

SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE, AND DANCE



VIRTUOSO
SERIES CONCERT
NICOLE ASEL
CSU FACULTY VOICE

WITH **TIM BURNS**, PIANO

NOVEMBER 29, 2021



Colorado State University

P R O G R A M :

NICOLE ASEL, MEZZO SOPRANO
TIM BURNS, PIANO

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2021
ORGAN RECITAL HALL

ZWEI GESÄNGE

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Gestillte Sehnsucht
Geistliches Wiegenlied

With Margaret Miller, viola

SELECTIONS FROM *RÜCKERT LIEDER*

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)

Ich atmet einen linden Duft
Liebst du um Schönheit
Blicke mir
Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen

RHAPSODY ON THE THEME OF PAGANINI (RECORDING) SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Lang Lang, piano
Mariinsky Orchestra
Valery Gergiev, conductor

INTERMISSION

FOUR SONGS, OP. 13

SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)

A Nun Takes the Veil
The Secrets of the Old
Sure on This Shining Night
Nocturne

BONNIE BLUE EYES

KENNETH FRAZELLE (B. 1955)

TEN THOUSAND MILES AWAY

STEVEN MARC KOHN (B. 1957)

PROGRAM NOTES

***Zwei Gesänge* for Alto with Viola and Piano, op. 91 Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)**

While an avid composer of lieder for piano and solo voice, Johannes Brahms wrote only two songs in which he added another instrument— the viola—to the usual duo. *Zwei Gesänge* (Two Songs) for alto with viola and piano represents not only Brahms's passion for German lieder, but also his storytelling. "Gestillte Sehnsucht" (Appeased Desire) is a reworking of a cradle song written by the composer for the child of his dear friends: violinist Joseph Joachim and mezzo-soprano Amalie Schneeweiss. However, the couple's marriage was in trouble, and in true romantic era fashion, Brahms wrote the piece for the couple to perform together in hopes that their relationship would be mended. Unfortunately, their marriage met an end far less calm than that of the piece dedicated to them. The text tells of "yearning desires" and "the longing" for those needs to be "lulled to sleep." This lullaby certainly retains its soothing character throughout. While the main melody is initially stated by the viola with soft piano accompaniment, the string instrument transitions to an accompaniment role itself when the singer begins the first verse. The second verse begins by describing the "anxious, dreamy flights" of those same desires and swells in volume in fast ascending, short motives in the viola and piano. The third verse returns to the same relaxed viola melody from the introduction. The low-ranged, D major chord that concludes the piece and the tender motion in the piano leading to it lend a sort of irony to the text's final message of finding rest, but only when the author has reached the end of his life.

Written several years earlier in 1863, "Geistliches Wiegenlied" (Sacred Lullaby), holds the same lullaby characteristics as the first song of the pair: flowing arpeggiated chords in a major key, a soft dynamic statement of the melody in the viola, and a text meant to soothe a child to sleep. This lullaby was written for the child of the same friends, who named their son Johannes after Brahms. The piece begins with the viola playing the melody of the well-known carol, "Joseph, lieber Joseph mein" (Joseph dearest, Joseph mine). The alto voice enters and continues the text with a completely different melody, urging the "holy angels" to "silence the treetops." Interestingly, this phrase, "stillet die Wipfel," is written multiple times throughout the text. Each time, Brahms chooses to repeat the phrase twice and briefly modulate to a different key, almost as if to convey the urgency of the parents' plea. Towards the middle of the piece, a modulation to F minor marks the words "Der Himmelsknabe duldet Beschwerde" (the Child of Heaven suffers pain). The text goes on to describe the soothing of that pain through sleep. As in the beginning of the piece, at the mention of wings and the flight of angels, the viola launches into its upper register, lending energy to the ending before a final calm in the form of another restatement of the initial rocking carol.

Gestillte Sehnsucht

Bathed in golden evening light,
How solemnly the forests stand!
The evening winds mingle softly
With the soft voices of the birds.
What do the winds, the birds whisper?
They whisper the world to sleep.
But you, my desires, ever stirring
In my heart without respite!
You, my longing, that agitates my breast –
When will you rest, when will you sleep?

The winds and the birds whisper,
But when will you, yearning desires, slumber?
Ah! when my spirit no longer hastens
On wings of dreams into golden distances,
When my eyes no longer dwell yearningly
On eternally remote stars;
Then shall the winds, the birds whisper
My life – and my longing – to sleep.

Geistliches Wiegenlied

You who hover
Around these palms
In night and wind,
You holy angels,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.
You palms of Bethlehem
In the raging wind,
Why do you bluster
So angrily today!
O roar not so!
Be still, lean
Calmly and gently over us;
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.
The heavenly babe
Suffers distress,

Oh, how weary He has grown
With the sorrows of this world.
Ah, now that in sleep
His pains
Are gently eased,
Silence the treetops!
My child is sleeping.
Fierce cold
Blows down on us,
With what shall I cover
My little child's limbs?
O all you angels,
Who wing your way
On the winds,
Silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.

Translations by Rickard Stokes

Selections from *Rückert Lieder*

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

Rückert Lieder is a set of songs composed by Gustav Mahler to the poetry of relatively little-known German poet Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866). Around the same time that Mahler composed his fifth symphony, he wrote this cycle of short songs, embedding the same dramatic flair and post-romantic tendencies. “Ich atmet einen linden Duft” opens with an immediate and perfect setting of the simple text’s meaning: “I breathed the breath of blossoms red.” The soprano enters with a slow, sauntering melody, accompanied by the violin’s moving line that begs the listener to imagine the lofty, floating scent of roses. Utilizing a larger ensemble, “Liebst du um Schönheit” (Lov’st Thou but Beauty) demonstrates Mahler’s affection for the dramatic. Written as a gift to his wife Alma, the piece describes the beauty of fair-looking people, the sun, and even mermaids, as being much more beautiful than the singer. The text repeats the phrase “O nicht liebe!” (O never love!) and each time, the voice soars into the upper range, accompanied by the dramatic swell of a crescendo/decrescendo in the ensemble. Each repetition of the expression is met with greater desperation.

With a striking difference to the previous two songs, a rumbling motif accompanies as the vocalist begins “Blike mir nicht in die Lieder!” (Look not, love, on my work undended!). The singer warns against experiencing art before it is finished, comparing the reward to the honey collected from bees well after they are busy making it. One can almost hear the murmuring of the insects swarming around their hive in the moving eighth-note line and sudden dissonances throughout. Bearing similarities in somber tone to Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen” (O Garnish World, Long since Thou has Lost Me!) describes the conductor-composer’s close recent brush with death in a sort of discussion with the listener. Mahler writes an ever-transitioning setting for the text that seems to swell between a wistful remembrance and calm acceptance of his own feelings towards death. The work culminates in the words, “I live for love’s sake, whose life is song,” and indeed, the song soothes the very soul of the listener in a calm suspension.

— program notes by Gideon Matchey

Ich atmet' einen linden Duft

I breathed a gentle fragrance!
In the room stood
A spray of lime,
A gift
From a dear hand.
How lovely the fragrance of lime was!
How lovely the fragrance of lime is!
The spray of lime
Was gently plucked by you;
Softly I breathe
In the fragrance of lime
The gentle fragrance of love.

Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder!

Do not look into my songs!
I lower my gaze,
As if caught in the act.
I dare not even trust myself
To watch them growing.
Your curiosity is treason.
Bees, when they build cells,
Let no one watch either,
And do not even watch themselves.
When the rich honeycombs
Have been brought to daylight,
You shall be the first to taste!

Liebst du um Schönheit

If you love for beauty,
O love not me!
Love the sun,
She has golden hair.
If you love for youth,
O love not me!
Love the spring
Which is young each year.
If you love for riches,
O love not me!
Love the mermaid
Who has many shining pearls.
If you love for love,
Ah yes, love me!
Love me always,
I shall love you ever more.

Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen

I am lost to the world
With which I used to waste much time;
It has for so long known nothing of me,
It may well believe that I am dead.
Nor am I at all concerned
If it should think that I am dead.
Nor can I deny it,
For truly I am dead to the world.
I am dead to the world's tumult
And rest in a quiet realm!
I live alone in my heaven,
In my love, in my song!

Translations by Rickard Stokes

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Sergei Rachmaninoff

As virtuosic as Rachmaninoff was on the piano, it is only fitting that he would admire another master performer like Niccolò Paganini. The Italian musician Paganini (1782–1840) was the most well-known violinist of his time and he is still known as the most famous violin virtuoso to date. The way he played his instrument and the way he composed for the violin were completely revolutionary. His 24 Caprices (c. 1805) are considered paramount works that collectively have even been referred to as the “Bible for violinists,” according to *Grove Music*. *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* was inspired by the 24th caprice. Rachmaninoff took this theme and enlarged it in a sense, expanding the orchestration from a single violin to a piano accompanied by a full romantic-era orchestra. The grandiose piece feels almost theatrical. From its introduction, and all the way through 24 variations on the theme, the work seems as if it is telling a story. As a matter of fact, Rachmaninoff himself said that the Rhapsody might tell of Paganini as a fantastical caricature, how the violinist struck a deal with the Devil in exchange for supernatural playing abilities, and of his love affair with a woman that would lead him toward destruction. This is, of course, simply fiction, based upon public superstitions during Paganini’s time, but the material made for a good story. The Rhapsody was completed in 1934 and premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra in Baltimore. Rachmaninoff himself filled the role of solo pianist. The reception was resoundingly positive, so much so that Rachmaninoff was somewhat taken aback. The composition remains one of his most praised and performed works to this day.

Four Songs, Op. 13

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

Samuel Barber is considered by many to be one of the greatest American composers of all time, and certainly one of the best of the twentieth century. He showed an incredible gift for composition from an early age, writing an operetta at only ten years of age. He continued his musical education, entering what was at the time the newly established Curtis Institute of Music, at just fourteen-years-old. He continued on to create a legacy of both instrumental and vocal music that remains incredibly popular and well-respected today. This set of *Four Songs*, his opus 13, was published in 1941, but each song was composed separately, spanning the years 1937 to 1940. Barber used poetry from four different authors and set them to music in his unique harmonic language.

In “A Nun Takes the Veil,” Barber allows Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem to speak for itself. The accompaniment is relatively sparse, and the vocal line is strong. The poetry questions, but the speaker’s yearning is so evident and present that the delivery becomes declamatory. At the end of both stanzas, the vocal line diminishes and the mood becomes almost romantic in the visualization of a place the protagonist wishes to be.

The mood suddenly becomes much more playful in “The Secrets of Old,” as W. B. Yeats’s verse tells of a lasting friendship looking back years later. Joy is evident in the light and nimble accompaniment, and the almost constant changing of time signature adds to the rhythmic and youthful feel of the song. An awareness of the passage of time from the perspective of the speaker is evident, as the singer is transported back to earlier days and remembers the happiness experienced in this meaningful friendship.

In Barber’s setting of James Agee’s poem, “Sure On This Shining Night,” the composer creates an atmosphere of catharsis and wonder that synthesizes perfectly with the words. This is likely Barber’s most performed art song. The singer finds herself alone on a starlit night, marveling at the beauty and feeling of peace and tranquility brought on by their surroundings. The voice and accompaniment start quietly, gradually building as the singer becomes overwhelmed with a sense of wellness, exclaiming “all is healed, all is health.” The melodic theme of the piece closes out the song and adds to the sentiments of wonder and mystery in a masterful way.

“Nocturne,” with words by Frederick Prokosch, serves as something of a lullaby. There is a lyrical tenderness that is prevalent throughout the song, but the accompaniment remains busy and denser than one might expect from a traditional lullaby. Also present is a bit of tension, as though sleep is not coming as easily as it should. The poetry alludes to suffering and worries that have now passed, allowing for sleep to finally take over. Somewhat like the previous song, there is a sense of healing and closure that emanates from both the words and the music.

Bonnie Blue Eyes

Kenneth Frazelle (b. 1955)

Kenneth Frazelle is an American composer originally from Jacksonville, North Carolina. He has had success in a wide variety of compositional styles, from solo piano and cello to a variety of vocal music. Having grown up in the Southeastern United States, a place where Frazelle still calls home today, he is intimately familiar with the body of folk music native to the area. *Bonnie Blue Eyes* is one such tune, which Frazelle learned from his grandmother and great uncle. His family can trace its roots back to the Carolina area as far back as the 1700s, and it is through this heritage that the music of the Blue Ridge Mountains was integrated into his own family history.

Frazelle keeps the vocal line simple, adhering to the original folk tune, but he ornaments his arrangement with non-traditional sonorities in the accompaniment. Even here, the pensive and tender accompaniment stays relatively simple and certainly accessible, but there is a distinctive use of extended harmony in certain moments of the song, particularly in the last stanza, which lends a modern touch to a traditional source.

Ten Thousand Miles Away

Steven Mark Kohn (b. 1957)

Composer Steven Mark Kohn's musical journey reads much differently than many of his contemporaries. He had little formal training growing up, did not learn to read music until he was almost an adult, and took his initial musical inspirations from LPs he heard at home that featured jazz, mainstream pop, and progressive rock. Once in college, he realized his passion for composing, which set him on a new course toward studio composition. Kohn found himself particularly drawn to vocal music, especially art songs that could tell stories of unique human experiences. In the late 1990s, he began to research American folk songs, with the idea of setting five as a set. By the end of his search, he had collected dozens of tunes worthy of performance. It was from these that he created his three volumes in the *American Folk Set*. "Ten Thousand Miles Away" opens the collection. The title refers to the length of the journey sailing from England to Australia that was forced upon thousands of nineteenth-century British convicts. They often knew neither when or if they would ever return. The piano imitates the rolling of the waves, while the voice conveys the tender hopes and memories of the love who remained behind. As for the larger collection of songs, Kohn—in what seems to be an affinity with Frazelle—writes, "I arranged these songs, but I did not write them. Our ancestors, storytellers with great musical talent, did that many years ago."

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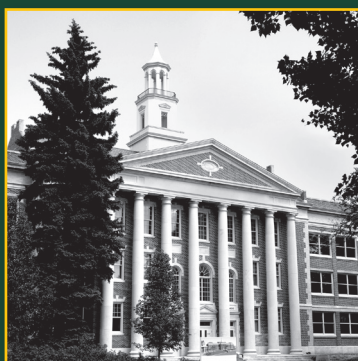
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