

Redefining the Traditional Recital Program: Recital Repertoire for Women's Voices by Canadian Women Composers

Caroline Schiller

Memorial University of Newfoundland
Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

Although there has been an increase in alternative programming that explores the works of contemporary composers, the vocal works of Canadian composers continue to be under-represented. A reassessment of the traditional recital program is needed to reflect a more expansive approach to the repertoire.

The goal of this paper is twofold: first, it is to stimulate the performer's imagination with regard to concert programming; second, it is to provide practical methods of incorporating the vocal works by Canadian women composers into an effective and challenging recital format.

Painting: The Concert Singer

This painting is entitled *The Concert Singer* by American Thomas Eakins. I have chosen to begin with the following image because it represents a traditional view of the recitalist that is echoed in the repertoire often selected for concerts. It represents a program where the singer is the focus, as she is characterized in the depiction here. The needs of the audience and the music are frequently subservient. We hope to explore how we may introduce a more expansive view of recital programming and repaint this picture.

Emmons and Sonntag's widely used reference book *The Art of the Song Recital* includes the following as a basic description of a traditional song recital:

It might commence with music from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian composers, or with the music of the German Baroque, or possibly with works by English composers such as Purcell. During the first half of the program there would surely be German Lieder and perhaps some French Romantic songs. The second half would certainly include something more modern, possibly in a more unusual language, and the recital would probably finish with a group of songs in English. (Emmons & Sonntag, 1979, p. 23)

This definition offers an example of the most conventional of concert programs. It is a performance that represents our most familiar recital experience and for many of our audiences, their only concert-going experience. A performance where chronology of the repertoire is the central theme has been the standard. While this programming format can provide effective diversity in areas of language and style, it has typically been far more representative of the European musical past than our own Canadian present.

The following is a sample of a less traditional take on the more academic program (Ex. 1). It contains a variety of repertoire using the more conventional works as cornerstones for the less familiar works in a group. This contrast provides variety for both the audience and singer. Designed for a young soprano, this program reflects a wide range of styles, languages, and periods, but Canadian works are included both as complete groups and as songs within smaller sets.

Three Spanish Lyrics by Imant Raminsh is a beautiful work for which he has chosen powerful texts with strong dramatic content. Also included in this recital is Jean Anderson's *Continuing Presences*, a varied and accessible group suitable for a young singer that combines lyrical and dramatic singing with a final comic twist. This work would be a very effective addition to this or any program.

Programming somewhat less familiar works within groups containing more traditional song literature offers the singer the opportunity to perform pieces from the standard repertoire while continuing to explore more obscure vocal literature. This recital satisfies

the description of a traditional recital offered earlier, but extends the boundaries by including lesser known works.

Sound Excerpt: The following sound example is from Dace Aperans's *Three Songs on Poems by Emily Dickinson* entitled, "It's all I have to bring today." It is sung by Latvian soprano Antra Bigacha with Ilona Brege accompanying.

Less traditional repertoire is currently disseminated through concerts devoted to the repertoire of a small, specialized group. These programs can be particularly effective if repertoire is chosen for its variety, communicative power, and general appeal rather than inclusion simply based on a connection to the proposed group.

These "all-inclusive" recitals sometimes focus so intently on introducing new repertoire that they overlook the necessity of selecting a well-balanced and communicative program. If we are not careful, they will merely provide our audiences with a growing sense of dread. Imagine the evening of "All Canadian Repertoire." Such an evening can be spectacular or daunting depending on the concert-goers' past experiences. Care is needed to create a program that offers the listener a point of reference. That access point may be musical, cultural, or personal, but it must permit the listener to connect to the new repertoire on an emotional level. This is exceedingly important where repertoire is accompanied by bias, as is frequently the case with "new" music.

An engaging alternative is a program based on a central theme that combines repertoire of all periods and styles with both the familiar and the rarely heard. The result is a program where all works contribute equally and are equally important to the success of the thematic idea. This slightly more eclectic approach provides a new perspective for familiar repertoire and a familiar context from which to explore new works.

For the purpose of this presentation, the thematic recital programs offered below have been constructed to represent as wide a range of contemporary repertoire as possible.

The Dance of Life

The first suggested thematic program is entitled *The Dance of Life*. *The Dance of Life* is a multi-media recital that has as its theme a painting by the same name created by Edward Munch (Ex. 2). The painting reflects the artist's view of the three stages of womanhood: youth, love, and the coming of old age.

The accompanying recital combines artwork and readings with vocal works chosen to suggest the themes within this painting. In the opening reading from Dorothy Parker's "The Waltz," a girl reflects on the trials of having to dance with a less than acceptable dance partner, this poem connects to Libby Larsen's exploration of self in excerpts from her cycle entitled *Me*.

Elizabeth Raum's collection of songs called *Men I have Known* highlight the personalities of a varied collection of men (represented in each title by their first and last initials) through the use of contrasting musical textures and styles. Ruth Watson Henderson's *Night in October* is her musical depiction of the emotions experienced with the birth of her first child. This eight-minute *scena* is a complex and emotional work offering musical and interpretive challenges for the performer. The recital program comes full circle, ending with Dorothy Parker's humorous reflection on life and acceptance of self, rather than Munch's proposed dance towards death.

Again, the central theme provided by *The Dance of Life* offers a context familiar to any audience member, and variety with the inclusion of visual stimuli, and spoken and sung text.

Sound Excerpt: Here we have an excerpt from "T.S." by Elizabeth Raum, in which an energetic seduction is accompanied by a tango. This excerpt is sung by Linda McGuire and is accompanied by Robert Kortgaard.

Literary Women

Recitals using the works of women as their central theme are also a popular choice for introducing a large body of previously unheard repertoire at one time. This program involves the written works of women in poetic and musical form (Ex. 3). This slight deviation in theme may allow for more flexibility and balance in programming.

Although it uses a traditional, chronological outline, this recital offers a wide variety of rarely heard works in a very accessible format. Jean Coulthard's, *Les chansons du coeur* are beautifully crafted songs that reflect a simple and intimate text. When combined with Rebecca Clarke's powerful tale of the *Seal Man* or Alma Mahler's *Der Erkennende*, the blend of past and present, Europe and North America, seems necessary to the overall continuity of the program.

The Divine Muse

A program of repertoire reflecting a sacred theme is a practical and commonly used recital concept. A thematic recital of this type (Ex. 4) could facilitate the inclusion of repertoire representing different faiths and perspectives. For this particularly challenging program, we have at the core a traditional Christian perspective reflecting Easter and Jesus's journey from birth to death. Throughout, there is a balance whereby moments of sadness are tempered with joy or discovery. The first two groups offer different depictions of Mary and the life of Christ, while Nancy Telfer concludes her set with a wild, improvised dance. Melissa Hui's *Lacrymosa* is a substantial and emotional work in which the sparse texture and chant-like style connect beautifully to the prayer settings of Maya Badian. The second half of the program juxtaposes Janet Danielson's setting of texts from the Trier Easter Play with John Carter's wonderful arrangements of gospel melodies providing a somewhat familiar ending.

Sound Excerpt: The following is an example of *Lacrymosa* by Melissa Hui. Aline Kutan, soprano; André Moisan, clarinet; and Louis-Andrée Baril, piano.

The North American Song

This program reflects the work of Canadian and American composers (Ex. 5). It could be expanded to include artwork (as I have indicated above), video, or writings from the two countries that reflected the characteristics of the music. The musical program begins with literature representing our collective English and Irish pasts. These engaging and challenging songs by Cheryl Cooney offer an unusually contemporary setting of standard poetry. The work by Melissa Hui is based on the poetry of Longfellow and offers limited vocal challenges but a rewarding overall vocal experience. The first half of the program concludes with Diana McIntosh's performance piece *Rôles renversés* in which the usual roles of singer and pianist are reversed and pandemonium ensues.

Two substantial works on this program are Barber's *Despite and Still* and Violet Archer's *Northern Landscape*. Both are powerful and dramatic pieces that contrast in both style and expressive focus. The final works on the program, Bolcom's *Cabaret Songs* and *Moss Flower* by Carol Ann Weaver, demonstrate the influence of popular music on contemporary song and provide a light-hearted ending.

Losers in Love

This recital borrows its title from a novel by Leonard Cohen and is inspired by a painting by Oskar Kokoschka called *Two Nude Lovers*. This program tracks lovers and the loss of relationships, some of which ended much better than others (Ex. 6).

In Handel's Cantata *Tu fedel, tu costante*, the lover, betrayed and angry, works through her cynicism at the supposed constancy of men to a resigned and joyful hope in a future

without them. Handel's Baroque is echoed in the lute songs contained in Libby Larsen's setting of letters from the Wives of King Henry VIII, women who lost both love and their lives. The two works by Leila Lustig are highly contrasting. In Lustig's *Something in the System* we are introduced to Lily, the woman whom all men want and the nemesis of the narrator. After intermission we return to the central pastiche, characters in crisis with regard to love and personal esteem. In Strauss's *Ophelia's Lieder*, we follow Ophelia's loss of love and sanity through her three soliloquies.

The selections from Lustig's *The Bone in the Fish* are based on poems by Barabara Holender and are striking in both their musical power and dramatic intent. The last two groups focus on loss of youth and innocence. These excerpts from Nancy Telfer's set introduce the audience to women from a variety of backgrounds and experience while the last work is a toast to women of all kinds.

There are three elements needed to encourage performances of works by Canadian composers: The first is a re-examination of what we as performers consider to be standard and essential repertoire for study and performance. The performer must ensure that the inclusion of works by Canadian composers is a characteristic feature of recitals rather than an oddity of programming reserved for the speciality recital. The second element is a fresh evaluation of how we approach recital programming, ensuring that we present new and unfamiliar works in a way that is engaging for both audience and performer. The third is that we seek to make available, practical information regarding the performance requirements of Canadian repertoire, to facilitate its performance and study. This commitment will allow us to actively foster the education of singers and teachers so that they embrace the repertoire of twenty-first century Canadian composers as readily as they would the works of composers of another country or century.

As performers and teachers it is our responsibility to both encourage the future development of Canadian repertoire and nurture a creative musical environment in which new works can flourish. When we, the performer and audience member, accept the music of our own country and time as intrinsic elements of the standard concert repertoire we contribute, not only to creative growth but ensure our own musical future.

Example 1: Program for a Young Soprano

From *Rosy Bower* Henry Purcell
 Mad Bess

Soprano and harpsichord

From *Italienisches Liederbuch* Hugo Wolf
 Auch kleine Dinge
 Mein Liebster singt am Haus
 Wer rief dich denn?
 Nein, junger Herr
 Mein Liebster ist so klein

Trois Mélodies Olivier Messiaen
 Pourquoi?
 Le sourire
 La fiancée perdue

Texts of Paul Verlaine
 Fantoche Irena Poldowski
 Chanson d'automne Micheline Saint-Marcoux*
 Chevaux de bois Claude Debussy

Intermission

Continuing Presences Jean Anderson*
 Autumn's Being
 Home
 Love for Today
 Mrs. Goodheart

Emily Dickinson Settings
 Heart we will forget him
 Heart we will forget him!
 From *Three Songs with Poems by Emily Dickinson*
 It's all I have to bring today
 Wild nights! Wild nights!

Aaron Copland
 John Duke
 Dace Aperans*

Alternative repertoire for final set: Animal Tunes
 The Fish
 A Melancholy Lay
 Lobster Quadrille

William Bolcom
 Richard Rodney
 Elizabeth Raum*

*Canadian

Example 2: The Dance of LifeBased on *The Dance of Life*, Edvard Munch 1899/1900**Innocence**

Reading: Dorothy Parker, excerpt from "The Waltz"

From *ME*

Why I Write This Book

Childhood

Adolescence

Libby Larsen

Discovery*Men I Have Known*

J.D.

T.S.

M.R.

J.D.

D.R.

What does Love Say?

Elizabeth Raum*

Intermission

Reading: Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Love is not all"

Mary Cassatt

To be a Painter

Travels:

Franco-Prussian War

Early Work

Degas

Maturity

Libby Larsen

Medium voice, trombone, piano - slides

Night in October

Ruth W. Henderson

Reflection

Reading: Maya Angelou, "The loss of love and youth"

Nanna's Lied

*Revelation on Public Transit**Tobacco Road*Kurt Weill
Leila Lustig*
Rodney Sharman*

Reading: Dorothy Parker, "Pour prendre congé"

Additional repertoire: *Woman: Songs on poems by Sandra Cisneros*, Melissa Hui;* *Contrastes*, Anne Lauber;* *Soliloquy*, Judith Lang Zaimont

*Canadian

Example 3: Literary Women

Amor dormiglione
La travagliata
La fanciuletta semplice

Barbara Strozzi (1619-c.1664)

Ich hab in deinem Auge
Liebst du um Schönheit
Er is gekommen in Sturm und Regen

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Laue Sommernacht
Der Erkennende

Alma Mahler (1879-1964)

Les chansons du coeur
J'ai fermé mon coeur
Je tisserais un arc en ciel
Voix d'yeux

Jean Coulthard* (1908-2000)

The Seal Man

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Intermission

From *Studies and Rambles of Wasagewanoqua*
Anna Brownell Jameson (1794-1860)
The Resurrection of Nature
Toronto
Sleigh Trip to Niagara
Ojibway Quaince
From Sault Ste. Marie *en bateau!*

John Greer* (b. 1953)

T.S. from *Men I Have Known*

Elizabeth Raum* (b. 1945)

Nevermore will the wind (Hilda Doolittle [1886-1961])

William Bolcom (b. 1938)

I never saw a moor (Emily Dickinson [1830-1886])

Richard Pearson Thomas (b. 1940)

Will there really be a morning? (Emily Dickinson)

André Previn (b. 1929)

*Canadian

Example 4: The Divine Muse

<i>Blessed Virgin's Expostulation</i>		Henry Purcell
<i>Jesus My Love My Joy</i>		Nancy Telfer*
Silence Awhile		
The Virgin Mary to Christ on the Cross		
Resurgam		
<i>Lacrymosa</i>		Melissa Hui*
	Soprano, clarinet, piano	
<i>Prayer</i>		Maya Badian*
	Soprano and recorder	
<i>Three Alleluias</i>		Daniel Pinkham
	Intermission	
<i>Mary Songs from the Trier Easter Play</i>		Janet Danielson*
To John at the Cross		
To the Gardener		
Soliloquy		
From <i>Cantata</i>		John Carter
Prelude		
Rondo (Peter go ring dem bells)		
Recitative (Sometimes I feel like a motherless child)		
Air (Let us break bread together)		
Toccatà (Ride on King Jesus)		

Additional repertoire: *Tongues of Angels*, Diana McIntosh* (medium voice, piano, percussion); *A Hymn to God the Father*, Elizabeth Raum*; *A Song of Darkness and Light*, Patricia Blomfield Holt.

*Canadian

Example 5: The North American Song

From *Five English Songs* Cheryl Cooney* (b. 1953)
 'Song' from Poetical Sketches
 Echo's Song
 Go and Catch a Falling Star

Waterbird Richard Hundley (b. 1931)
 Sweet Suffolk Owl

Jabberwocky Lee Hoiby (b. 1926)
 Lady of the Harbour

Three Songs on Poems by Longfellow Melissa Hui* (b. 1966)
 The Tide rises, the Tide falls
 Snowflakes
 Nature

Rôles renversés Diana McIntosh* (b. 1937)

Intermission

Northern Landscape Violet Archer (1913-2000)
 The Lonely Land
 Swift Current
 Sea Cliff

Despite and Still Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
 A Last Song
 My Lizard
 In the Wilderness
 Solitary Hotel
 Despite and Still

Moss Flowers Carol Ann Weaver* (b. 1948)

Cabaret Songs William Bolcom (b. 1938)
 Waitin'
 Song of Black Max

Alternate repertoire:

A Sarah Binks Songbook, John Greer*
 Reflections while Translating Heine
 (Fantasia on a Theme of Robert Schumann)
 Elegy to a Calf (Lamento Pastorello)
 Square Dance (Hoe-Down)

*Canadian

Example 6: Losers in Love

Tu fedel, tu costante Soprano, violin I, violin II, basso continuo	G.F. Handel
<i>Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII</i> I. Katherine of Aragon II. Anne Boleyn III. Jane Seymour IV. Anne of Cleves V. Katherine Howard	Libby Larsen
Intermission	
From <i>The Bone in the Fish</i> The Widows of Cornwall Poem Adios, Panchos	Leila Lustig*
Something in the System	Leila Lustig*
Overweight, Overwrought over You	Thomas Pasatieri
Take this Waltz	Leonard Cohen*
<i>Portraits</i> An Old Woman's Lamentation To My Daughter Girl at the Corner of Elizabeth and Dundas The Hag of Beare Here's to the Maiden	Nancy Telfer*

Additional Repertoire: *Drei Lieder der Ophelia*, Richard Strauss

*Canadian

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