

Date du récital/Date of recital: *May 12, 2024*

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Classe de/Class of: *Tracy Smith Bessette*

These program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course. Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.

### **Program**

Mi palpita il cor

George Frideric Handel  
(1685-1759)

- I. Mi palpita il cor...Agitate è l'alma
- II. Tormento e gelosia...Ho tanti affanni in petto
- III. Clori, di te mir lagno...S'un di m'adora

Kalypso

Cecilia Livingston  
(b. 1984)

Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse

Claude Debussy  
(1862-1896)

- I. Pantomime
- II. Clair de Lune
- III. Pierrot
- IV. Apparition

### **- Intermission -**

On this island, Op. 11

Benjamin Britten  
(1913-1976)

- I. Let the florid music praise
- II. Now the leaves are falling fast
- III. Seascape
- IV. Nocturne
- V. As it is, plenty

Sélections / Selections

Richard Strauss  
(1864-1949)

- Allerseelen Op. 10, No. 8
- Schlechtes Wetter Op. 65, No. 5
- Die Georgine Op. 10, No. 4
- Leises Lied Op. 39, No. 1
- Cäcilie Op. 27, No. 2

*Mi palpita il cor* was written shortly after George Frideric Handel left Italy in 1710, which was a very formative period for him. It was in Italy that Handel was influenced by composers such as Corelli and Scarlatti, which is evident, particularly in his Italian cantatas, which reportedly have similar structures to Scarlatti's cantatas.<sup>1</sup> Handel's Italian cantatas were "praised for their masterful dramatic construction and extraordinary beauty."<sup>2</sup> *Mi palpita il cor* was recomposed and remodelled a few times, and there are at least four versions known: HWV 132a for soprano and continuo, HWV 132b for soprano, continuo and oboe, HWV 132c for mezzo-soprano, flute, and continuo, and HWV 132d for alto, flute, oboe, and continuo. Some of the editions show considerable variation beyond the instrumentation.<sup>3</sup>

The origin of the libretto is unknown, but it follows a young man who is confused and wondering whether his love, Cloris, reciprocates his feelings. The opening recitative and aria declaim that his heart throbs and his soul is agitated, though he does not know why. The second recitative and aria submit to the pain from which he cannot find a way out, and finally, the third recitative and aria reflect a hope that perhaps one day, love will be reciprocated, and they will be content.<sup>4</sup>

Canadian composer Cecilia Livingston wrote *Kalypso* in 2015 with a text by Duncan McFarlane as a companion-piece to *Penelope* (2014). The two pieces explore characters, named by their titles, from Homer's *Odyssey*: Penelope, Odysseus's wife, and Kalypso, a nymph who seduced and kept Odysseus on her island for many years. The song is written to reflect Kalypso's inner thoughts and her calls to Odysseus after he has been sent home to Penelope, and Kalypso is left alone, frustrated and perhaps confused that he has been taken from her. Livingston describes that "Kalypso's plea-apostrophe is set in a warm, tender, jazz-rich, Chopin-esque language[...]which hints at something more peculiar in her powers."<sup>5</sup> Kalypso's song demonstrates her more volatile and perhaps narcissistic nature in comparison to Penelope, as she calls out to him, complains, and even blames Odysseus when he is released and sent home - by the gods who are frustrated with Kalypso - to be with his wife. The opening, which is much like a siren song, is also suggestive of her alluring but potentially dangerous and harmful nature.

*Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse* by Claude Debussy were written around 1881, during the period of his life when he worked with the Vasnier family. Eugene-Henri Vasnier provided for and encouraged Debussy after he left the Paris Conservatoire, and Debussy also accompanied Marie Vasnier and dedicated many of his early works to her.<sup>6</sup> In total, Marie Vasnier, with whom

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Herbage. 'The Oratorios' in *Handel: A Symposium*, Edited by Gerald Abraham. 1954: 74.

<sup>2</sup> Doris Ornstein. "On preparing a Performing Edition of Handel's Cantata: *Mi Palpita il Cor*", *Bach*, Volume 29, No. 1. 1998: 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> George. F. Handel. *Mi palpita il cor, HWV 132b*, Edited by Thomas Allery, Hannah Blumsohn, Ella Bodeker, Jens Franke, Lucy Neil, Jorge Silva. Historical Performance Department, Guildhall School of Music & Drama. 2020: ii.

<sup>5</sup> Cecilia Livingston. *Kalypso*. 2015: 2.

<sup>6</sup> James R. Briscoe. "Debussy's Earliest Songs." *College Music Symposium* 24, no. 2, 1984: 81.

Debussy was suspected to have been in love<sup>7</sup>, received approximately thirteen songs from Debussy, written specifically to highlight her vocal capabilities.

*Pantomime* is a lively, playful piece about *commedia dell'arte* characters. Debussy illustrates the personalities of Pierrot, Cassandre, Colombine, and Harlequin through tonal and textural shifts and varied melodic materials. Pierrot is a "typical character in French pantomime,"<sup>8</sup> with thievish tendencies and a lack of morals, and this is reflected in his playful and mischievous theme. Cassandre, in contrast, is described as a man who laments his disinherited nephew, and his music is filled with musical sighs and descending chromaticism. Harlequin's music supports his plotting to abduct Colombine with a lively and agile contour. Colombine's music is the most distinct, marked with a sudden tempo change; her melody floats over rapid harp-like arpeggiations,<sup>9</sup> giving it a dreamlike quality.

The set's second song is Debussy's first setting of *Clair de Lune*. Here, cascading chords illustrate the moonlight and unify the entire piece, though they are manipulated to intensity and calm the mood throughout. The text is deeply introspective, contemplating love and sadness. The individuals illuminated by the moonlight supposedly revel in fantastic disguises with music and dance, yet the poem identifies their sadness. Further, even though the subject of their songs is love and opportune life, they do not believe in their fortune. The abstract nature of the song is reinforced by its ethereal sense, which avoids feeling concrete musically, thereby supporting the introspective nature of the text.

Like the first song, *Pierrot* again visits characters of *commedia dell'arte*. The musical basis of this movement is the popular French folk song "au clair de lune," which the piano introduces and maintains throughout the song. Pierrot is the primary subject and wanders along the Boulevard du Temple after finishing a performance at Harlequin's wedding. He wanders and meets a girl who teasingly leads him on while the moon watches the scene jealously. Like the first of the set, this song concludes with a playful vocalize.

*Apparition* is set in an ethereal manner, with rapid, sparkling figurations in the piano's upper register. The text, a first-person narrative, is a recollection with all stanzas in the past tense. The speaker recalls a dream about the day of their first kiss. The memories recalled are bittersweet and emotional, and the speaker describes the dream as a torment as they remember a beloved individual from their youth when all was well. The speaker expresses that they have no regret, even though the memories now evoke a great sadness.

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Kimball. *Song: a Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2005. 191.

<sup>8</sup> Diane K. Moellenhoff. "Literary and Stylistic Analysis of Debussy's *Quatre Chansons de Jeunesse*." MMus Dis., The University of Texas at Austin, 1979:10.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Johnson. "Present Absence: Debussy, Song, and the Art of (Dis)Appearing." *19th-Century Music* 40, no. 3. 2017: 244.

Benjamin Britten's song cycle, *On This Island, Op 11* sets five texts by W.H. Auden, and was published in 1938, with the texts being published only shortly before, in 1936.<sup>10</sup> Most of the texts feature some minor changes when set to music, but overall do remain mostly intact.

*Let the florid music praise!* opens the set with a sort of fanfare, as the A section of the piece is a broad, joyous declamation about love and beauty. The piano plays dramatic, arpeggiated flourishes while the voice enters with accented quarter notes, which have a very instrumental quality to them, like a fanfare or trumpet tune. The mood shifts dramatically in the B section, supported by a tonal shift from D major to G minor. The vocal line changes from the declamatory style to a more private tone, and the text now focuses on the unloved and the eventuality of death, which "pardons no one, loved or not."<sup>11</sup> There is evident pain and longing in this section, reinforced by the use of dissonance and tonal ambiguity.

*Now the leaves are falling fast* compares the harsh reality of the political situation of the 1930s with an unattainable ideal.<sup>12</sup> The setting reinforces a sense of uneasiness, the relentlessness of time, and a false sense of security, proceeding as a rapid pattering over unrelenting, driving eighth notes in the piano. This sense is contrasted by the aforementioned *unattainable ideal*, where the musical motion is suddenly halted as a hopeful image of a mountain stream that could bless "travellers in their last distress."

*Seascape* meditates on a natural landscape where all actions are part of normal life cycles. Auden uses onomatopoeia and alliteration, and the poem explores how the seascape interacts with the senses of hearing and sight. The piano captures the motion of the water throughout the piece with continuous sixteenth notes while the voice glides above it, describing the natural scene before the 'stranger.'

*Nocturne* explores what occurs during the night and ultimately, wishes that the protagonist of the text can benefit from the "healing" of sleep, which is peaceful and allows for a gentle waking in the morning. The music of this song is simple, which blocked chords in the piano throughout, and a simple melody which continually rises in arpeggiations then descends in a winding, scalar motion.

*As it is, plenty* is an "example of Auden's ironic social satire, encouraging the protagonist to rejoice gratefully for his great success which is measured purely by the societal norm."<sup>13</sup> The man appears to have everything he could want, but there is a sense that he is unsatisfied. The song is set in a ternary form, with some contrast in the middle section. It is based on the swing style and, therefore, intensely contrasts all other songs in the set. The whole piece is playful and supporting to the ironic tone of Auden's text.

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<sup>10</sup> Mory S. Ortman. "Benjamin Britten and W. H. Auden's *On This Island*: An analysis and interpretive guide." DMA Dis., Arizona State University, 2002: 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 84.

Richard Strauss “created a style of [his] own” with musical phrases that seem to “pour out of him [...] and you hardly ever come across a line which you feel has been contrived.”<sup>14</sup> *Allerseelen* is a tender song in which an individual longs for a beloved who has passed away. The text recalls the feeling of holding hands and the sweetness of a glance, remembering and honoring a loved one. Structurally, the piece is through-composed, allowing it to follow the emotion of the text freely. Strauss captures the incredibly bittersweet emotions experienced as the protagonist remembers the happy memories which are now tainted by loss.

*Schlechtes Wetter* provides a dramatic contrast to *Allerseelen*, showing a different side of Strauss’s compositional style. The piano illustrates a storm with snow, rain, and wind. Yet through this ‘terrible weather’ - as the title translates to - the narrator sees a mother who has been shopping for ingredients to bake a cake for her daughter. There is a juxtaposition of the violent storm and the warm scene of the loving mother, set as a waltz. These two scenes could be taken literally, or understood from a psychological perspective in which the warm home scene is something the narrator longs for and which removes an overwhelming noise of emotions and thoughts.

*Die Georgine* discusses love found in a later season of life, comparing it to a Dahlia - the translation of Georgine - which is a late-blooming flower. The flower, like the narrator, has never known the springtime of life. Despite this, the poem highlights that both the joy and the pain of love are the same, whether experienced early or late.

*Leises Lied*, translating to *gentle song*, takes place in a garden as a lover longs for an absent beloved. This song has a haunting quality due to the heavy use of augmented harmony and whole-tone motion in the melody. This creates strong tonal ambiguity, and despite its key signature of two flats, the piece has cadences in E major, b-flat minor, D major, and d minor, which is the final cadence of the piece. This being said, this final cadence does tease with the notated key by placing a B-flat major chord, behaving as a VI chord, just before the final d minor chord.

*Cäcilie* was completed on September 9, 1894, the day before his wedding to soprano Pauline de Ahna, and the entire opus was given to her as a wedding gift.<sup>15</sup> This lied talks about the internal anguish caused by separation, and the anticipation that one may experience as they look forward to seeing their beloved once again.

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<sup>14</sup> Elena Gerhardt. “Strauss and His Lieder.” *Tempo*, no. 12, 1949: 10.

<sup>15</sup> Marie Rolf, and Elizabeth West Marvin. “Analytical Issues and Interpretive Decisions in Two Songs by Richard Strauss.” *Intégral* 4, 1990: 67.

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