



YEAR TWO FINAL RECITAL PROGRAMME NOTES

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Introduction

This recital explores the theme of devotion and the different ways in which people can demonstrate this. It looks at ideas of devotion to a person or place, a dream of devotion and also the loss of devotion and the effects of this. The final piece also creates a sense of irony over the entire recital, depicting a coarse view of the stupidity of devotion, leaving us to question the message of the entire recital.

“Hark! The echoing air”, Henry Purcell

Henry Purcell, 1659-1695, was a British Baroque composer and organist, born into a musical family, with his father being the choir master at Westminster Abbey. He is most known for his song repertoire, as well as his operas *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692), an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which this piece is from. *The Fairy Queen* is based on Greek mythology, telling comedically the story of the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. During the Baroque period, this large-scale production was unusual, with operas usually only being performed in front of a private audience. For this reason, Purcell’s production was viewed more as a theatrical piece, however, today it is regarded as a semi opera.

“Hark! The echoing air” is heard in the final act of *The Fairy Queen*, creating a fanfare to celebrate marriage. The original voice and brass arrangement mimic each other in a childlike manner, reflecting the dancing of the cherubs in the libretto. The binary form allows us to form two phrases from this piece, first celebrating the “triumph”, which comes with the marriage at the end of the opera, and then breaking into a dance, as “cupids clap their wings”, portraying the image of cupids skipping around, with the long melisma’s being broken up by the repeated rhythmic “clap”.

“Hark! The echoing air” flippantly portrays a childlike perspective of devotion that comes with the youth of marriage.

Hark! Hark! The echoing air a triumph sings,
Hark! The echoing air a triumph sings,
A triumph sings,
A triumph sings,
A triumph sings,
A triumph, triumph sings,
A triumph, triumph sings,

And all around,
And all around,
Pleased cupids clap their wings,
Clap their wings,
Clap their wings,
Pleased cupids clap their wings,

And all around,
And all around,
Pleased cupids clap,
Clap, clap their wings,
Clap their wings,
Clap their wings,
Clap their wings,

Pleased cupids clap their wings.

“O del mio dolce ardor”, Christoph Willibald Gluck

Gluck was a German classical composer of the French and Italian style. Around 1727, he moved to Prague to study music, eventually making his way to Vienna in 1735, and then Milan, where he learnt the Italian classical style under the education of Giovanni Battista Sammartini. He became internationally renowned as a reformer of Italian opera, rediscovering its simplicity and directness, in contrast to the virtuosic style of the time, recreating the seriousness found in French opera.

“O del mio dolce ardor”, literally translating to “O my sweet passion”, is an aria from Gluck’s opera, *Paride ed Elena*, 1770. Based on Greek mythology, this tells the story of the Judgement of Paris and the events leading up to the Trojan War. This opera is one of three “reform operas” by Gluck, collaborating with Italian poet and librettist, Calzabigi.

“O del mio dolce ardor” is sung by Paris after he chose Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess. The opening section confesses Paris’s desire to be with Aphrodite, creating intensity with a predominantly static melodic line at the start of phrases. This is contrasted by the fluidity in the middle section, as Paris paints the picture of Aphrodite’s beauty, stating in the climax “Hope and passion enflames me”, through a large arpeggiated vocal range. In this edition, the editor also illustrates Paris’s besotted devotion towards Aphrodite with an ad lib. marking, accentuating a long musical sigh, before returning to the intensity of the opening theme.

O del mio dolce ardor
Bramato oggetto,
L’aure che tu respire
Alfin respire.

Ovunque it guardo io giro
Le tue vaghe sembianze
Amore in me dipinge,
Il mio pensier si finge
Le più liete speranze,
E nel desi oche così m’empie il petto
Cerco te, chiamo te, spero e sospiro!

“Widmung”, Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann, 1810-1856, was a German Romantic composer. In his early years, he studied virtuosic piano and composition as a student of Friedrich Wieck, later falling in love with his daughter, Clara. Schumann eventually married Clara in 1840, after Wieck refused his first proposal to his daughter in 1837. Schumann’s marriage influenced much of his composition in his mature period, often writing about his devotion to Clara. This period after his marriage also saw the composition of almost all of his solo songs, despite previously having neglected this style. Schumann’s background

in virtuosic piano also highly influenced his music, with his accompaniments being “almost self-sufficient piano pieces”, working as a duet with the voice.¹

“Widmung”, literally meaning “Devotion”, is part of Schumann’s *Myrthen* collection, written as a wedding gift to Clara, with Schumann setting a poem by Friedrich Rückert, inspired by his own marriage. This piece is in sonata form, expressing an emotional devotion. Schumann establishes a passionate drive in the opening and final sections, as he exclaims “You are my soul, you are my heart,”, creating a breathless motif with the rise and fall of the phrases. This is contrasted by the middle section, interpreting Rückert’s more metaphorical language, also modulating to the dominant. Schumann creates a sustained line, reflecting the idea of “Du bist die Ruh’,” (“you are rest”), using a rocking motion, evoking a lullaby, before building back to the original theme. The climax into the final section is built with ascending chromaticism, literally reflecting the poem “lifting me lovingly above myself”.

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn’, o du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab!

Du bist die Ruh’, du bist der Frieden,
Du bist von Himmel mir beschieden.
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert,
Dein Blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,
Mein gutter Geist, mein bess’res Ich!

Du mein Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn’, o du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt, in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du, darein ich schwebe,
Mein gutter Geist, min Bess’res Ich!

“Invitation to the Gondola”, Ian Venables

Ian Venables, 1955, is most recognised for his composition of English art songs. “The Invitation to the Gondola” was written as part of a Venetian song cycle, *Love’s Voice* (1995) and is one of several songs in which Venables sets the poetry of Victorian writer, John Addington Symonds, to music. This piece is the third of four songs in the Venetian cycle, with each song evoking a transformative ideal, seeing the unseen. This is portrayed in “The Invitation to the Gondola”, as the narrator describes “a city seen in dreams.” This piece’s ternary form allows a picture of devotion to be visualised by the audience, with the opening and final sections commanding the audience to see the beauty of the night in Venice, “where outspread angel flame wings brood o’er the buried sun.” These surrounding sections also use create a rocking motion within the 6/8-time signature, reflecting the rocking of

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Schumann> (20/04/2021)

waves. In the middle section, Venables changes this to a straight tempo to create a contrasting atmosphere as he personifies Venice, “With her towers and domes” rising out of the water, fabricating a calm in the metaphorical storm.

Venables’s highly syllabic setting of the words to music develops evocative imagery with Symonds’ highly descriptive poetry. The use of contrasting rhythmic ideas between the voice and accompaniment maintains the sense of being in a reverie, with no clear structure being indicated. Venables portrays a devotion to the beauty of Venice, with the personification heightening this.

Come forth for the night is falling
The moon hags round and red
On the verge of the violet waters
Fronting the daylight dead.

A breeze from the sea is wafted
Lamp-litten Venice gleams
With her towers and domes
Uplifted like a city seen in dreams.

Come forth for the liquid spaces
Of sea and sky are one
Where outspread angel flame wings
Brood o’er the buried sun.

Her watery ways are a tremble
With melody far and wide
Borne from the phantom galleys
That o’er the darkness glide.

Bells call to bell from the islands
And far off mountains rear
Their shadowy crests in the crystal
Of cloudless atmosphere.

There are stars in the heav’n
And starry are the wondering lights below
Come forth for the night is calling
Sea city and sky are aglow!

“Sleep”, Peter Warlock

Peter Warlock is a British composer most known for his Elizabethan works, with songs forming the largest part of his compositional works. He is celebrated for his ability to create a unity of music and text, unique harmonies and melodic qualities. “Sleep” was part of his Elizabethan work, written by poet, John Fletcher, 1579-1625. This poem presents a state of despair and someone who has lost all devotion to life. Fletcher was a celebrated play-writer of his time, writing tragic comedies and being rival to his contemporary, William Shakespeare.

Fletcher’s poem has been set to music by several composers, with Ivor Gurney doing another arrangement, interpreting his own feeling of despair after coming back from the war shellshocked. The lyrics evoke a loss of hope and devotion, stating “All my powers of care bereaving.” Warlock’s arrangement of this piece might be a way of reflecting his own despair, eventually committing suicide.

Warlock is able to depict a haunting mood through his harmonies and tempo changes, creating a lilting motion through the music. This piece is also entirely syllabic, which weighs each word,

pleading to “Let me know some little joy.” Warlock uses Fletcher’s desperate poetry to illustrate a complete loss of hope within a person.

Come, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving
Lock me in delight awhile;
Let some pleasing dreams beguile
All my fancies, that from hence
There may steal and influence,
All my powers of care bereaving.

Tho’ but a shadow, but a sliding,
Let me know some little joy.
We that suffer long annoy,
Are contented with a thought
Thro’ an idle fancy wrought:
O let my joys have some abiding.

“Oliver Cromwell”, Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976, was a pianist, conductor and considered to be the leading British composer of the mid-20th century, most known for his operatic works. Britten’s focus on British Folk music came while he was studying in the United States, 1940-1950s, as a way of reconnecting with his roots.

“Oliver Cromwell” has no traceable origin, with folk music being learnt orally. Britten arranged this as a way of portraying Suffolk, his birth county, in a set of quirky verses. It implies the idea of the bizarre, apathetically describing Oliver Cromwell, who led Parliamentary armies against King Charles the I in the civil war, as buried in an orchard underneath an apple tree. This piece farcical as the buried head pops out to scare an old woman.

Britten creates a flippant irony at the end of this recital, portraying the story of someone who has no devotion or respect, presented as a joke. The melodically identical verses not only identify the piece as folk music, but also creates a childlike liberty through repetition, with the performer mimicking themselves, also becoming onomatopoeic with the “Hee-haw” exclamation at the end of every phrase.

Oliver Cromwell lay buried and dead,
Hee-haw – buried and dead,
There grew an old apple tree over his head,
Hee-haw – over his head,

Oliver rose and gave her a drop,
Hee-haw – gave her a drop,
Which made the old woman go hippety hop,
Hee-haw – hippety hop.

The apples were ripe and ready to fall;
Hee-haw – ready to fall;
There came an old woman to gather them all,
Hee-haw – gather them all.

The saddle and bridle, they lie on the shelf,
Hee-haw – lie on the shelf,
If you want any more, you can sing it yourself
Hee-haw – sing it yourself.

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