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Junior Recital: Chelsee Woodey, mezzo-soprano

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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JUNIOR RECITAL

Chelsee Woodey, mezzo-soprano
assisted by
Joanne Kong, harpsichord, piano
Davis Massey, cello

APRIL 23, 2005, 5:00 PM
PERKINSON RECITAL HALL
Program

1. Qual Per Ignoto Calle
   Cantata for mezzo-soprano
   and basso continuo RV 677
   Antonio Vivaldi
   (1678-1741)

3. Der Arme Peter Op. 53 No. 3
   I. Nicht schnell
   II. Ziemlich schnell
   III. Langsam
   Robert Schumann
   (1810-1856)

Liederkreis Op. 39
   No. 1 In der Fremde
   No. 4 Die Stille
   No. 10 Zwielicht

Charm of Lullabies Op. 41
   1. Cradle Song
   2. The Highland Balou
   3. Sephestia's Lullaby
   4. A Charm
   5. The Nurse's Song
   Benjamin Britten
   (1913-1976)
Born into a musical family, Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) came by his talent naturally, for his father was a professional violinist. After an elementary education, he joined the priesthood and was ordained by the age of 25. His work for the church ended abruptly, however, due to health problems in his lungs. He then turned to composition and performance as his professions. His first compositions were written for violin ensembles. He wrote numerous sonatas and concertos but also loved composing sacred music. He dabbled in opera, and traveled frequently to promote his work. His vocal works heavily influenced his concerto works, reflected in his use of instrumentation and melody.

At the time Vivaldi wrote this work, the da capo aria was the standard vehicle of expression in the cantata. “The subject matter is also in line with the convention of the time: they concentrate on - happy or unhappy - love and everything connected to that, mostly set in a mythical world with nymphs and shepherds.” (Johan Van Veen, Grove Dictionary) The melismatic lines of heartbreak are rich and virtuosic.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was a German composer of the Romantic era. As a boy, his father encouraged him to participate in many musical arenas, but when his father died, neither his mother nor his guardian supported his endeavors. Instead, he attended law school in Leipzig, where he wrote letters to fight his feelings of misery. Finally, he found the courage to tell his mother, “My whole life has been a struggle between Poetry and Prose, or call it Music and Law.” He pursued his musical ambition, but soon thereafter permanently injured his right hand. Not able to play the piano, he devoted his life to composition. With influences like Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Goethe, Schumann created equally stimulating piano pieces and vocal pieces.

*Der Arme Peter*, a set of three songs, expresses three different perspectives of one story. The first is a bird’s eye view, the narrator,
who describes a man’s heartbreak as he watches the woman he loves dance with her new husband on their wedding day. The dance rhythm of the piano shows celebration, but the vocal line shows despair. The second is in first person where Peter deals with his internal conflict of whether or not he wants to see his beloved Grete and tell her how he feels. He knows he cannot because she will not return his love. The final song, set in a minor key, is from the perspective of the townspeople. As they watch Peter walk down the street, they see a dead man walking. A surprise cadence to the set suggests there may be hope for such a heartbroken man.

Schumann’s *Leiderkreis* Op. 39 is one of the most classic and popular lied cycles of the era. With poems by J. Eichendorff, the cycle consists of twelve songs. The accompaniment of *In Der Fremde* holds a very expressive melodic line while the voice simply outlines its contour. *Die Stille* is a lighthearted song full of happiness and glee to be in love and to be alive. The final selection, *Zwielicht* is an odd choice for this cycle. Its mysterious accompaniment and lyrics add a different flavor to the mix, and almost send chills up the spines of the listeners.

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft, off the Suffolk coast of England on November 22, 1913. His mother, a singer and pianist, contributed greatly to Britten’s musical training. A talented young man, Britten could master any instrument in a short period of time. His influences were contemporary composers like Schoenberg, yet he also loved Beethoven and Brahms. In 1934, he ventured away from England to visit Florence for a performance of his *Phantasy Oboe Quartet* at the ISCM festival. His mother died soon thereafter and he moved in with his life partner, Peter Pears. In need of a life change, he moved to North America in 1939 where he matured as a composer. Three years later, he moved back to England when he met the singer Nancy Evans. Most of his mezzo-soprano compositions were written for Evans, including *A Charm of Lullabies*.

A set of five songs, *A Charm of Lullabies* was first performed in The Hague, January 3, 1948. *The Highland Balou*, a poem written by
Robert Burns, is an adapted Gaelic lullaby which Burns received during his tour of the Highlands. The mother sings to her child to bless (leeze) him to become strong enough to steal a horse and marry wealthy. At the time, stealing cattle was a way of foraging in the area. The most oddly placed song in the set is *A Charm*, with lyrics written by Thomas Randolph. This poem references several Greek mythological stories and images. Erinnys, one of the furies, is the personification of the conscience. Rhadamanthus is one of three judges in the infernal region; he is described as a very just judge. The furies, the avenging deities, are named Erinnys, Alecto, and Tisiphone. The furies are “attendants on justice, and if the sun in heaven should transgress his path would punish him.” (W. Emerson) The final song of the set is the most like a lullaby. Two perspectives are revealed in this song where the listener cannot tell if the nurse or the mother is singing to the child.