

A GRADUATE RECITAL IN VOICE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

Valeria Kishkunas
University of Northern Iowa
December, 2014

This Recital Abstract by: Valeria Kishkunas

Entitled: A Graduate Recital in Voice

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Music

Date

Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date

Dr. Korey Barrett, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. John Hines, Thesis Committee Member

Date

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

This Recital Performance by Valeria Kishkunas

Entitled: A Graduate Recital in Voice

Date of Recital: September 20th, 2013

has been approved as meeting the recital requirement for
the Degree of Master of Music

Date

Dr. Jean McDonald, Chair, Recital Committee

Date

Dr. Korey Barrett, Recital Committee Member

Date

Dr. John Hines, Recital Committee Member

Date

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

ABSTRACT

Valeria Kishkunas, soprano, presented a graduate voice recital on Friday, September 20, 2013 at 8:00 PM in Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa. The recital was performed in collaboration with pianist Dr. Robin Guy and presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music in Vocal Performance. Assisted by tenor Juan Ahumada, the recital opened with the Act I duet “Ah, del padre...Fuggi, crudele, fuggi” from *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Mozart (1756 – 1791). The remainder of the program included the *Wesendonck Lieder* by Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883), “La mamma morta” from *Andrea Chénier* by Umberto Giordano (1867 – 1948), three selections by Ottorino Respighi (1879 – 1936), and the song cycle *The Shining Place* by Lee Hoiby (1926 – 2011).

Premiering in Prague in 1787 to great success, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is an opera buffa in two acts with a libretto based on the Don Juan legend by Lorenzo da Ponte.¹ The opera opens with a masked Don Giovanni’s unwelcomed and failed seduction of Donna Anna, which results in a duel between Don Giovanni and Donna Anna’s father, the Commendatore. The duel ends with the death of the Commendatore, and fuels Donna Anna’s lust for vengeance. Donna Anna begins the duet, “Ah, del padre...Fuggi, crudele, fuggi” by describing these events to her fiancé, Don Ottavio. Together, they swear to seek retribution for her father’s death. Through a combination of secco and accompagnato recitativo, Donna Anna expresses her lament and is consoled by Don

¹ Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 27-28.

Ottavio. Donna Anna's music is in D minor, which Mozart used as a tonal center for all of her vengeful numbers.² Don Ottavio's music, while reassuring Donna Anna of his love, shifts to a much more serene and comforting F major. Momentarily, while Donna Anna asks for Don Ottavio's pardon and refers to him as her beloved, the tonality of her music changes to F major. As Don Ottavio and Donna Anna unite in a pledge of vengeance, the duet ends resolutely in a return to D minor.

The recital continued with the *Wesendonck Lieder* by Richard Wagner. Though more prolific in the composition of larger forms, Wagner was adept in the composition of song as evidenced by his *Wesendonck Lieder*. This song cycle was conceived and born out of a love affair between Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck, the wife of one of Wagner's benefactors. While the exact details of the affair are unknown, it is generally thought that the forbidden romance may have motivated Wagner to stop working on *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and begin work on his epic love story, *Tristan und Isolde*.³ During this time, Wagner also composed the *Wesendonck Lieder*. Five of Mathilde's poems are the basis for this cycle, which bears her name. The poems describe the pain and suffering associated with the pursuit of love and happiness, and foreshadow pervasive themes from *Tristan und Isolde*. It is further understood that two of the songs were selected by Wagner to be studies for *Tristan und Isolde*: "Träume" and "Im Treibhaus."⁴

²Ibid, 28.

³ Hans Rudolf Vaegt, "Tristan and Ecstasy," in *Wagner Outside the Ring: Essays on the Operas, Their Performances and Their Connections with Other Arts*, ed. Louis DiGaetani (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009) 108.

⁴ Ibid, 105.

The first selection of the cycle is “Der Engel.” Written in ABA form, an aura of serenity is created through upwardly progressing, arpeggiated G major chords. This tranquility underlines the narrative describing childhood stories of angels easing the suffering upon Earth. The atmosphere established in the first thirteen measures is broken when the narrator turns to thoughts of languishing hearts that are filled with worry. Wagner expresses this sorrow with repeated, B flat minor chords, contributing to a feeling of tension. Once the narrative talks of angels coming down to lift sorrow-laden hearts heavenward, the voice and accompaniment soar together before returning to the serene G major of the opening.

“Stehe still!” begins with rapidly ascending minor pentascales in the accompaniment that contrast with dotted rhythms in the vocal line, resulting in an apt portrayal of the narrator’s anxious plea to stop the “roaring, thundering wheel of time.” This driving rhythm slowly gives way to repeated chords, which further dissolve into calm arpeggios. The voice is heard without accompaniment, signifying the peace that comes when “a soul completely sinks into another.” Finally, the piece ends with repose on a strong C major chord.

“Im Treibhaus” describes desolation and sorrow through stark texture in the piano accompaniment from the outset of the song. This continues as the narrator paints a picture of plants that bend and twist, only to reach absolute nothingness. The narrator notes the correlation between empty human existence and the way in which plants subsist. While the song is through-composed, a repeated ascending melodic pattern made

up of minor seconds serves to symbolize the plants grasping for the void. In the piano postlude, repeated minor seconds seem to evoke the image of tears and the ascending melodic pattern repeats once more, symbolizing the plants forever reaching towards the void.

“Schmerzen” begins with expansive ascending octaves above minor chords, signifying the setting or poetic death of the sun. The narrator refers to the sun as the “glory of the gloomy world,” and goes on to reflect on the majesty of the rebirth of the sun each morning. At this point Wagner employed a distinctive dotted figure, known as the sword leitmotif, derived from *Das Ring des Nibelungen*. In this context the figure signifies the sun as a “proud, victorious hero!”⁵ The narrator reflects on the idea that death brings way to life, to which Wagner responds with a final repeat of the sword leitmotif ending on an affirmative C major chord.

“Träume” begins with an expansive piano prelude comprised of repeated diminished and minor seventh chords, used later by Wagner in the Act II love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* “O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe.”⁶ This progression repeats throughout the entire song, as if symbolizing a heartbeat; a heartbeat which matches the tempo of each section as the narrator reflects on ideas of love. The tempo slows again, though, with the narrator’s wish that dreams might grow and bloom, leaving the scent of

⁵ Robert Cart, “Dreams: Richard Wagner’s Five Poems by Mathilde von Wesendonk,” Art Song Update Newsletter, <http://www.artsongupdate.org/Articles/WesendonkLiederRobertCart.htm> (accessed September 1, 2013).

⁶ Vaget, *Tristan*, 110.

those dreams on the lover's breast. The song ends with an extended piano postlude, rich with chromaticism through use of diminished seventh chords.

The second half of the recital opened with "La mamma morta" from Umberto Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, a four-act verismo opera with libretto by Luigi Illica. Premiered at Teatro alla Scala in 1896,⁷ it remains Giordano's most-performed opera. The story takes place during the French Revolution, the title character inspired by the life of the famous French poet of the same era. The opera's main plot focuses on the love triangle between three main characters, Maddalena, Gérard, and Chénier. "La mamma morta" occurs in Act III, scene eight, and is sung by Maddalena to Gérard in response to his passionate but welcomed declaration of love.⁸ Maddalena's narrative leads the through-composed structure of the aria with a "clear rise, climax and descent."⁹ The aria has two specific musical themes, the first signifying her sorrow and the second signifying her triumph through love. Sorrow is expressed in the first section through an A minor tonal center, tremolos in the accompaniment, and a declamatory vocal line. The climax of the section is reached as Maddalena exclaims that she brings misfortune to all who care for her. The second section begins as Maddalena finds love through grief. Her growing strength is depicted through an ascending, soaring vocal line, and harmonic progressions that end joyously in G major.

⁷ Stanley Sadie, ed. *The Grove Book of Operas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹ Danielle Kuntz, "Cinematic Opera, Operatic Cinema: A Cross-Genre Analysis of La mamma morta from Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*," *Adventures in Music History and Literature at St. Olaf College*, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/music242-spring2014/portfolio/cinematic-opera-operatic-cinema-a-cross-genre-analysis-of-la-mamma-morta-from-giordanos-andrea-chenier> (Accessed June 21, 2014).

The next set on the recital featured selected songs of Ottorino Respighi, an Italian composer from the early twentieth-century, who blended classical structure with Romantic style. While dealing with depression, Respighi was particularly drawn to the poetry of Ada Negri (1870 – 1945), and he set several of her poems to music. Three of these were presented on the recital.

“Notte” illustrates the impending night. The narrator describes images of a beautiful garden that is filled with fragrant roses but also has “mournful darkness.” The music evokes this imagery through a sustained, legato vocal line and melodic cadences in the accompaniment that occur on the fifth of the scale at the end of each section.¹⁰ Its formal structure is ABA with a coda. The melody is given to the piano accompaniment during the coda, while the voice intones a long phrase on a single pitch. “Nebbie” conjures an intense drama through repeated minor chords, and open fifth pedal tones.¹¹ Fog is evoked through a slowly rising scale that gathers with intensity as it ascends. Negri’s poem is saturated with despair and is rich with images of black crows circling above, fog and a desolate and weary soul. “Nevicata,” written in ABA form, begins with sixteenth-note accompanimental figures that arouse images of falling snow. This combined with a relaxed tempo creates atmosphere of immense calm is created.

The world is peaceful and beautiful because of the falling snow. But even with the immense calm of the world, the narrator turns to thoughts of memories of a faded love

¹⁰ Ruth C. Lakeway and Robert C. White, Jr., *Italian Art Song* (United States of America: Indiana University Press) 99.

¹¹ Kimball, *Song*, 437.

that cannot be covered by snow. The vocal line ascends and becomes expansive as the narrator contemplates the faded love.

The recital closed with a song cycle by Lee Hoiby called “*The Shining Place*,” on texts by Emily Dickinson. Hoiby is a twentieth-century American composer whose compositional style was influenced by his teacher Gian Carlo Menotti, and his mentor Samuel Barber. In fact, Carol Kimball states, “Hoiby’s compositions reflect the dramatic flair of Menotti and the warm lyricism of Barber.”¹² Hoiby composed in many genres, and is arguably best known for his vocal music. Hoiby said, “I love words. I love language. I take special care that the words should be understood, not only that, but the music should help them further, to elucidate the feeling, the meaning of the words, otherwise there’s no reason to set it to music.”¹³ Because of this, he is especially appreciated among voice professionals for his sensitive text setting and expressive, dramatic songs.

The cycle begins with “The Shining Place.” The accompaniment is marked *Allegro*, contains few rests, and includes many arpeggiated chords. This is in direct contrast to the vocal line, which consists of long, sustained notes. Together, they produce an atmosphere that is animated, yet calm. The vocal line gradually ascends throughout the entire piece, which contributes to a quality of anticipation and excitement. The climax of the song occurs with the text remarking on the joy of being remembered and honored by saints.

¹² Ibid, 340.

¹³ Ibid, 340.

“The Letter,” which is through-composed in form, offers glimpses into the world of a young girl. Hoiby created a sweet and child-like atmosphere for this piece by setting the text syllabically over triplets and broken chord figures.¹⁴ Hoiby draws on text painting to highlight the words “joggle,” and “unconveyed” using triplets as a device that brings levity to the piece.

In contrast, the next song, which describes the scene of a drowning boy, is somber and dark. “How the Waters Closed” is characterized by minor chords and syncopation between the vocal line and accompaniment, which together create an uneasy, troubled feeling. Ascending chromatic chords are symbolic of the lilies that spread over the boy’s body. Hoiby uses a vast dynamic range, extending from pianissimo to fortissimo in both the voice and piano, to great effect.

“Wild Nights” exploits leaping, lyrical phrases¹⁵ that are well suited to Dickinson’s sensual poetic language. The lush vocal line is supported by a dense accompaniment, rich with arpeggiated chords, triplets and chromaticism.¹⁶ Ecstatic and erotic love is evoked through the piano’s unrelenting rhythms, lush harmonic progressions, and the wide-ranging, soaring melodies in the voice.

Closing the recital, “There Came a Wind like a Bugle” starts with a low rumble from the piano, which soon gives way to wild scalar motion, triplets and powerful

¹⁴ Robin Fisher and Ruth C. Friedberg, *American Art Song and American Poetry* (Michigan: Scarecrow Press Inc.) 179.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 179.

chromaticism.¹⁷ These accompanimental figures successfully highlight the powerful text, which speaks of an impending doom, its path of destruction, and finally, a resolution and a grateful acceptance.

¹⁷ Kimball, *Song*, 340.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown-Montesano, Kristi. *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*. California: University of California Press, 2007.
- Cart, Robert. *Dreams: Richard Wagner's Five Poems by Mathilde von Wesendonck*. Art Song Update Newsletter, <http://www.artsongupdate.org/Articles/WesendonkLiederRobertCart.htm> (accessed September 1, 2013).
- Downs, Philip G. *Classical Music: the Era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992.
- Fisher, Robin and Ruth C. Friedberg. *American Art Song and American Poetry*. Michigan: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001.
- Groos, Arthur, ed. *Richard Wagner Tristan und Isolde*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Kimball, Carol. *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*. Milwaukee: Hall Leonard Corporation, 2006.
- Kuntz, Danielle. *Cinematic Opera, Operatic Cinema: A Cross-Genre Analysis of La mamma morta from Giordano's Andrea Chénier*," *Adventures in Music History and Literature at St. Olaf College*, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/music242-spring2014/portfolio/cinematic-opera-operatic-cinema-a-cross-genre-analysis-of-la-mamma-morta-from-giordanos-andrea-chenier> (Accessed June 21, 2014).
- Lakeway, Ruth C. and Robert C. White, Jr., *Italian Art Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Vaget, Hans Rudolf. "Tristan and Ecstasy." In *Wagner Outside the Ring: Essays on the Operas, Their Performances and Their Connections with Other Arts*, edited by Louis DiGaetani, 105-121. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.
- Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The Grove Book of Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006.

Presents a Masters of Music Recital

Valeria Kishkunas,

Soprano

Dr. Robin Guy, Piano

Juan Ahumada, Tenor

Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center
Friday, September 20th Davis Hall, 8:00 p.m.

*This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Music degree in
Vocal Performance*

From the studio of Mr. Jeffrey Brich

Program

“Ah, del padre in periglio”
from *Don Giovanni*

Wolfgang Mozart
(1756-1791)

with Juan Ahumada, tenor

Wesendonck Lieder

1. Der Engel
2. Stehe still!
3. Im Treibhaus
4. Schmerzen
5. Träume

Richard Wagner
(1813-1883)

Intermission

“La mamma morta”
from *Andrea Chénier*

Umberto Giordano
(1857-1919)

Notte
Nebbie
Nevicata

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)

The Shining Place

1. The Shining Place
2. A Letter
3. How the Waters Closed
4. Wild Nights
5. There came a Wind like a Bugle

Lee Hoiby
(1926-2011)