

Adelaide – Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven is perhaps known best for his symphonies and late string quartets. His contributions to the genre of art song are numerically few yet mighty in compositional value. *Adelaide*, Op. 46, is one such example. This cantata, as it was called by Beethoven, was composed in 1814-15, in an experimental and transitional period between what musicologists refer to as his Middle and Mature periods.

The basic structure of *Adelaide* is a cavatina-cabaletta, an Italian music form that divides an aria into a stately first half and energetic second half. The melodious *Larghetto* section forms the cavatina, whilst the cabaletta is the quick and excited *Allegro Molto*. Beethoven also transforms the main theme throughout the piece in a manner reminiscent his Austrian contemporaries, Haydn and Mozart. This fusion of styles is what makes this an exemplar of this innovative period.

The poem *Adelaide* was written by Friedrich von Matthisson, a German Romantic poet to whom Beethoven dedicated this piece. Beethoven delayed sending Matthisson the music, fearing his disapproval, but Matthisson was effusive in his praise. The publishers printed many editions, signifying the song's contemporary popularity, and its popularity lasted long enough that Franz Liszt transcribed three versions of the piece for his own use. Perhaps the most fitting quote comes from the music critic Eduard Hanslick, who described it as "the only song by Beethoven the loss of which would leave a gap in the emotional life of our nation."

Selections – Ottorino Respighi

Respighi, like Beethoven, was not particularly seen as a composer of art song. His atmospheric style is best represented in his orchestral tone poem triptych on Rome: *Fountains of Rome*, *Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. This atmospheric style, however, carries over into his art song, even into his choice of poetry which he set. These following selections each evoke different landscapes and settings. It is interesting to note that each of these pieces relies heavily on musical scales as a means of creating intensity in the composition.

The poem *Nebbie*, or "Mists," was written by Ada Negri, and published in her first collection *Fatalità* (1895). She faced many difficulties in her life, including having her poetry dismissed by critics on the grounds that she was a woman. As she swore an oath to the fascist dictatorship in Italy as a prerequisite to join the Italian Academy as well as receiving the Mussolini Prize in 1931 further marred her oeuvre in the eyes of many people. Respighi's setting of this poem from 1906 has proven popular with recitalists, often in conjunction with other settings of Negri's poetry.

The following pieces, *Pioggia* and *O falce di luna*, are taken from Respighi's 1912 publication of *Sei Liriche* or "Six Lyrics." The poem *Pioggia*, translating to "Rain," was written by Vittoria Aganoor, an Italian of Armenian heritage. It was originally published in 1900 in her collection *Leggenda eterna*. This poem forms a Petrarchan sonnet, with two quatrains and two tercets, but Aganoor subverts that poetic structure by following a typically Shakespearian rhyme scheme for the quatrains, then breaking completely with Shakespeare for the tercets. This poem

has proven less popular with recitalists, yet it has been programmed by Luciano Pavarotti and Victoria Bezetti.

The final selection, *O falce di luna*, was written by Gabriele D'Annunzio. A Decadent poet, he also served later in life as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Italian Army, later granted the honorary title of General. He also served as the dictator of the short-lived authoritarian republic called the Italian Regency of Carnaro, with the title of Duce. Later, Mussolini kept D'Annunzio out of politics through a generous stipend from the state. Thus, that his earlier works of poetry have been clouded with his later fascistic associations. This poem is from D'Annunzio's second poetry collection, *Canto novo*, published in 1882, of poetry from his youth. The structure of the poem is of three quatrains, in which D'Annunzio uses familiar devices such as alliteration and anaphora to illustrate the landscape.

Cinq chansons “de Venise” – Gabriel Fauré

Gabriel Fauré's forays into composition are seen by musicologists and critics as the defining link between French Romanticism and Modernism, treading carefully between the passionate strains of Frédéric Chopin and the atmospheric Impressionism of his contemporary, Claude Debussy. His Venetian Songs, Op. 58 from 1891, are dedicated to then Princess de Scey-Montbéliard, who originally sought to commission an opera between Fauré and Verlaine. Verlaine, in declining health, was not fit to write a libretto. Fauré then chose poetry from already published works of Verlaine to create this set, published in a collection entitled *Cinq Mélodies*. This set earned its demonym by the painting beneath its name, of a Venetian gondola on the water in front of the famous Piazza San Marco.

Fauré declined to call this a song cycle, but rather a suite, a term more regularly used for a collection of dances which were thematically linked. It is for this that Fauré termed this set as such, as he detailed in a letter to the Princess, describing how melodic themes from pieces earlier in the set are brought back in later pieces. Thus, the order of pieces is fixed. Interestingly, the keys of these pieces are not set. This is evinced by Fauré's transcripts, which show various pieces in different keys depending on the performer.

Three Songs – Matthew Emery

The most contemporary of the composers on this recital, Matthew Emery is a Canadian composer from London, Ontario. He has studied at the University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto, and is currently working towards his Doctorate of Musical Arts at the latter. His main genre is choral music, which has been commissioned by many choirs around the world. A chorale-like quality pervades his Three Songs, with his use of open chords and close dissonances. Each of these songs are taken from different poets, with the theme throughout the poetry being one of the narrator relating to a loved one.

The first poem, *For Broken and Tired Am I*, was written by Archibald Lampman, a fellow Ontarian from Chatham-Kent. Described as the “Canadian Keats,” his poetry is focused on nature. The poem's proper title is *Refuge*, published in the collection *Alcyone* (1899). Emery

omits the first stanza of the poem in his setting. It can be supposed that since the text evokes images which are similarly found in the second stanza of the poem, it was removed.

The second poem was written by Eugene Field, a noted American poet. The poem's original title was *Hugo's "Flower to Butterfly"*, which was a parody of Victor Hugo's *Roses et Papillons*. Emery's omission of stanzas 2-4 from the original poem make the object of the narrator's attentions less specific.

The final poem was created by the poet, playwright, and author Oscar Wilde. Considered a poetic masterpiece, it was written by Wilde from the depths of his sorrow at the loss of his 10-year-old sister, Isola. Written seven years after her death at the age of 19, it is known that Wilde made frequent trips to her grave. *Requiescat* may be rendered from the Latin as "May She Rest in Peace."

Selections – Fernando Obradors

Fernando Obradors was a Catalan-Spanish composer. Primarily self-taught, his musical output ranged from orchestral compositions to theatrical incidental music. His most frequently performed music, however, remain his four volumes of Spanish poetry, *Canciones clásicas españolas*. These volumes take Spanish poetry from various sources, setting them to folk-like melodies. Composed for voice and piano, it would not be a stretch to imagine any of these pieces be accompanied by a guitar.

The first poem is a teasingly short poem by Fernández Boigas, from Cadiz. Boigas was also a cantaor, who sang in the Spanish tradition of flamenco cante. The poem is a cante chico, or little song, in which the cantaor sings of light and bawdy humour to the amusement of the spectators. This poem is also known by another name, *Coplas de Curro Dolce*, or "Verses of Curro Dolce." Curro Dolce was the stage name of Boigas.

¿Corazón, por qué pasáis... is an anonymous work from the 17th Century. Obradors' setting interprets it as a slightly satirical lullaby, reflecting on the fickleness of the narrator's heart.

Al amor is another 17th Century creation, of the Spanish poet Cristóbal de Castillejo, a Cistercian monk from Castille, albeit not a particularly devout one. His travels through Europe are littered with tales of seduction of upper-class women while in the service of one of the minor Kings in the Holy Roman Empire. The poem itself is essentially a translation of a section of one of the greatest poems in Latin's Golden Age by Gaius Valerius Catullus, known as Catullus V (*Vivamus, mea Lesbia...*). The original poem speaks to ignoring the rumours that stern old men speak of, and of simply living and loving each other.

Obradors, beneath the title of *El Vito*, notes that it was a popular song in Madrid, around 1800. However, its origins are in Andalusia, where the dance that the name refers to originates. The name is a rather crude reference to St. Vitus' dance, otherwise known as Sydenham's chorea, characterized by rapid and uncontrolled jerking movements from the arms and legs. The poetry, as with many traditional folksongs, is anonymous and comes in many variations, but the common theme throughout all settings is lust.

Selections – Sergei Rachmaninoff

While the average person would not know Rachmaninoff's music by his name, his iconic lyricism has helped maintain his popularity among musicians to this day, through songs by Céline Dion and Eric Carmen. Rachmaninoff's romances, the Russian term equivalent to lied or mélodie, are known for their soaring vocal lines, technically demanding piano accompaniment, and a keen sense for drama.

The first romance gives its inspiration away from its French title, *Chanson georgienne* or "Song of Georgia." It was written by Aleksandr Pushkin for Mikhail Glinka, as a lyric for a melody Glinka had played for him. Rachmaninoff's version, published in 1893, followed Glinka's romance by nearly 60 years. Rachmaninoff uses melismas and augmented seconds to create an "oriental" effect. Rachmaninoff dedicated this romance to his future wife.

A Dream is a simple setting of a translation of Heinrich Heine's *Ich hatte einst ein schönes Vaterland*, of 1834, with the Russian translation by Aleksey Pleshcheyev. A binary poem in iambic, its simplicity is reflected in the restraint shown in the piano, with outbursts of passion in the silence after stanzas.

I beg for mercy is a transgressive poetic take on spring. Rather than spring symbolizing joy, the narrator sees before him the horror that awaits after falling in love. Written by Dimitri Merezhkovsky in 1886 and set by Rachmaninoff in 1906, it is one of his lesser known romances.

Again, I am alone follows directly after *I beg for mercy* in Op. 26, as nos. 8 & 9 respectively. The poet Ivan Bunin continues the explore of the cruelty of spring. Bunin and Rachmaninoff had met in Yalta in May 1900, with Anton Chekhov and members of the Moscow Art Theatre. While they were great friends after that, Rachmaninoff only set two of his poems.

Night is mournful is that second poem by Ivan Bunin. This poem was written in 1899 and set on September 3rd, 1906, a day before Rachmaninoff wrote *Again, I am alone*. The poetry is remarkable for its use of trochaic pentameter, a meter rarely used in Russian poetry. The poem reflects an internal monologue in which the narrator is melancholic, yet hopeful. The quintuplet figure in piano has an impressionistic effect of the narrator's ever-looming depression.

Spring Waters is the joyous exaltation of spring, eschewing the despondency of the previous poems. The recurring sextuplet figure in the piano calls forth in one's mind the burbling streams of water immediately. Interesting to note, an unwritten aspect of Russian performance practice indicates that a dominant-seventh be sung at the end of the second line of the piece, yet there is absolutely no written evidence, in score or otherwise, that this should be sung. It is an aural tradition from the earliest performances of this piece in Russia. It remains one of Rachmaninoff's most popular romances, having been transcribed for various musical ensembles, and performed widely in recitals. Written by Fyodor Tyutchev in 1829-30, it was set in 1896 and dedicated to Anna Ornatskaya, Rachmaninoff's first piano teacher.