

This Was Love

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My recital consists of an assortment of romantic art songs from the European concert tradition. These art songs cover many musical and emotional treatments of love, while all are confined to the masculine hetero-normative perspective on romantic love. My purpose is to demonstrate that, more than just entertainment, these songs are cultural artifacts through which one can discover past musical and social paradigms. The recital is sectioned by language and location which serves to illuminate the specific movements and characteristics of different areas of western culture. Accordingly, this paper provides a brief background and description of terms before examining each of the composers and pieces.

Songs and Love

Romantic love is not a simple idea; its meaning changes constantly for individuals as well as for cultures. In Western culture, it was not until the advent of Protestantism that love was a valued aspect in the formation of marriages and families. At the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of love was augmented by Romanticism and men began to pour out their hearts to their love interest, making themselves vulnerable in the hope of an intense emotional intimacy as an expression of personal need.¹ For the young men of the Romantic era, love was a transcendence of the soul, high and pure, requiring a full emotional disclosure to the beloved. It is not hard to imagine these uninhibited young men bursting into song at the fulfillment or rejection of this love. In my recital, I examine many such songs, written from the masculine perspective on hetero-normative love. It is no accident that most of these songs were written not by older

¹ Knapp, Mark and Peter N. Stearns. "Men and Romantic Love: Pinpointing a twentieth-Century Change" *Journal of Social History* 26/4 (1993) 769-795.

composers refined in their craft, but by young, budding composers, often just beginning to experience romantic love for the first time themselves.

In most of the pieces I will perform, the text is written by a poet as poetry, not as song. It is only later, with or without the poet's permission, that a composer decides to set the poem to music. Yet music and poetry are very similar as expressive arts. Both "juxtapose elements that are referential, mimetic, or conceptual with purely formal patterns that are largely independent of external meanings" (Kramer 1984:5). Furthermore, both are rhythmically designed pieces that use desire and expectancy to convey meaning through their experienced temporality. For effective poetry and music do offer a unique temporality, one in which the passage of time is made concrete while it is also sensually and perceptually heightened. When composers set a poem to music they are faced with choices. Great songs are most often great due to a high level of sensitivity to and understanding of the poetry. It is this synthesis that contains the power of both poetry and music. The poetry does not necessarily dictate the composition, however, for often the most meaningful moments are created when the composer intentionally and artfully subverts or revises the poetic structure or meaning.²

The composer has many techniques and options when setting a poem. The most obvious of these is imitation, using sound to "mimic the kinetic quality of a feeling or a natural process" (Kramer 1984:148). This could be as simple as the composer melodically imitating a bird's call or as complex as juxtaposing different rhythmic textures to create a feeling of uneasiness hinted at in the text. Another technique the composer may use is repetition, which usually represents stability. Yet when repetition is used creatively, stability soon gives way to captivation, followed

² Kramer, Lawrence. *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

by obsession. It is sometime late in this process that repetition can begin to lose its subject, the lover, and start to symbolize its object, the beloved -- the *absent* beloved. Form is also a powerful symbolic component. For example, the use of a closed or open form can tell us whether the love will be fulfilled or not.³

Italian Art Song

Alessandro Scarlatti (1659 – 1725) was born in Sicily to a musical family and subsequently received musical lessons at a very young age. At age twelve his father died and his family moved to Rome. He married in 1678 and was shortly after taken under wing by a wealthy sculptor and architect, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, for whom he composed his second opera, *Gli equivoci nel sembiante*. *Gli equivoci* was such a success that the Queen Christina of Sweden, a celebrated patron of music, took him to her palace for the debut of his third opera, *L'honestà negli amori*, in 1680. “Già il sole dal Gange” is the one aria to endure from *L'honestà*, as the opera itself has largely been forgotten. Sung by the pageboy Saldino, “Già il” is an ode to the glory of the sun rising over the river. The opera is set in Algeria and thus the Ganges is not meant specifically, it is merely an exotic term to signify the east. “Già il sole dal Gange” is enjoyable because of its energetic ascending lines, musically painting the sunrise. Despite being written in the baroque era, this piece falls musically in the classical style, preceding romanticism. It is characterized by a light, clean texture, homophony, abstract subject matter, and short simple melodies.⁴

³ Kramer, *Music and Poetry*.

⁴ For further information on Scarlatti see Pagano, Roberto and Malcolm Boyd. “Scarlatti: (1) Alessandro Scarlatti”, *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*.

Initially attributed to the Italian opera composer Giuseppe Giordani (1751 – 1798), the authorship of the popular song “Caro Mio Ben” is still unknown. Evidence has recently surfaced that the unrelated Tommaso Giordani (1730-1806) was the author, but other evidence suggests that it could have been Tommaso’s father, also named Giuseppe.⁵ Originally scored for strings and voice, “Caro Mio Ben” is notable for its elegant simplicity. “Caro” has become one of the most well-known *bel canto* pieces. *Bel canto* (“beautiful singing”) is a style focused principally on legato line throughout the entire range of the piece, emphasizing vocal tone rather than the text.⁶ The form of “Caro” is a modified ternary form: A A’ B B’ A. Yet the way the lines are written undercuts the transitions and the piece is seemingly seamless; listeners would be hard-pressed to notice the pitch shift down of a minor third on identical words from A to A’. The beloved woman is described as cruel and fickle, her cruelty epitomized by a descending tri-tone at the end of the B’ section.⁷

Francesco Paolo Tosti (1846 – 1916) attended the Naples Conservatory at age twelve, studying composition and violin. He later became a professor at the conservatory until illness forced him to leave. After a few years of destitution, Tosti found a wealthy patron in Rome. In 1875, Tosti traveled to London where he was received with great appreciation. Over the next five years Tosti visited England frequently until in 1880 he settled in London. Within a few months, Tosti became one of the most desired song writers, befriended the royal family, and became a professor of singing at the Royal Academy of Music. His piece “Ideale” displays one of his

⁵ Paton, John Glenn. *26 Italian Art Songs and Arias*, (Los Angeles: MCMXCI Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1991).

⁶ Jander, Owen and Ellen T. Harris. "Bel canto", *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0www.oxfordmusiconline.com.tiger.coloradocollege.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/02551>, (Accessed 3 Nov. 2012).

⁷ For further information on T. Giordani see Cholij, Irena. "Giordani, Tommaso", *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.tiger.coloradocollege.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11172>, (Accessed 3 Nov. 2012).

unique expressive techniques, the layering of triple and duple rhythms. In this arrangement, the right hand of the piano plays constant triplets, while the left hand and the singer have eighth-notes in duple meter. This juxtaposition leads to a rocking feel and an uneasy uncertainty. From an expressive standpoint, this rhythmic texture illuminates the distraught feeling of the singer at the loss of his love. In this piece, the impact of Romanticism is fully realized. Its musical language is much broader and more dramatic than “*Gia il Sole Dal Gange*,” with a subject of intense personal emotion. To emphasize the emotion, strong contrasts are made in pitch, dynamics, and tempo. The text is also steeped in drama; the singer compares himself to a “rainbow of peace,” describes a “lonely room,” and dreams of “every trouble, every pain” being forgotten.⁸

Schumann and His *Lieder*

The son of a bookseller, translator, and author, Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856) was raised on romantic and classical literature. At age six, he began studying the piano at the encouragement of his father. After his father died in 1826, his mother encouraged him to attend law school in Leipzig. After three years, Schumann told his mother that even though he was equal parts musician and poet, he had decided to give up law (which represented his poetry side) in favor of music. After less than a year of piano study, Schumann gave up his hopes of becoming a famous concert pianist due to a lame finger. Instead, he began focusing on theory and composition. In 1834 Schumann first published *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (“*The New Music Journal*”), a magazine that he used to share his music criticisms, insights, and values. It

⁸ For further information on Tosti see Horner, Keith. “Tosti, Sir Paolo”, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.tiger.coloradocollege.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/28203>, (Accessed 2 Nov. 2012).

was not until 1839 that he composed pieces for anything other than the piano. In fact, his exploration of different genres was influenced by his love for Clara Wieck, his piano teacher's daughter. After a long legal battle with Clara's father, Schumann and Clara married in 1840 which prompted a flood of songs from Schumann. Evidently the piano was incapable of capturing the love, excitement, and passion that Schumann felt for Clara, for in this one year he wrote 138 *lieder*. It is worth noting the beauty and complexity in Schumann's accompaniments, which often give the piano at least equal interest and importance with the vocal line. Rarely are his *lieder* homophonic, yet often the piano and voice work together so well that they become inseparable, and the listener senses the romantic notion of unity.⁹

The German *lied* is distinct as an art song form. The term *lied* can be traced back to eleventh century Germany, with the first written sources of Old High German literature. Yet *lieder* as they are commonly known today, specifically reference songs that have come out of a re-emphasis on *Volkslieder* ("Folk songs"). The interest in folksongs grew out of German romantic nationalism in the eighteenth century and greatly affected both poets and composers of the time. Effects of the folk song revival on composers included setting simple texts that deal with themes of individual experience – often of pastoral life and romantic love -- and setting texts in simple and tuneful ways. Mainly due to their intended nature as pieces to be performed in living rooms for a few guests, *lieder* are almost always accompanied by piano alone, are set to a romantic poem with great sensitivity, and create a mood of emotional insight where the singer is often intensely intimate and self-revealing.

⁹ For further information on Schumann and *lieder* see Kerman, Joseph. *Listen*, (2nd ed.; New York: St. Martin's Pr, 1992) 254 – 262. ; and Russell, Peter. *The Themes of the German Lied From Mozart to Strauss*. (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1945).

Dichterliebe (“Poet’s Love”), a sixteen-song cycle, contains some of the most famous of Schumann’s lieder of 1840; the songs set selected poems from Heinrich Heine’s *Lyric Intermezzo*. The sixty-six poems of *Intermezzo* explore love lost and the contradictory emotions that follow, along with bitter irony. The poems that Schumann chose loosely follow an emotional progression while recounting the poet’s love. The song cycle represents the romantic ideal in that it uses many elements to become a total unity without losing the distinctness of each one.¹⁰ The cycle begins with the poet dreamily expressing his absolute love “in the wonderful month of May.”

“Im wunderschönen Monat Mai” begins with what appears to be an alteration between IV-V in E minor, with no resolution, and then repeats; this lack of resolution certainly describes the poet’s longing. As soon as the voice enters, the tonality resolves to G major with an *almost* perfect cadence in measure six. The exception to this cadence is a 4-3 suspension, which shows that the poet cannot be completely happy. Interestingly, the content of the song is about the man’s longing, birds, and flowers, rather than the beloved. The song ends with the third appearance of the accompaniment’s introduction on V⁷ of the E-minor, making it the ideal romantic expression of longing for a harmonic and emotional resolution.

“Aus meinen Tränen sprießen” begins on the tonic of the first piece, completing the cadence by resolving the final V⁷ chord, and seeming to resolve the end of the first piece, yet in the words of the pianist and music scholar, Gerald Moore, “the discord is resolved, but not the doubts” (Moore 1981:3). It is as if every phrase the singer has is a question, since each one ends on the V⁷ with a fermata. It is the piano that then resolves this question, but in *pianissimo* each

¹⁰ Perry, Beate J.. *Schumann’s Dichterliebe and Early Romantic Poetics: Fragmentation of Desire*, (Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, Madrid, and Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

time.¹¹ This resolution never comes in the vocal line, only in the accompaniment, and it never comes in time; it is always a measure later than it should be according to the harmonic rhythm of the piece. Furthermore, the final note in each of the singer's phrases is held as question; it is dominant of the piece, wanting to resolve to the tonic or the third of the tonic. Interestingly it is the same note (B) that is held, again as a question, at the very end of the piano's line in "Im wunderschönen." "Aus meinen Tränen" is also interesting in that it combines two of Schumann's stylistic modes, the sacred and the sexual. The sacred style emerges from the general feeling of the piece; the block chords softly descending and the many authentic cadences remind the listener of church hymns. The sexuality is in the movement, the pulsing, often on one pitch, followed by climaxes -- the melodic step up to the V⁷ tension that is held and then released. This joining of the sacred and sexual is the expression of idyllic romantic love, the highest form of the soul, often described as a type of worship.

"Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube" is the first song that attempts to describe the object of the poet's love. The woman who the poet loves is "small," "fine," and "pure." As a description of another human being, these three adjectives are inadequate. The poet then goes on to call her a "rose," "lily," "dove," and "sun." Again what we learn is the depth of the poet's obsession, not necessarily any characterization of the woman. It is almost as if by describing his love as birds and flowers, he denies her any voice or agency. Flowers in the Victorian era are symbolic of sexual innocence and femininity.¹² Perhaps he is showing us that he cannot communicate with her or that she speaks in an unknown language. After the slow and tender "Im wunderschönen"

¹¹ Moore, Gerald. *Poet's Love: The Songs and Cycles of Schumann*, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1981).

¹² Frownfelter, Andrea. *Flower Symbolism as Female Sexual Metaphor* (2010). Senior Honors Theses. Paper 238.

and the slightly faster” Aus meinen”, “Die Rose” is a dramatic continuation of the acceleration of tempo, which shows us the poet’s passion, as well as his desperate obsession.

The French *Chanson*

It is fair to say that the French art songs would not be what they are today without Gabriel Fauré (1845 – 1924). Rising against the excess sentimentalism of the romantics, Fauré began his own style which, like Debussy, later turned to the writings of the symbolist poets for lyrics and inspiration. Frustrated with the strict and obvious tonal and formal structures his contemporaries used, he looked forward instead of back. Fauré’s melodic lines are hesitant, often with unusual contours, never extreme in range. His harmony is unusual; strange resolutions or even lack of resolution is not uncommon for him. Yet Fauré tempered his ideas in a strong classical conscience, which he employed subtly. Composed around 1865, the tender and wistful “Lydia” is one of his most cherished pieces. Not surprisingly, the piece is in the Lydian mode. After three simple measures to set the key, Fauré uses accidentals, which he continues to use throughout the piece with increased frequency. The poem is by Leconte d’Lisle and is from the perspective of Lydia’s lover, who describes her physicality in sensual and increasingly explicit ways. The third stanza begins with “A hidden lily unceasingly spreads,” using the flower as a metaphor for the female anatomy. Then, in the fourth stanza, the lover begs Lydia to let him “die forever,” clearly begging for *le petit mort* (“orgasm”), not for his murder. Fauré heightens the sexuality already clear in Lisle’s poem. For example, in measure seventeen Fauré crescendos and ascends stepwise towards the tonic into the words “on your blossoming lips,” but on “lips” he uses a flat seventh and then descends to a flat sixth and diminuendos. This melody gives us the expectation that we will reach the tonic. He defies our expectation as he suddenly descends and switches to the parallel minor as if bringing us back to the tenderness and intimacy of the moment while

delaying gratification, as well as underscoring the double entendre of Lydia's "flowering lips." This phrase is then followed by the second verse, where the excitement of the rising block chords starts to be more meaningful and symbolic. Finally, Fauré chooses to repeat the word "die" at the end so that the listener understands the metaphorical death that Leconte de Lisle intended. In all of his works, Fauré exaggerates the French fondness for counter-setting, placing unimportant syllables on important pitches and beats. For instance, the final melodic climax of "Lydia" falls on the schwa of "*puisse*," an already unimportant word. Additionally, in the measure before this Fauré dissolves the meter for a disorienting effect.¹³

Born in Germany, Johann Paul Aegidius Schwarzenndorf (1741 – 1816) changed his last name to Martini shortly after moving to France in 1760. Employed by the Queen before the revolution and by Napoleon after the revolution, Martini composed in many different styles and forms. Early in his career, Martini was famous for his military music but he was also writing songs. One of these songs, "Plaisir d'Amour" remains in performance halls to this day. "Plaisir" is a bittersweet song about love's – and women's -- fickleness. When describing "the ungrateful Sylvia" Martini switches to the parallel minor to underscore her cold betrayal.¹⁴

The Later American School

Samuel Barber (1910 – 1981) is one of the few well-known American composers of the twentieth century who did not follow the trend of experimentalism. Instead, Barber employed much of the vocabulary of the nineteenth century, writing elegant, lyrical music. At age ten, Barber had already written an operetta and at fourteen was enrolled in the Curtis Institute of

¹³ For more information on Fauré see Hall, James H. *The Art Song* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953).

¹⁴ For more information on Martini see Hall, *The Art Song*.

Music, where, three years later, he composed “The Daisies.” Set to a poem by James Stephen, “The Daisies” is a quintessential example of Barber’s intimate and almost nostalgic lyricism. Beginning “with a melodic introduction, the accompaniment then falls back to a semi-supportive role, sometimes guiding the vocal line through the harmonies, other times contrasting it. The call of the lark is the most notable moment for the piano, with the second being a counterpoint of thirds to accent the lark’s song. This piece reflects the change in attitude of men’s romantic perspective; it is reserved in its emotional description and paints a more somber and sweet picture than the unrestrained love of Romanticism. Yet there are still many romantic holdovers in the composition. Most obvious is the text, describing love and nature (again flowers and birds), and the quintessential romantic setting, a pastoral field where everything is happy and magical.¹⁵

“The Lass from the Low Countree” is an American folk song that was first collected, arranged, and recorded by composer and collector John Jacob Niles (1892 – 1980), in his 1941 collection *American Folk Lore: Vol. 3*. Later, in the liner notes of his 1964 *John Jacob Niles Sings Folk Songs* album, Niles stated that he wrote the text and tune of *The Lass*. He claimed to have loosely based the words off of “a sad little ditty” a man named Hugh Stallcup sang him, titled “The Ash From the Hill Country.” “The Lass” tells the story of a woman from the lower class who falls in love with a man from the upper class, who ignores her affections. The piece is pushing towards the new ideal of romantic love, where men must be reserved and in emotional control at all times. The first phrase describes the lord in mezzo-forte, and then for second

¹⁵ For more information on Barber see Heyman, Barbara B. "Barber, Samuel", *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.tiger.coloradocollege.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/01994>. (Accessed 4 Nov. 2012).

phrase, introducing the lass, the dynamics become much quieter, musically describing the lass as weak, delicate, and emotional.¹⁶

John Philip Sousa (1854 – 1952) began his musical studies on the violin. At age thirteen he began playing in the U.S. Marine Band of which he later became a conductor. Sousa is best known for his marches which he often played when touring the United States with his band. His band focused on musical perfection and toured constantly, bringing quality music directly to the people with over 15,200 concerts over forty years. One of Sousa's strongest motivations for touring with his band was educating America. Less well known, but perhaps equally educating, Sousa wrote "You'll Miss Lots of Fun When You're Married," a minstrel type song to the words of Edward M. Taber. "You'll Miss" portrays the twentieth-century shift to sexuality (as opposed to romantic love) as man's expressive power. The song essentially instructs men that when they are married they must give up their individuality men, and that a young man ought to be "reckless" and "fresco the town or stay out all night and play draw."¹⁷

Conclusions

The romantic art song is largely shaped by the contemporaneous paradigm of love. Through these songs one can see that in the nineteenth century there is a strong emphasis on intensely emotional romantic love. This emphasis on love subsequently declines in the twentieth century in favor of a less emotional, and more sexual, expression. Another trend in these pieces is the scarce and inadequate description of the female beloved. These female lovers are treated as objects, whose purpose is to induce masculine sexuality and emotion. Composers accomplish

¹⁶ Niles, John J. *John Jacob Niles Sings Folk Songs*, 2 LPs (Folkways Records FW02373 / FA 2373, 1964).

¹⁷ For more information on Sousa see Bierley, Paul E.. "Sousa, John Philip", *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.tiger.coloradocollege.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/26305>, (Accessed 2 Nov. 2012).

these various meanings by sensitivity to the text with aid of compositional techniques, including imitation, repetition, and form. Songs as cultural artifacts provide us with insight into the hearts, ideas, and lifestyles of past generations.

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