

SINGING: THE HUMAN CONNECTION

by

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A Senior Honors Project Presented to the

Honors College

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for

Graduation with Honors

by

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May 2022

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Artist's Statement

Though music may not be a universal language, it is a facet that can help us understand each other across cultures, languages, and borders. This project explores the experiences in singing in different parts of the world, through programming diverse repertoire to present in a senior recital and through interviewing singers and voice teachers from different global perspectives. The recital portion of my project included pieces from around the world that centered around the theme of night, stars, and the moon. For my research, I did a case study not to analyze individual's experiences as a representation of the whole, but rather as a point of comparison between individual experiences in different parts of the world. The study highlighted the connection that different individuals have with their voice as part of their identity as a human in the world.

My research came from my passion for singing in other languages. Over the course of my time at ECU, I have sung in Italian, Spanish, Danish, Swedish, German, French, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew, Icelandic, Latin, and Portuguese. Beyond gaining insight to the structure and phonology of another language, diversifying my repertoire in this way has allowed me to form connections with people who speak these languages and are from the cultures that the music is from. I have emailed with the composer of the Icelandic piece to work on pronunciation and translation. I have also emailed with a Danish voice teacher to learn how to pronounce the Danish piece. I have connected with professors in the Japanese, Russian, and Spanish departments to work on pronunciation, going as far as to use the phonology and dialect of the region the piece is from. Building relationships with people over music in a language and culture that they know has led to more conversation about what music means to them and in their lives.

Background and Context

This process began in the Spring of 2021 when I presented a collaborative recital with two other honors college students. Our recital was titled "The Road Less Traveled" because we featured pieces

that are not typically sung or performed in western classical music settings. This process involved asking mentors, friends, and colleagues who had knowledge of lesser-known repertoire and knowledge of the cultures/languages they came from.

While I was preparing this recital, I was also researching experiences in music education had around the world as a final project for a music education class. I interviewed people from Chile, Puerto Rico, Sweden, and France about what their music classes were like in school and what music means to them in their culture. This was the project that preceded the research that I presented at my senior recital and at the Research and Creative Achievement Week.

In the Fall of 2021, I finalized my senior recital titled "From Dusk to Dawn." When collecting repertoire, I chose the theme of stars, night, and the moon because universally across cultures, civilizations have written and sang about the night, the stars, and the moon. This theme made a for a clear order of songs: start with songs about the sun setting and darkness coming and end with the morning and sun rising. Throughout each section, I had a time-lapse playing on a projector on stage of the sun setting, the stars coming out, the moon in the sky, and the sun rising. In between the "stars are rising" set and the "moonlight is shining" set, I gave a short presentation of my research. I compared cultural values and practices of singing. The interview answers reveal several connections and contrasts between the individual subjects. Some interviewees found different aspects of singing and learning to sing more important than others, such as lesson pacing (technique versus repertoire) and preparation (performing versus rehearsing). There were also many similarities that resonated in each singer's experience around the world. For instance, all subjects discussed the mind body connection that is experienced in singing.

Night is Falling

My first song came as a suggestion from my research mentor and voice teacher. She is from Canada and suggested this song by a Canadian composer, Chester Duncan, called "Darkening." The first

line is “The night is darkening around me” which was the perfect line to begin a recital about the night. The song can be interpreted as standing your ground in the face of fear. The second song is titled “Gia la notte s’avvicina” by Isabel Colbran. This Italian song is from a book of 24 Italian songs and arias written by female composers. The title translates to “Night is already approaching.” This song offered a musical contrast to the darker opening. It is a faster tempo and is a love song about comparing their beloved to the sea on a gentle day.

The last song of the *Night is falling* set was titled “Noche Serena” (Serene Night) arranged by Edward Kilenyi. This song is another love song but offers a summary of the emotions expressed in the first two songs. This song is an arrangement of a Mexican folk poem about someone’s lover that they are living without. It starts with comparing the loveliness of spring to their loved one. The end compares themselves without their love to the withered plants in winter. It has a melancholy tone that leaves room for the stars to rise in the next section.

Stars are rising

At the start of this set, we are left with someone longing for their lost love and then the next set starts with another Mexican folk arrangement titled “Pregúntale a las estrellas” (Ask the Stars) arranged by Edward Kilenyi. The narrator of this song is desperately trying to find out why the person they love does not share their feelings. They are asking the stars, the birds, the flowers, the whole world how this could be so. The first verse is venting to the world about how this person could not return their love. The second verse takes a gentler tone as the narrator decides that even if they do not love them in return, their life is better because they love this person.

Following the love song and star theme, the next song by the German composer Clara Wieck-Schumann titled “Mein Stern” (My star). This story follows someone waiting for their love (their star) to return in the night. There is imagery of how the night is frightening and that they are the light. There is also imagery of how their light (as their star) comforts them. The next piece is one of the most well-

known pieces on my recital. It is called “Nuit d’etoiles” (Night of Stars) by Claude Debussy. This song is a melancholy reminiscence about lovers who are no longer with them. However, it is about remembering them with love while looking at the stars.

Moonlight is shining

The next set centers around the moon and dreams. The set opens with “Mánaskin” (Moonlight) by H. I. Thorsteinsson, an Icelandic composer. I found this piece online and contacted the composer to purchase a copy. He sent me his personal translation from Icelandic to English and a voice recording of his Icelandic pronunciation. The piece talks about the brightness and beauty of the moonlight on ordinary objects. It ends with the narrator deciding not to turn on their lights and just use the light of the moon.

From this piece, I went straight into “Kojo no tsuki” (Moon over the ruined castle), a Japanese folk song arranged by Rentarô Taki. This song tells the story of a beautiful festival of spring that is now left in the past after a battle that has ended in defeat. Now the only light that shines is the moonlight over the ruined castle. This song has three verses and each grows in intensity as the listener learns more about the tragedy of the battle.

The next song is titled “Dentro da noite” (Into the night) by O. Lorenzo Fernández. This piece is in Brazilian Portuguese. It has musical influences from both classical western art song style and bossa nova jazz. The narrator of this song is asking for the guitar to sing them to sleep and to forget what they are going through. I had the opportunity to connect to a mutual friend who is from Brazil to work on the pronunciation. He helped me over a phone call, and I recorded him speaking the text. I used that recording to ensure that my pronunciation was accurate.

The last song in this set is “Stars and the Moon” from the musical *A Brave New World*. The music is by Jason Robert Brown. This song tells the story of someone who longs to find a partner who is wealthy and famous. They are approached by two other potential partners who promise them

happiness and the stars and the moon. They turn it down in hopes that they will find someone with a yacht and a lot of money. Eventually, they find someone wealthy and well connected with celebrities. After marrying this person, they realize that they will never have true happiness, the stars, or the moon.

Morning is breaking

This last section is about the hope and promise of a new morning dawning. “The Imaginary Garden” by Marie-Claire Saindon (French-Canadian composer) is a song that I helped teach as a choral arrangement at the NC Governor’s School in 2019. The text is written by Mahvash Sabet, an Iranian poet who is currently imprisoned for her religion and for educating women against the law. She wrote this text on scraps of paper and pieces of napkin and slipped it out to family members who had it sent to a translator and published in the US and CA. I connected strongly with this story, the text, and the melody. I reached out to Ms. Saindon to ask her if she had a solo arrangement of the piece. She responded that she did not but that she would like to write one for me to sing. A few months later, she sent me a copy arranged for solo voice. To give an idea of why this song fit well into the morning section, the last line of the song is “One verse is sufficient to fill the eyes with the shining beams from above.”

The last song on my recital was an arrangement I made of Dolly Parton’s “Light of a Clear Blue Morning.” This song felt fitting as it was the dawn part of the recital as well as near the time when we were starting to see an end to the pandemic. Vaccines were becoming widely available and the lines “It’s been a long hard fight, but I see a brand-new day a-dawning” connected with me in this time.

My objective in programming this music was to open more conversations about singing and about music as a global connection. I intended to examine why people sing and how we can sing songs from other cultures in a way that is culturally appropriate and accurate. Through all of this, I was able to find the human connection in singing and will continue to look for these connections in the world.

Appendix

Two Presentations of Research/Recital:

My senior recital “From Dawn to Dusk” is available to view here: <https://youtu.be/mpVayHE77i0>

My research presentation from Research and Creative Achievement Week is available to view here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRr4V9hriw4&t=26s>

Source Files:

1. Hemedinger_Program Notes and Translations – This document has the notes and translations for each piece presented in my recital. There were copies of this document available for anyone viewing the recital.
2. Hemedinger_SeniorRecitalProgram – This is the recital program that was available for anyone viewing the recital.