed. The fourth, “Ya eres mía. Reposa con tu sueño en mi sueño,” is the most overtly sexual of the set. The opening text is repeated in outbursts through an extravagant, recitative-like opening: “Ya eres mía”/”You are mine.” The next section takes on a sultry Latin flair, punctuated with syncopated rhythms. Nonfunctional dominant seventh chord sonorities refuse to resolve, leaving the listener to yearn for a resolution. Unlike the first song in the cycle, which readily changed texture and style to evoke specific images, this seductive syncopated style remains more or less steady throughout the song, until the moment immediately following the climax. The syncopated texture is replaced by ethereal 32nd notes, originally fluttered on the strings. This suddenly dreamlike atmosphere paints a clear picture of the text, “Without you, I am your dream, only that, and that is all.”

“Amor mío, si muero y tú no mueres” is the last song of the set and the cycle. This is widely considered to be Lieberson’s passionate farewell to his beloved wife, as the theme of the song (for which the English title is “My love, if I die and you don’t”) is hope and comfort in the face of death. He chose to set the ending text twice, the last setting languid and highly lyrical: “For love has not ended, just as it never had birth, it has no death: it is like a long river, only changing lands, and changing lips.” The song ends with the word “Amor” repeated, with increased decrescendo each time, on a B, as though being drawn away into the eternal. After noting that Lorraine began her career as a violist, Alex Ross writes, “The vocal line ends on a B, and afterward the same note is

held for two slow beats by the violas, as if they were holding the hand of the singer who came from their ranks. The composer is holding her hand, too.”<sup>5</sup>

The final set on the recital was comprised of musical theatre pieces by German-American composer Kurt Weill. The first two songs were excerpted from 1943’s *One Touch of Venus*, both sung by the character Venus, who is a statue of the mythological Venus come to life. “I’m a Stranger Here Myself” is Venus’ cheeky opening number. The phrase of the title repeats like a miniature refrain, and its contour reveals blues influences. As the song progresses and Venus becomes increasingly confounded as to why she has thus far been unable to win the object of her affection, the melodic content climbs in tessitura. The higher tessitura lend a sense of melodrama to her frustrations. The next song in the set, “That’s Him,” is Venus’ declaration of love after she has successfully captured her lover’s attention. Weill’s propensity for adding a little bitterness to the sweetness shows only slightly, as Venus alternately describes her lover as “indispensable” and “satisfactory.” The musical content, by contrast, betrays none of the surreptitious sourness.

The closing number on the recital was “One Life to Live” from Weill’s 1941 musical *A Lady in the Dark*. The show follows Liza Elliott, a successful but overwhelmingly average and terribly unhappy businesswoman, as she experiences several hallucinations, wherein she displays characteristics that she lacks in real life. The first of these hallucinations, commonly referred to as “The Glamour Dream,” features a beautiful, outgoing, and widely adored version of Liza. She sings “One Life to Live”

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<sup>5</sup> Alex Ross, *Listen to This* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux/Picador, 2011), 306.

before a gathering of fans and paparazzi, charming them with her carefree attitude.

Pervasive syncopated and dotted rhythms lend a lilting feeling to the vocal line and a sense of fun to the song's overall mood.

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Katherine E. Beane, Mezzo-soprano  
Dr. Robin Guy, Piano  
December 8, 2014, 8:00 PM  
Davis Hall, Gallagher Bluedorn PAC

PROGRAM

<i>Myrthen</i>	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Widmung	
Was will die einsame Träne	
Du bist wie eine Blume	
Lied der Suleika	
<i>Fêtes galantes II</i>	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Les ingénus	
Le faune	
Colloque sentimental	

INTERMISSION

<i>Neruda Songs</i>	Peter Lieberon (1946-2011)
Si no fuera porque tus ojos tienen color de luna	
Ya eres mía. Reposa con tu sueño en mi sueño	
Amor mio, si muero y tu no mueres	
I'm a Stranger Here	Kurt Weill (1900-1950)
That's Him	
One Life to Live	

*This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree at The University of Northern Iowa School of Music. Katherine is a voice student of Dr. Jean McDonald.*