

A Journey through Song: The Way of the Human Voice

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December 15, 2005, 6.00 pm

Milbank Chapel, Teachers College, Columbia University

The theme of this song program focuses around the idea of multiculturalism and the human voice. I choose to arrange these songs to represent cultural diversity within the western tradition, the first coming from the tradition of Italian Opera, written by an Austrian, W.A. Mozart, the second a Russian romance, and the third a French art song. The tradition of setting poetry to music is well established in the West, though today in many ways is a dying art form, the traditions of art song or lieder in German, combine the beautiful poetry with provocative. I hope this short presentation will inspire you to discover or rediscover this tradition from your own language and culture or from another culture.

Opera, the Russian romance and the French art song come from the tradition of classical western music, which is familiar to people the world over as classical music. While this musical tradition has been adapted the world over I would encourage you to take the time to remember that this music too came out of a particular cultural context. This aria, the Russian romance and the French art song are both pieces set for voice with piano accompaniment, which will be sung a capella today.

The human voice is an instrument that has been used to communicate stories of cultural traditions, in healing, and in the expression of emotions. The therapeutic uses of the human voice in the West dates back to the beginnings of the modern psychotherapeutic traditions at the turn of the last century. Today music therapists use the human voice as a major tool in their work.

We hope you enjoy today's performance.

Deh, Vieni alla Finestra (Hark, come unto the window)

Aria (Serenade) from Don Giovanni (1756-1791)

Lyrics and Composition: W.A. Mozart

At this point in the opera Don Giovanni (Don Juan) is trying to woo Donna Anna, whose trust he has lost. If Anna knew that Giovanni was the one calling her she would certainly not come to the window, so Giovanni disguises himself as his dim servant Leporello.

Utro Tumannoe (Foggy Morning)

A Russian Romance

The Russian piece can be Utro Tymannoe (Foggy Morning) a song about remembering one's past on a foggy morning, from the point of view of the one who is remembering and projecting all the images of his life onto barren land and gray sky.

Composer: A. Abaz (1845-1915)

Lyrics: I. Turgenev

Translation by: Eldar Beiseitov

Foggy morning, gray morning, Sad Skies, covered with snow.
They don't want to remember the time that has long past
And the faces long forgotten.

You will remember speeches marked by desire and lust.
Glances that are so greedily and tenderly caught.
The first meeting, the last meeting.
The beloved sound of the quite voice.

You will remember the separation with a strange smile,
You will recall a lot of the long forgotten.
Listening to the chatter of unattached wheels,
Looking into the wide skies, thinking deeply.

D'une Prison (From a prison) A poem about a man who finds out about the simplicity of life from his prison cell.

Composer: Reynaldo Hahn (1875 –1947)

Lyric adapted from: Paul Verlaine (1844 –1896)

Poem dedicated to Leon Daudet

Translation by: Richard Stokes

The sky above the roof,
So blue, so calm!
A tree, above the roof,
Waves its crown.

The bell, in the sky I watch,
Gently rings.
A bird, on the tree I watch,
Plaintively sings.

My God, my God, life is there
Simple and serene.

That peaceful murmur there
Comes from the town.

O you, O you, what have you done,
Weeping without end,
Say, O say, what have you done
With all your youth?

The sky above the roof,
So blue, so calm!
A tree, above the roof,
Waves its crown.