Junior Recital: Erin Elizabeth Vidlak, soprano

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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ERIN ELIZABETH VIDLAK
SOPRANO

FROM THE STUDIO OF
JENNIFER CABLE

PERKINSON RECITAL HALL
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2015 • 4:00 PM

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

RICHMOND
School of Arts & Sciences
PROGRAM

Myrthen, op. 25
Die Lotosblume
Widmung
Du bist wie eine Blume

Die Vögel
Seligkeit
Gretchen am Spinnrade

**There will be a 10-minute intermission**

The Daisies
Sure on This Shining Night
Three Songs, op. 45
Now Have I Fed, and Eaten Up the Rose
A Green Lowland of Pianos
O Boundless, Boundless Evening

Erin Elizabeth Vidlak, soprano
Dr. Joanne Kong, piano

Out of respect for the performers and those audience members around you, please turn off all electronic devices before the recital begins. Thank you.
This cycle of 26 songs contains settings of texts by a diverse collection of poets, including Goethe and Heine, as well as Burns and Byron. Schumann presented these songs to his wife, Clara, the morning after their wedding in 1840. He himself did not consider these songs a real cycle, but more a testimony to the love that he and Clara shared. The title reveals the composer's adoration of his wife, whom he deemed worthy of more than the traditional wreath of orange blossoms worn by German brides. Rather, he felt that Clara deserved a "Myrthen," a wreath of myrtle leaves and white flowers, symbolically associated with the goddess Venus.

1. Widmung (Dedication)

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn', o du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab.

Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden,
Du bist vom Himmel mir beschieden.

Daß du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,
Dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,
Mein guter Geist, mein beßres Ich!

You my soul, you my heart,
you my bliss, O you my pain
you my world in which I live,
my heaven you, to which I float,
O you my grave, into which
my grief forever I've consigned.

You are repose, you are peace,
you are bestowed on me from heaven.
Your love for me gives me my worth,
your eyes transfigure me in mine,
lovingly you raise me above myself
my good spirit, my better self!

Text by Friedrich Rückert,
English translation by Emily Ezust

As the opening piece of Myrthen, this song contains grand statements of Schumann's love for Clara, initiated by sweeping keyboard phrases in the first measure that are soon joined by the voice. While the opening and closing sections of "Widmung" are full of energy and excitement, the mood is broken up by the middle section, characterized by its smooth, flowing, and connected line. This symbolizes the "peace" and "repose" ("Ruh" and "Frieden") that Clara simultaneously offers him.
7. Die Lotosblume (The Lotus Flower)

Die Lotosblume ängstigt
Sich vor der Sonne Pracht,
Und mit gesenktem Haupte
Erwartet sie träumend die Nacht.

Der Mond, der ist ihr Buhle,
Er weckt sie mit seinem Licht,
Und ihm entschleiert sie freundlich
Ihr frommes Blumengesicht.

Sie blüht und glüht und leuchtet,
Und starret stumm in die Höh;
Sie duftet und weinet und zittert
Vor Liebe und Liebesweh.

The lotus flower is anxious
Before the sun's splendor,
And with drooping head
She dreamily awaits the night.

The moon he is her lover,
He wakes her with his light,
And to him alone she reveals
Her devoted flower face.

She blooms and glows and shines,
And stares mute into the heavens;
She sighs and weeps and trembles
With love and love's pain.

Text by Heinrich Heine,
English Translation by Lawrence Snyder

In this beautiful little poem, Heine tells the story of love between a lotus flower and the moon. Schumann's sustained, legato vocal line brings about the image of the lotus flower opening up to see her lover, while the piano's slowly rising string of chords evokes the moon rising into the night sky. Their separation is made poignant by the poem's bittersweet final phrase: "she sighs and weeps and trembles with love and love's pain."

24. Du bist wie eine Blume (You Are Like a Flower)

Du bist wie eine Blume
So hold und schön und rein
Ich schau' dich an, und Wehmut
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.

Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt',
Betend, daß Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold.

You are like a flower
So lovely and beautiful and pure
I look at you and sadness
Steals into my heart.

It seems to me as if my hands
On your head I should place
Praying that God keep you
So pure and beautiful and lovely.

Text by Heinrich Heine,
English Translation by George Bird and Richard Stokes
In this poem, Heine compares his beloved to a beautiful flower. Realizing that the loss of her beauty and innocence would be a tragedy, the poet experiences sadness when he sees her and feels as if he must ask God that she should always stay that way. Schumann altered the final verse of Heine’s poem, from “so hold und schön und rein” (“so lovely and beautiful and pure”) to “so rein und schön und hold” (“so pure and beautiful and lovely”), perhaps in order to give prominence to Clara’s purity. Also significant is the diminished fifth interval in the vocal line, placed on the word “Wehmut” (“sadness”), to underscore a momentary change of mood. Lastly, make sure to listen for the piano’s brief turn figure at the very end of the postlude—its melodic shape is the inversion of the singer’s “schliecht mir ins Herz hinein,” in effect reminding the listener of the entire plot of the song while restoring the turn to the tonic.

**Die Vögel, D.691 (The Birds)**

**Franz Schubert**

Wie lieblich und fröhlich,  
Zu schweben, zu singen,  
Von glänzender Höhe  
Zur Erde zu blicken!  

Die Menschen sind töricht,  
Sie können nicht fliegen.  

Sie jammern in Nöten,  
Wir flattern gen Himmel.  

Der Jäger will töten,  
Dem Früchte wir pickten;  
Wir müssen ihn hohnen,  
Und Beute gewinnen.  

How delightful and exhilarating  
To soar, to sing,  
To look down on the earth  
From the shining heights!  

Men are foolish:  
They cannot fly.  

They lament in their troubles;  
We fly up to the heavens.  

The huntsman wants to kill us,  
Whose fruit we pecked,  
But we should mock him  
And snatch our spoils.  

Text by Friedrich von Schlegel,  
English Translation by Emily Ezust

In this light-hearted *Lied*, Schubert assigns specific musical motives to the protagonists involved in Schlegel’s poem—the birds and the men. The birds’ theme is characterized by the energetic vocal melody in the opening and closing sections, with sixteenth notes that constantly jump up and down in pitch, while the men’s theme, in the middle section of the song, is much more static and grounded. While the huntsmen desire to kill the birds, the latter ultimately win, mocking and stealing from the humans who cannot fly.

*Continued*
In this waltz-like, strophic Lied, Schubert evokes several specific images within the separate verses of Hölty’s poem. The first two verses describe how much the author wishes to reside in heaven, with beautiful angels and an imagined “Himmelsbraut” (heaven-bride). However, the poet’s true feelings are revealed in the final verse when he states that he would be willing to stay on earth forever if his lover Laura would only look at him with a smile.
Wo ich ihn nicht hab,  
Ist mir das Grab,  
Die ganze Welt  
Ist mir vergällt.

Mein armer Kopf  
Ist mir verrückt,  
Mein armer Sinn  
Ist mir zerstückt.

Nach ihm nur schau ich  
Zum Fenster hinaus,  
Nach ihm nur geh ich  
Aus dem Haus.

Sein hoher Gang,  
Sein' edle Gestalt,  
Seines Mundes Lächeln,  
Seiner Augen Gewalt,

Und seiner Rede  
Zauberfluss,  
Sein Händedruck,  
Und ach, sein Kuss.

Mein Busen drängt  
Sich nach ihm hin.  
Auch dürf ich fassen  
Und halten ihn,

Und küsse ihn,  
So wie ich wollt,  
An seinen Küssen  
Vergehen sollt!

Where I do not have him,  
That is the grave,  
The whole world  
Is bitter to me.

My poor head  
Is crazy to me,  
My poor mind  
Is torn apart.

For him only, I look  
Out the window  
Only for him do I go  
Out of the house.

His tall walk,  
His noble figure,  
His mouth’s smile,  
His eyes’ power,

And his mouth’s  
Magic flow,  
His handclasp,  
And ah! His kiss!

My bosom urges itself  
Toward him.  
Ah, might I grasp  
And hold him!

And kiss him,  
As I would wish,  
At his kisses  
I should die!

Text by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,  
English Translation by Aaron Green

Continued
In “Gretchen am Spinnrade” Schubert sets one of the best-known episodes from Goethe’s Faust. Alone, pregnant, and devastated by the loss of her lover, Gretchen sits at her spinning wheel and laments her situation. The piano’s constantly turning sixteenth notes in the right hand represent the spinning of the wheel, while the left hand’s jumping bass-notes could be heard as the wheel’s clicking as it bumps along, or perhaps as Gretchen’s troubled heartbeat. Her mental state continues to deteriorate as she becomes caught in the memory of her lover, and even loses control of the wheel halfway through the song as she remembers his kiss, rendering her speechless for several measures. Once she starts it again, the wheel only turns faster and faster until she expresses her final wish for death by her lover’s hand. Her ultimate iteration of “my peace is gone, my heart is heavy” is broken—left alone in such a state of suffering, she knows she cannot survive.

The Daisies, op. 2, no. 1

In the scented bud of the morning O,
When the windy grass went rippling far!
I saw my dear one walking slow
In the field where the daisies are.

We did not laugh, and we did not speak
As we wandered happily, to and fro,
I kissed my dear on either cheek,
In the bud, of the morning O!

A lark sang up, from the breezy land;
A lark sang down, from a cloud afar;
As he and I went, hand in hand,
In the field where the daisies are.

Text by James Stephens

“The Daisies” was published in 1936 as the first of Barber’s Three Songs, op. 2. It is followed by “With Rue my Heart is Laden” (text by A. E. Housman) and “Bessie Bobtail” (text again by Stephens). “The Daisies” is dedicated to Barber’s mother, Marguerite McLeod Beatty Barber, who was called “Daisy,” and it received one of its earliest performances by his aunt, Louise Beatty Homer, who would become a leading contralto at the Metropolitan Opera. The charm in this little piece lies in the contrast between the graceful melody and the piano’s busy accompaniment. It evokes birdsong several times, with its grace-note pickups into the phrases about the larks, and keeps the tempo lively and flowing.
Sure On This Shining Night, op. 13, no. 3

Samuel Barber

Sure on this shining night
Of star made shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.
The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.
Sure on this shining night
I weep for wonder
Wand’ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

Text by James Agee

"Sure on This Shining Night" is the third of Barber’s Four Songs, published in 1940 as his op. 13. The text is from an untitled poem by James Agee, whom Barber befriended later in his life. While the vocal line may seem melodically simple, the interplay between the voice and piano accompaniment creates a dynamically rich setting that commands the listener’s attention. The piano keeps a consistent internal pulse while the vocal melody soars overhead, producing a mystical but delicate texture that evokes the poem’s tender mood.

Three Songs, op. 45

Samuel Barber

Opus 45, dating from 1974, comprises the last three songs that Barber ever wrote. The composition of these pieces followed two major events in Barber’s life: the failure of his opera Antony and Cleopatra, which led to a self-imposed five-year exile in Italy, and the liquidation of his home in Mount Kisco, New York. One might interpret the varying mood of these songs—somber, sardonic, and nostalgic—as part of Barber’s reaction to this personal upheaval.

1. Now Have I Fed, and Eaten Up the Rose

Now have I fed and eaten up the rose
Which then she laid within my stiff-cold hand.
That I should ever feed upon a rose
I never had believed in live-man’s land.

Only I wonder was it white or red
The flower that in the darkness my food has been.
Give us, and if Thou give, thy daily bread,
Deliver us from evil, Lord. Amen.

Text by Gottfried Keller/James Joyce

Continued
The original author of this text is the German-born Gottfried Keller; Barber uses James Joyce’s English translation for his musical setting. This two-stanza translation is from a six-stanza poem that Keller wrote in 1846 as part of a poetic cycle titled *Gedanken eines Lebendig-Begrabenen* (*Thoughts of a Living Burial*). Moreover, Joyce translated the poem only after hearing a setting by the Swiss composer, Othmar Schoeck, who had substantially altered and abbreviated the text.

The vocal melody, introduced in the piano, is based on a five-note motive that is repeated, with variation, throughout the song. Its angular texture creates a chilling effect in combination with the accompaniment. The voice enters against the drone of a pedal A, above which are placed repetitive quarter and eighth notes, giving the effect of a funeral dirge. The song’s ABA form, though it does not conform to the two stanzas of poetry, serves to heighten important textual material. The opening section presents the idea of death, while the brief middle section exhibits a different melodic and accompanimental character when the rose is considered. As if to end the questioning, the closing section reveals the finality of death with the return of the original music an octave higher.

2. A Green Lowland of Pianos

   In the evening
   As far as the eye can see
   Herds
   Of black pianos

   Up to their knees
   In the mire
   They listen to the frogs
   They gurgle in water
   With chords of rapture

   They are entranced
   By froggish, moonish spontaneity

   After the vacation
   They cause scandals
   In the concert hall
   During the artistic milking
   Suddenly they lie down
   Like cows

   Looking with indifference
   At the white flowers
   Of the audience
At the gesticulating of the ushers.

Text by Jerzy Harasymowicz/Czeslaw Milosz

The somber character of the first song is replaced by sarcasm and humor in this surrealistic verse written by Jerzy Harasymowicz and translated from the original Polish by Czeslaw Milosz. The poem likens pianos to cows and seems irreverent towards the art of musical performance. According to James Stephen King, Barber's use of text-painting is particularly exciting in this song, as it is not a device frequently found in his music with such obvious intent. Particular highlights include the accompaniment's glissando effect on the word "pianos" in the first verse and the double trills that later exaggerate the world "gurgle." Barber's incongruous contrasting of a detailed musical structure with an absolutely free textual form appears to be the key to the humorous character of this song.

3. O Boundless, Boundless Evening

O boundless, boundless evening. Soon the glow
Of long hills on the skyline will be gone,
Like clear dream country now, rich-hued by sun.
O boundless evening where the cornfields throw
The scattered daylight back in an aureole.
Swallows high up are singing, very small.
On every meadow glitters their swift flight,
In woods of rushes and where tall masts stand
In brilliant bays. Yet in ravines beyond
Between the hills already nests the night.

Text by Georg Heym/Christopher Middleton

The final song of op. 45 is a translation by Christopher Middleton of Georg Heym's text "O weiter, weiter Abend." Although Heym (1887-1912) was one of the earliest German Expressionists, this poem is both nostalgic and romantic. Barber's setting captures the character of the text, evoking a pastoral sunset scene while referencing the onset of nighttime at its end. The flowing vocal melody reveals Barber's characteristic lyricism and romantic inclinations, with few chromatic alterations. The piano accompaniment shows a continual sixteenth-note pattern, characterized by contrary motion. The introduction of left-hand arpeggiated chords thickens the texture and highlights significant words such as "gone," "clear," and "sun." Halfway through the song, the piano recalls the original vocal melody as if to remind the audience of the text, though none is present. Within the final phrase, the piano and voice show significant change: their decreased motion perhaps indicates the impending darkness of the oncoming night.