

Date du récital/Date of recital: Saturday, January 27, 2024

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Classe de/Class of: Tracy Smith Bessette

These program notes are written by Julianna Collevocchio, and are presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the course. I will be singing the role of Noémie in Jules Massenet's *Cendrillon*.

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Cendrillon composed by Jules Massenet is a four act opera, based on Charles Perrault's 1698 version of the fairy tale Cinderella, set to French libretto by Henri Cain. *Cendrillon* was composed in 1898 at the height of Massenet's success. Originally titled *Cendrillon: Conte de Fées en Quatre Actes et Six Tableaux*, it premiered on May 24, 1899 in Paris at the Opera-Comique and was applauded by both audience and critics. The lavish production as well as the quality of music ensured that it would be an immediate success.¹

Massenet was considered one of the most successful opera composers at the end of the nineteenth into the twentieth century. At a young age, Massenet was accepted into the Conservatoire National de Paris and became a recipient of the Grand Prix de Rome. It was during this time that he met Franz Liszt and was introduced to his wife Mademoiselle de Sainte-Marie. Composing twenty-seven operas, Massenet is often known as a composer who writes in support of the voice. His detailed musical markings and wide range of compositional techniques are strong components of his musical style. Much of Massenet's style is strongly influenced by composers such as Berlioz, Wagner and Gounod. *Cendrillon* is one of those operas in which Massenet has shown the greatest suppleness and skill, with lavishing effects of

¹ Miles, Rodney. "Cendrillon (ii)." (Grove Music Online.2002), 2.

rhythm and odd contrasts of colours.² Massenet writes with many different vocal colours that help to shape the serious and comical characters within the opera. The music of the family members, specifically the step sisters, is simple in harmony, melody and is often exaggerated through Massenet's extreme use of vocal markings. The sisters sing in short phrases, have sudden outbursts and act as the comical foil to the opera. Noémie and Dorothée are motivated by the desire's of their Mother, Madame de la Haltière. In order to be recognized by the Prince, the sisters behave foolishly and put their faith in their Mother to help them reach a high social status. In contrast, Cendrillon and the Prince are much more complex characters. Their music is sophisticated, elegant and sonorous. Massenet uses many motifs in the orchestra to evoke the relationship of the characters, time and place. For example, a repeating rhythmic pattern appears throughout the opera when the characters sing about the ball. The dotted rhythm followed by a grouping of triplets, mimics the dance music. This is done regularly throughout the opera to imitate the action that is happening on stage and to foreshadow the action that is to come. Through the contrast of voices, orchestral motifs and elaborate set, the grandiose of the opera comes to life.

Along with learning the role of Noémie, I also covered the role of Clorinda in Gioachino Rossini's *La Cenerentola* with Opera McGill. Both opera's premiered in the nineteenth century, but are very different in their libretti. *La Cenerentola* excludes elements of fairytale, whereas *Cendrillon* has the element of magic where social inequalities are deemed natural. Both step sister roles challenged me vocally and yet allowed me to find many facets of my voice. I have been able to explore new vocal colours, spontaneity and vocal freedom through developing my

² Finck, Henry T. *Massenet and His Operas*. (New York: AMS Press, 1976,) 203.

voice and its connection to the body. Learning the role of Noémie required me to look beyond the vocal line to determine an emotional quality that would help bring the short phrases and quick text off the page. Connecting my body to an emotional response has been very beneficial in my learning of this role, as it has allowed me to make music freely and truthfully. In comparison, the role of Clorinda found its way into my body through a more technical process that included body alignment, low abdominal engagement and adjusting my mouth aperture for optimal sound. In my learning process I have come to realize that if my instrument is aligned and free of unnecessary tension, I am able to access my full vocal tract. This has given me much freedom and has allowed me to access a more expansive and reliable instrument. Through my learning, coaching and rehearsing of *Cendrillon*, I have gained a stronger understanding of the French language and the power of intention behind the text that motivates the need to sing.

Bibliography

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