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NO BOYS ALOUD: WORKS BY WOMEN

Notes and Translations



Program Notes

A NOTE FROM THE ARTIST

When I began to program this recital, I knew two things: First, the music I chose should span multiple languages, genres, eras, and styles, and second, all of the composers should be women. Unfortunately I knew it would be a challenge. I had barely learned about female composers in my undergraduate and graduate work—a fact I shamefully didn't realize until I myself was teaching young students—so how was I to know where to start? And that was the problem. Why *didn't* I learn about female composers at university? Why *didn't* I know how much Black women composers were contributing to American classical music? Why *were* all of the “great” composers that “every singer should know” somehow all white men? Many of the composers I did learn about were indeed great, but asking these questions taught me that if I was only listening to half the population, I was only seeing half the picture; and my education, therefore, was incomplete.

So, I set out to correct this. I invested in books, resources, composer collectives, conferences, and spent time learning about the missing half from my school days. I also made a point to balance the scales when it came to assigning repertoire to my studio members, implementing a “Repertoire Equity” policy for everyone to follow. And in planning this recital I decided it should have something for everyone. I deliberately chose to sing pieces that could be assigned to the advanced high school or college level student. I also, in lieu of traditional program notes on the composers themselves, chose to instead make recommendations for the types of voices and students who might suit each piece.

If you're here and you had the same musical education as I did, perhaps you're wondering where to start? Please, please, steal this rep! Or, check the “For Further Reading” in the appendix, because the pieces I chose and the composers I highlight today are by no means an exhaustive list. It would mean so much to me to know that future music educators are providing the whole picture to their students. Hopefully, this work will make a difference, it certainly has for me. Thank you!

- Carol Perry

Why are the roses so faded (Poet: Heinrich Heine)

Warum sind denn die Rosen so blaß,
O sprich, mein Lieb, warum?
Warum sind denn im grünen Gras
Die blauen Veilchen so stumm?
Warum singt denn mit so kläglichem Laut
Die Lerche in der Luft?
Warum steigt denn aus dem Balsamkraut
Verwelkter Blütenduft?
Warum scheint denn die Sonn auf die Au
So kalt und verdrießlich herab?
Warum ist denn die Erde so grau
Und öde wie ein Grab?
Warum bin ich selbst so krank und so trüb,
Mein liebes Liebchen, sprich?
O sprich, mein herzallerliebstes Lieb,
Warum verließest du mich?

Why Are the Roses So Faded

Why are the roses so faded
O speak, my love, why?
Why in the green grass
Are the blue violets so silent?
Why with such a mournful voice
Does the lark sing in the sky?
Why does the balsam weed give off
The scent of wilted blossoms?
Why does the sun on the meadow shine
So coldly and so wearily?
Why is the earth so gray
And empty like a grave?
Why am I myself so sick and despondent?
My sweet love, speak
O speak, my heart's beloved love,
Why did you leave me?

Bei dir ist es traut (Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke)

Bei dir ist es traut:
Zage Uhren schlagen
wie aus weiten Tagen.
Komm mir ein Liebes sagen,
aber nur nicht laut!

Ein Tor geht irgendwo
draussen im Blütentreiben.
Der Abend horcht an den Scheiben.
Lass uns leise bleiben,
Keiner weiss uns so!

With You It Is Safe

With you it is safe:
Timid clocks strike
As in days of old.
Say something sweet to me,
But not too loudly!

A gate squeaks somewhere outside,
Out there in the blossoming flowers.
The evening listens at the window panes.
Let us keep quiet,
So no one knows we're here!

Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen (Poet: Heinrich Heine)

Ich stand in dunklen Träumen
Und starrte ihr Bildnis an,
Und das geliebte Antlitz
Heimlich zu leben begann.

Um ihre Lippen zog sich
Ein Lächeln wunderbar,
Und wie von Wehmutstränen
Erglänzte ihr Augenpaar.

Auch meine Tränen flossen
Mir von den Wangen herab -
Und ach, ich kann's nicht glauben,
Dass ich dich verloren hab!

I Stood In Dark Dreams

I stood in dark daydreams
And gazed at her picture
And that beloved face
Began to come slowly to life.

Around her lips played
A wondrous laughing smile
And tears of sorrow
Glistened in her fair eyes.

My tears also, flowed
Down my cheeks
And ah! I cannot believe
That I have lost you!

Warum sind denn du Rosen so blaß

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel

This first piece is perfect for the student who loves a good story and a moving vocal line. Fanny Mendelssohn's haunting piano combines beautifully with intertwining passages that stretch each sentence to its very end. The insistence of legato practically guarantees that the singer must find the support to make it through the long phrases. The language is not too difficult and moves at an intermediate pace, with lovely opportunities to practice words commonly found in German poetry. The theme of this text is moody and dramatic, though some students may find the strophic style of text challenging to memorize. Give it to the "theatre kid" in your studio.

Bei dir ist es traut

Alma Schindler Mahler Gropius Werfel

"Bei dir ist es traut," by contrast, is all about stillness. Repeating pitches and *piano* dynamics encourage a thoughtful approach to the legato. It's fun to imagine what Mahler is suggesting in her use of the grace notes in the accompaniment. Is it the ticking clock? The swinging gate? Have your student decide. The text, by Rilke, is simple but heartfelt. It would serve as a fine introduction to the German language. The student singing this should take extra care to fill the moments in between the singing, and it's a great piece for someone working on dynamic contrast.

Ich stand in dunklen Träumen

Clara Wieck Schumann

"Ich stand in dunklen Träumen," from Schumann's Opus 13, has all of the classic hallmarks of German Lieder. The push and pull of the fully realized block chord accompaniment, the charming prelude and postlude, the melodic line storming through different tonalities, only to resolve beautifully as the poem concludes. The singer assigned this piece is likely already experienced with German, enjoys singing the other Schumann*, and perhaps has delved into the interesting tonalities of Hugo Wolf. Fun fact: there is an additional setting of this exact same text, also by Clara Schumann but titled "Ihr Bildnis," that ends in a more doubtful E natural resolution rather than the tonal center of E flat. Spooky!

*did you know Clara Schumann's husband, Robert, was also a composer?

Florence Beatrice Price

Out of the South Blew a Wind

The charm of this 6/8 time and the moments of playful piano chromaticism gives this piece a youthful and warm energy. Appropriate for any level of classical singer, the student will enjoy finding and showcasing the text-painting in Fannie Carter Woods' vivid poem. While seemingly strophic, the second verse really takes off into the upper register. The final page has moments of sustain right in the second passaggio that are great to work through, especially on top of the interesting rhythmic elements in Price's accompaniment. You can ask your student, what does the final arpeggio mean to them?

Sunset

Perhaps a bit more challenging than the previous piece, *Sunset* asks for longer phrases, larger intervallic jumps, and bigger moments of dynamic contrast. A person new to this piece may find good results in lip-trilling through the melody first. The poetry has myriad places to decode where the best breaths might belong. For example, the student can experiment with "I'll seek a home in the golden west that lures me on in my joyful quest" but choosing different phrasing each time to see which best fits the storytelling.

An April Day

This piece is arguably the most energetic of the three, with a very demanding piano part, as is typical for Florence Price. It is an exquisite showcase of her commensurate pianistic virtuosity that her art songs have such florid and expressive accompaniments. The piano will especially need an expert approach in the final measures of the piece. Singers interpreting this song should have a good command of dynamics, passaggio navigation, and storytelling. It will also help the singer to think of whatever brings them the greatest joy, and channel that energy into this vocal line.

Mots d'amour (Poet: Charles Fuster)

Quand je te dis des mots lassés,
C'est leur douleur qui fait leurs charmes!
Ils balbutient, et c'est assez,
Les mots ont des larmes.

Quand je te dis des mots fougueux,
Ils brûlent mon coeur et mes lèvres,
Ton être s'embrase avec eux,
Les mots ont des fièvres.

Mais quels qu'ils soient, les divins mots,
Les seuls mots écoutés des femmes,
Dans leurs soupirs ou leurs sanglots,
Les mots ont des âmes.

Le Couteau (Poet: Camille Mauclair)

J'ai un couteau dans l'coeur.
Une belle l'a planté.
J'ai un couteau dans le coeur
et ne peux pas l'ôter.

C'couteau c'est l'amour d'elle.
Une belle l'a planté.
Tout mon coeur sortirait
avec tout mon regret.

Il y faut un baiser.
Une belle l'a planté.
Un baiser sur le coeur
mais ell'ne veut pas l'donner.

Couteau reste en mon coeur
Si la plus belle t'y a planté.
J'veux bien me mourir d'elle
mais j'veux pas l'oublier.

Words Of Love

When I speak to you with weary words,
It is their sadness that gives them charm!
They hesitate, and it is enough
The words have tears.

When I speak to you with fiery words,
They burn my heart and lips,
Your being is caught in their blaze,
The words have passion.

But whatever they may be, the divine words,
The only words that women hear,
In their sighs or in their sobs,
The words have souls.

The Knife

I have a knife in my heart
My lover, my lover put it there
I have a knife in my heart
And it cannot be pulled out.

This knife is the knife of love
My lover, my lover put it there
All my heart will be taken
With all my sorrow.

Only a kiss can heal it,
My lover, my lover put it there
A kiss on my heart
But she will not give it.

Knife, stay in my heart
Since my lover put you there!
I want to die of love for her
But I do not want to forget her.

Colombine (Poet: Paul Verlaine)

Léandre le sot,
Pierrot qui d'un saut,
 De puce
Franchit le buisson,
Cassandre sous son
 Capuce,
Arlequin aussi,
Cet aigrefin si
 Fantasque
Aux costumes fous,
Ses yeux luisants sous
Son masque,

- Do, mi, sol, mi, fa, -
Tout ce monde va,
 Rit, chante
Et danse devant
Une belle enfant
 Méchante

Dont les yeux pervers
Comme les yeux verts
 Des chattes
Gardent ses appas
Et disent: "À bas
 Les pattes!"

- Eux ils vont toujours! -
Fatidique cours
 Des astres,
Oh! dis-moi vers quels
Mornes ou cruels
 Désastres

L'implacable enfant,
Preste et relevant
 Ses jupes,
La rose au chapeau,
Conduit son troupeau
 De dupes?

Colombine

Leander the fool
Pierrot who with a hop
 Like a flea
Jumps over the shrubbery
Cassander under his
 Cloak,
Harlequin also
This cunning trickster so
 Fantastic
In his crazy costume
His eyes gleaming behind
His mask,

-Do, mi, sol, mi, fa,-
All these people go,
 Laughing, singing
And dancing before
the lovely child
 Naughty

Whose wicked eyes
Like the green eyes
 Of cats
Guard their charms
And say "Keep your
 Hands off!"

Forever they go on!
Like the fateful courses
 Of the stars
Oh tell me toward what
Shadowy or cruel
 Disasters

Determined child
Nimble and lifting
Her skirts
A rose in her hat
Is leading her band
 Of fools?

Mots d'amour

Cécile Chaminade

Cécile Chaminade's charming piano accompaniment plays well with the text. In fact, the back and forth of the piano with the vocal line is what makes this piece so fun to sing. Singers studying this piece likely already have a comfortable grasp of French, enjoy playing with dynamics, and can tolerate an a cappella vocal entrance or two without an existential meltdown.

Le Couteau

Nadia Boulanger

While this poem has considerably less text to intimidate the young singer, the challenging rhythmic elements make up for it in spades. Never before has counting to three been such an ordeal. A student would do well to work hard on subdividing the big beats into triplets and then finding the dotted rhythms within. It can be done! Certainly a worthwhile challenge for such a gorgeous and haunting piece of music. We hear a steady "heartbeat" and the repeated "stabbing" of the titular knife in the piano, but it is up to the singer's discretion to determine precisely when and where this happens in the repeated text. Will the narrator survive the wound? What do the final chords signify?

Colombine

Poldowski

This poem tells of the stock characters from Commedia Dell'Arte, an old form of traveling theatre originating in 16th century Italy. A troupe of performers come through town and we hear their names and identifying characteristics, and Colombine is the "naughty child" putting them through their paces. The accompaniment is playful and direct, illuminating the performers' antics. The vocal line is not without its challenges, and the French is fast and acrobatic. It should be noted that—for the brief moment of solfeggio in this text—the French pronounce the syllable "sol" with an open-mid back [sɔl] vowel and a dental l, rather than the diphthong [soʊl] and optional "l" at the end, as Americans do.

In addition to the characters' business taking place during the song, the poetry of Paul Verlaine has quite a few double meanings and plays on words, as is typical for this era of French chanson. It's worth reading his entire *Fêtes Galantes* catalogue to give greater context to the story here.

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APPENDIX

Works Cited

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The Kapralova Society