



# The Heart of a Woman

## Abigail Pickens, soprano

### Senior Recital

David Heid, piano  
with Grant Bryden & John Critelli

March 28, 2026

8:00pm

Nelson Music Room,  
East Duke Building

From *Soirées musicales*  
I. La promessa  
V. L'invito

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

"Ma se colpa io non ho . . . Batti, batti, o bel Masetto"  
from *Don Giovanni*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Intermezzo Op.118 No. 2

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen

Clara Schumann (1819–1896)

Chanson d'Amour

with *John Critelli, cello*

Amy Beach (1867–1944)

Notre amour

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

"Ah! Je veux vivre"  
from *Roméo et Juliette*

Charles Gounod (1818–1893)

"Steal Me, Sweet Thief"  
from *The Old Maid and the Thief*

Gian Carlo Menotti (1911–2007)

All I Ask of You  
from *The Phantom of the Opera*

with *Grant Bryden, baritone*

Andrew Lloyd Webber (b. 1948)

Moments in the Woods  
from *Into the Woods*

Stephen Sondheim (1930–2021)

Meadowlark  
from *The Baker's Wife*

Stephen Schwartz (b. 1948)

*To give each audience member the opportunity to enjoy the performance fully, please silence all electronic devices. Flash photography, food, and beverages are not permitted.*

## About the Artists

**Abigail Pickens** is a senior at Duke University double-majoring in Biology and Music with a concentration in Vocal Performance. She has completed eight semesters of private vocal study at Duke and currently studies under the instruction of Professor Ted Federle. For seven semesters, Abigail has also been a member of Duke Opera Theatre (DOT) under the direction of David Heid. Her DOT credits include Susanna in the *Le Nozze di Figaro* Act II Finale and roles in scenes from *Treemonisha*, *Suor Angelica*, and “The Great American Songbook Cabaret”. Notably, she performed Mozart’s “Crudel perché finora” in a collaboration between Duke Opera Theatre and the Duke Wind Symphony. She concludes her final semester in Duke Opera Theatre performing the title role in a scene from Viardot’s *Cendrillon* this April.

Abigail has appeared as the soprano soloist in Beethoven’s *Choral Fantasy* with the Duke University Chorale and Duke Symphony Orchestra, and as the soloist for Frank Ticheli’s *Angels in the Architecture* with the Duke Wind Symphony. She appeared in David Heid’s “Milestones” recital this past fall, performing Beach’s “Chanson d’Amour”. Her training has been furthered through masterclasses with acclaimed mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano and world-renowned director Francesca Zambello who serves as the Artistic Director of the Washington National Opera and is recognized for her productions at the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera House, and La Scala.

Abigail’s competitive honors include being named a National Quarterfinalist in the NATS Musical Theatre Competition, placing her among the top 30 collegiate vocalists in her category nationwide. She also holds first-place and third-place honors from the NATS Mid-Atlantic Regional competitions in the Musical Theatre and Classical divisions respectively. Beyond her classical work, she is a signed artist with Small Town Records where she has performed original music and covers around campus. She also performs with Jazz@ Duke and appeared as Belle in Hoof ‘n’ Horn’s 24-hour production of *Beauty and the Beast*.

Abigail extends her sincere gratitude to Professor Scott Lindroth for his mentorship on the research and scholarship for the extended program notes that serve as her distinction project. She offers special thanks to David Heid and Ted Federle for their invaluable guidance and artistic mentorship throughout her undergraduate career and to the Duke University Music Faculty for all their instruction. Abigail also thanks John Critelli for his year-long collaboration on the Beach selection. She sends a special thank you to Grant for returning to Duke for tonight’s duet and for being her favorite person to sing with. Finally, she thanks her parents for their love and encouragement; she is profoundly grateful for the years of piano and voice lessons that allowed her the opportunity to do what she loves.

**David Heid** comes to North Carolina after a successful career in New York City as a vocal coach and accompanist. Also an arranger and conductor, he made his Lincoln Center debut in Alice Tully Hall in 1994. In the summer of 1997, he made his first international appearance performing at both the Darling Harbor Convention Center and the historic Towne Hall in Sydney, Australia. His coaching clients include past Grammy, Tony, and MAC Awards winners.

David is currently on the faculty at Duke University where he is the Director of Duke Opera Theater as well as serving on the piano faculty, working with singers and teaching a class in collaborative piano. He is in demand throughout the region as a collaborative artist and has worked with many of the area's leading organizations including the North Carolina Symphony, North Carolina Opera, Mallarmé Chamber Players, Opera Wilmington, Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, Duke Symphony, Durham Choral Society, Raleigh Chamber Music Guild, Theater in the Park, Thompson Theater Summerfest, Long Leaf Opera, and Triangle Opera. He was previously on staff of the renowned Juilliard School in New York City.

He has had a lengthy career as a collaborative pianist enjoying work with generations of leading singers. Among the artists he has worked with previously include Susan Dunn, Adria Firestone, Marisa Galvany, Carolyn James, William Stone, and Christine Weidinger. He has also performed with artists currently appearing in major venues around the world such as Leah Hawkins, Jennifer Johnson Cano, Janinah Burnett, Mario Chang, Lisa Chavez, Timothy Murray, Jason Karn, Andrea Moore, LaToya Lain, and cellist Bonnie Thron.

David has been privileged to serve as pianist for masterclasses given by legendary performers such as Renee Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, and Simon Estes. As a clinician, he has taught classes at numerous schools including Mercyhurst University, SUNY Fredonia, UNC Pembroke, and the Durham Music Teachers Association as well as serving as a judge for the National Opera Association Collegiate Scenes Competition.

David Heid also worked extensively in gospel music and recorded on a number of Christian labels. He has toured the U.S. and Canada with Jane Syftestad and directed The Voice of St. John's MCC – named in 1977 “The Best Gospel Choir in the Triangle.” Their debut recording “Anywhere with Jesus” was nominated for a GLAMA award in the contemporary spiritual category.

David is a proud graduate of SUNY Fredonia School of Music.

**Grant Bryden** is a Duke University graduate of the class of 2025 where he majored in Neuroscience and minored in Music and Chemistry. During his time at Duke, Grant's involvement with the Music Department ranged from participating in the Opera Theatre program for seven semesters to taking voice lessons in the Federle studio for eight semesters.

At Duke, Grant had the unique opportunity to perform in masterclasses with widely acclaimed baritones Nathan Gunn and Timothy Murray as well as mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano. Some of Grant's favorite music experiences at Duke include performing at his senior recital "Journeys into the Night", the Duke Symphony Orchestra's Concerto Competition, and the Music Department's 50 Years of Biddle Gala Concert singing the role of Bernardo in the "Tonight Quintet" from *West Side Story*. Grant also competed in the North Carolina and Mid-Atlantic Regional Classical NATS voice competitions for three consecutive years. Last year, he qualified as a National Association of Teachers of Singing National Semi-Finalist, one of twelve singers from his category invited to perform in the competition's final round in Philadelphia.

Grant would like to thank Abigail for being the most talented and fun duet partner and can't wait to perform one of his favorite songs together!

Cellist **John Critelli**, from New York, NY, studies with Professor Caroline Stinson and has previously studied with Alex Croxton. He has received prizes in chamber music competitions as well as awards for solo playing and composition. While at Duke, John has been a member of the Duke Symphony Orchestra and Duke Chamber Music, performing with various arrangements of strings and piano.

# Texts and Translations

## La promessa

*Ch'io mai vi possa  
Lasciar d'amare,  
No, nol credete,  
Pupille care;  
Nè men per gioco  
V'ingannerò.*

*Voi foste e siete  
Le mie faville,  
E voi sarete,  
Care pupille,  
Il mio bel foco  
Sin ch'io vivrò.*

*Pietro Metastasi*

## The Promise

That I will ever be able  
To stop loving you,  
No, don't believe it,  
Dear eyes!  
Not even to joke  
Would I deceive you about this.

You alone  
Are my sparks,  
And you will be,  
Dear eyes,  
My beautiful fire  
As long as I live, ah!

*Translated by Christie Turnage Turner*

## L'invito

*Vieni, o Ruggiero,  
la tua Eloisa  
da te divisa  
non puo restar:  
alle mie lacrime  
già rispondevi,  
vieni, ricevi  
il mio pregar.*

*Vieni, o bell'angelo,  
vien, mio diletto,  
souvra il mio petto  
vieni a posar!  
Senti se palpita,  
se amor t'invita...  
vieni, mia vita,  
vieni, fammi spirar*

*Count Carlo Pepoli*

## The Invitation

Come, o Ruggiero,  
your Eloisa  
separated from you  
cannot remain:  
You have already  
responded to my tears,  
come and grant  
my request.

Come, beautiful angel,  
come, my delight,  
here on my bosom  
come to rest!  
Feel my throbbing heart,  
when love invites you,  
come, my life,  
come, make me die!

*Translated by Johann Gaitzsch*

### **Batti, batti, o bel Masetto**

*Ma se colpa io non ho,  
ma se da lui inganata rimasi!  
Eppoi, che temi?  
Tranquillati, mia vita;  
Non mi tocco la punta della dita.  
Non me lo credi? Ingrato!  
Vien qui, sfogati, ammazzami,  
Fa tutto di me quel che ti piace,  
Ma poi, Masetto mio,  
Ma poi fa pace.  
Batti, batti, o bel Masetto,  
La tua povera Zerlina;  
Staro qui come agnellina  
Le tue botte ad aspettar.  
Lasciero straziarmi il crine  
Lasciero cavarmi gliocchi,  
E le care tue manine  
Lieta poi sapro bacciar.  
Ah, lo vedo, non hai core!  
Pace, pace, o vita mia,  
In contento ed allegria  
Notte e di vogliam passar.*

*Lorenzo Da Ponte*

### **"Beat me, hit me, oh dear Masetto"**

But what if I was not at fault?  
What i fit was all his doing?  
And then, what are you afraid of?  
Calm yourself my dearest;  
he didn't touch even the tip of my finger.  
You don't believe me? Ingrate!  
Come here, blow off steam, kill me,  
do all to me that which you please,  
but then Masetto mine,  
but then make peace.  
Beat me, beat me, oh dear Masetto,  
your poor Zerlina;  
I will remain here as a little lamb  
your blows to await  
I will allow you to tear out my hair,  
I will allow you to carve out my eyes,  
and your dear hands,  
happily then I will kiss.  
Ah! I see you do not have the heart!  
Peace, peace, oh my life,  
in happiness and joy  
day and night we will spend.

*Translated by Elizabeth Klesmith*

**Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen**

*Er ist gekommen  
In Sturm und Regen,  
Ihm schlug bekloffen  
Mein Herz entgegen.  
Wie konnt' ich ahnen,  
Daß seine Bahnen  
Sich einen sollten meinen Wegen?*

*Er ist gekommen  
In Sturm und Regen,  
Er hat genommen  
Mein Herz verwegen.  
Nahm er das meine?  
Nahm ich das seine?  
Die beiden kamen sich entgegen.*

*Er ist gekommen  
In Sturm und Regen.  
Nun ist entglommen  
Des Frühlings Segen.  
Der Freund zieht weiter,  
Ich seh' es heiter,  
Denn er bleibt mein auf allen Wegen.*

*Friedrich Rückert*

**He came in Storm and Rain**

He came  
in storm and rain,  
my anxious heart  
beat against his.  
How could I have known,  
that his path  
should unite itself with mine?

He came  
in storm and rain,  
he boldly  
stole my heart.  
Did he steal mine?  
Did I steal his?  
Both came together.

He came  
in storm and rain,  
now has come  
the blessing of spring.  
My love travels abroad,  
I watch with cheer,  
for he remains mine, on any road.

*Translated by David Kenneth Smith*

## **Chanson d'Amour**

*L'aube naît, et ta porte est close!  
Ma belle, pourquoi sommeiller?  
À l'heure où s'éveille la rose  
Ne vas-tu pas te réveiller?*

*Ô ma charmante,  
Écoute ici  
L'amant qui chante  
Et pleure aussi!*

*Toute frappe à ta porte bénie.  
L'aurore dit : Je suis le jour!  
L'oiseau dit : Je suis l'harmonie!  
Et mon cœur dit: Je suis l'amour!*

*Ô ma charmante,  
Écoute ici  
L'amant qui chante  
Et pleure aussi!*

*Je t'adore, ange, et t'aime, femme.  
Dieu qui pour toi m'a complété  
A fait mon amour par ton âme,  
Et mon regard pour ta beauté!*

*Ô ma charmante,  
Écoute ici  
L'amant qui chante  
Et pleure aussi!*

*Victor Hugo*

## **Love Song**

Dawn comes, and your door is closed!  
My beauty, why are you sleeping?  
At the hour when the rose is awakening,  
are you not also going to awaken?

Oh my charming one,  
listen here  
to the lover who sings,  
and also weeps!

Everything knocks at your blessed door.  
Dawn says, "I am the day!"  
The bird says, "I am harmony!"  
And my heart says, "I am love!"

Oh my charming one,  
listen here  
to the lover who sings,  
and also weeps!

I adore you, angel, I love you, woman,  
God, who made me for you,  
made my love for your soul,  
and my gaze for your beauty!

Oh my charming one,  
listen here  
to the lover who sings,  
and also weeps!

*Translated by John Glenn Paton*

## **Notre amour**

*Notre amour est chose légère,  
Comme les parfums que le vent  
Prend aux cimes de la fougère  
Pour qu'on les respire en rêvant.  
Notre amour est chose légère.  
Notre amour est chose charmante,  
Comme les chansons du matin  
Où nul regret ne se lamente,  
Où vibre un espoir incertain.  
Notre amour est chose charmante.*

*Notre amour est chose sacrée,  
Comme le mystère des bois  
Où tressaille une âme ignorée,  
Où les silences ont des voix.  
Notre amour est chose sacrée.*

*Notre amour est chose infinie,  
Comme les chemins des couchants  
Où la mer, aux cieux réunie,  
S'endort sous les soleils penchants.*

*Notre amour est chose éternelle,  
Comme tout ce qu'un Dieu vainqueur  
A touché du feu de son aile,  
Comme tout ce qui vient du cœur,  
Notre amour est chose éternelle.*

*Armand Silvestre*

## **Our love**

Our love is light and gentle,  
Like fragrance fetched by the breeze  
From the tips of ferns  
For us to breathe while dreaming.  
Our love is light and gentle.  
Our love is enchanting,  
Like morning songs,  
Where no regret is voiced,  
Quivering with uncertain hopes.  
Our love is enchanting.

Our love is sacred,  
Like woodland mysteries,  
Where an unknown soul throbs  
And silences are eloquent.  
Our love is sacred.

Our love is infinite  
Like sunset paths,  
Where the sea, joined with the skies,  
Falls asleep beneath slanting suns.

Our love is eternal,  
Like all that a victorious God  
Has brushed with his fiery wing,  
Like all that comes from the heart,  
Our love is eternal.

*Translated by Richard Stokes*

**“Ah! Je veux vivre”**

*Ah! Je veux vivre dans le rêve  
Qui m'enivre ce jour encore.  
Douce flamme, je te garde dans mon âme  
Comme un trésor!*

*Cette ivresse de jeunesse ne dure, hélas!  
qu'un jour!  
Puis vient l'heure où l'on pleure,  
Le coeur cède à l'amour  
Et le bonheur fuit sans retour!*

*Loin de l'hiver morose  
Laisse moi sommeiller  
Et respirer la rose,  
Avant de l'effeuiller. Ah!  
Douce flamme  
Reste dans mon âme  
Comme un doux trésor,  
Longtemps encore!*

*Jules Barbier & Michel Carré*

**“Ah! I want to live”**

Ah! I want to live in this dream,  
Which intoxicated me again this day.  
Sweet flame, I keep you in my soul  
Like a treasure!

This intoxication of youth lasts, alas!  
But a day!  
Then comes the hour when one weeps,  
The heart yields to love  
And happiness flees without returning!

Far from the bleak winter  
Let me slumber  
And breathe in the scent of the rose,  
Before its petals are plucked. Ah!  
Sweet flame  
Stay in my soul  
Like a sweet treasure,  
For a long time yet!

*Translated by Sarah Power*

## Extended Program Notes

For my senior recital, I wanted to explore the evolution of female agency across centuries of vocal literature, investigating how the “woman in love” is constrained and ultimately liberated by the music she inhabits. Central to this exploration is the musicological framework of “envoiced agency”, a concept developed by Carolyn Abbate in her essay “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”.<sup>1</sup> Abbate argues that the act of singing itself provides female characters with their own agency that subverts the victimhood that the plot suggests. In this framework, the musical performance becomes a negotiation between a trio of forces: the librettist, who provides the narrative text; the composer, who provides the musical and structural tools; and the performer, who utilizes those tools to interpret the work.

Even when the narrative seeks to silence a woman or place her in a submissive role, the physical act of singing allows her to claim the authorship of the moment, effectively overcoming the librettist’s voice. When a soprano maneuvers through complex coloratura or manipulates rhythmic tension, she is actively seizing control of her narrative. In these moments, the voice is able to transcend the “submissive” implication of a text to reveal a character who is the architect of her own emotional journey.

This program will move from the eighteenth-century opera stage to the twentieth-century musical theatre stage. There is a recurring phenomenon: women utilizing the musical landscape of their narrative to assert their own intellectual, technical, and psychological authority. By examining these works, this program highlights the diverse ways in which female characters navigate the social structures of their time, ultimately revealing that the “woman in love” is often the most powerful force in the room.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbate, Carolyn. “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women.” In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Theory and Aesthetics*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, 225–58. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

**“Batti, batti, o bel Masetto”** from *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) composed *Don Giovanni* in 1787, a period during which he examined the social impact of opera through his collaboration with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte. In Mozart’s Vienna, music was a privilege of the aristocracy and nobility, however, his operas frequently centered around characters that challenged those very social structures. In the late eighteenth century, class differences and gender roles were rigid boundaries; a peasant woman such as the character Zerlina would have relied entirely on marriage and social reputation for what scholar Kristi Brown-Montesana deems “class survival”. For a woman of Zerlina’s status, agency was not about overt rebellion, but rather about the clever manipulation of the patriarchal framework to which she was bound.

In the aria “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto”, Zerlina attempts to mollify her fiancé, Masetto, after a public flirtation with the transgressive nobleman Don Giovanni. Having provoked Masetto’s jealousy, Zerlina must now ensure her future with him, constructing a performance that is as intent on social preservation as it is on romantic reconciliation. When simply examining the libretto, the text suggests a woman begging for forgiveness, even offering her fiancé to physically punish her to prove her loyalty. However, the musical composition and performance reveal a character in total command of the emotional stakes. Her agency is established in the recitative preceding the aria, where Zerlina’s lack of hesitation signals that she is not afraid of Masetto. In this moment, Masetto becomes a passive character; he is the one forced to listen, while Zerlina’s musicianship of the soprano range reveals a cunning and intelligent character that is in fact manipulating him. Her invitations to violence are extravagant and often hyperbolic,

offering Masetto to “tear out her hair” and “carve out her eyes”, that they function as a test of his resolve.

The true manifestation of Zerlina’s authority, however, lies in her absolute control over the work’s tempo and meter. She dictates the flow of the entire aria, leading Masetto through a series of musical shifts that ultimately disarm him. The aria begins in a stable 2/4 meter, yet as Zerlina successfully convinces Masetto to reconcile with her, she unilaterally shifts the music into a playful, dance-like 6/8 meter. If Zerlina were truly tamed by Masetto, the music might remain in the predictable 2/4 meter of the opening. She never relinquishes her autonomy to Masetto, despite what the lyrics may suggest; instead, she leads him into her own “dance”. By doing this, Zerlina chooses the moment that the “apology” ends, and reconciliation and celebration begin, forcing Masetto to follow her.

As the aria builds, Zerlina asserts both a technical and narrative agency, showing that Mozart’s musical cleverness allowed for a depth of her character that is not immediately noticed in the libretto. By navigating rapid scales, she demonstrates a physical vigor and strength that juxtaposes her verbal plea to be punished. As Carolyn Abbate argues, this physical act allows the female voice to take authorship of the moment, displacing the submissive implications of the text—a clear example of “envoiced agency”. By the time the aria ends, Zerlina has not just escaped punishment, she has completely regained her autonomy. Masetto assents entirely to her terms.

As a performer, the most difficult challenge in interpreting this aria lies in balancing the performative, calculated persona Zerlina presents to Masetto with the underlying intellectual strength required to maintain control over the scene. My experience with the aria confirms the character’s agency; the demands on vocal stamina for the latter half of the aria are intense, yet

that is exactly where I feel the greatest sense of freedom as Zerlina. Performing this aria reveals that Zerlina's supposed submission is merely a role she uses to reach the point of total musical and psychological liberation, and control.

### **“La Promessa” & “L’invito”** from *Soirées Musicales* by Gioachino Rossini

Gioachino Rossini composed his *Soirées musicales*, a collection of eight arias and four duets for voice and piano, around the year of 1835. This era marked a significant professional transition for the composer. Following his early retirement from operatic composition after *Guillaume Tell* in 1829, he moved to Paris and immersed himself in the intimate sphere of the Parisian salon. According to Richard Osborne's biography, Rossini's *Soirées Musicales* were created specifically for these salons which functioned as social spaces with both public intrigue and private domesticity. Often hosted by affluent women, salons acted as venues where artists, intellectuals, and musicians came to perform and discuss art. For the wealthy nineteenth-century woman, the salon was one of the few spaces where they could truly be in command, and Rossini's writing in this genre facilitated an agency that is rooted in vocal virtuosity and presence.

In “La Promessa”, the text by Pietro Metastasio presents a vow of eternal love. However, Rossini elevates this sentiment through the vocal agility he demands of the singer. Applying Abbate's theory of “envoiced agency”, the singer's power is not located in the text itself, but in the relentless use of appoggiaturas and wide melodic leaps. This technical demand elevates the song from a passive promise to a display of mastery. By maintaining this technical artistry, the singer asserts an earnest conviction that drowns out the possibility of a submissive interpretation

of the text. While this piece is frequently performed by both male and female singers, the mastery of the technical demand of the song creates an agency that transcends gender.

As a performer, interpreting “La Promessa” requires a navigation of the expansive leaps that Rossini embeds throughout the score. These transitions, which frequently force the voice to shift between registers, initially presented a challenge to my vocal stability. However, they have ultimately become the primary mechanism through which I exercise authority of the piece. By mastering those shifts, I am able to utilize the full color palette of my voice, from the resonance of the lower register to the shimmer of the upper range, effectively bridging the registers to showcase a unified technique that encompasses a large portion of my vocal range. Rather than viewing these leaps as technical obstacles, I have come to recognize them as an assertion of vocal agility, where the ability to bridge the registers reinforces my status as the primary agent of the performance thus taking full command of the musical narrative.

In “L’invito”, Rossini shifts the focus to a more overt form of social agency through the use of the rhythmic pulse of the bolero. Scholar Susan McClary notes in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*<sup>2</sup> that the bolero has become a foundational trope in operatic depictions of exotic and seductive femininity, a concept that Rossini brings into the salon. In “L’invito”, the bolero is a rhythmic engine that creates a performance that can command the attention of the salon audience. By utilizing this dance form, the singer is moved into a space of seductive agency. The character is no longer a passive subject of the narrative; instead, she is the architect of the alluring invitation.

However, the greatest authority can be heard through the use of *rubato* by the singer. While the bolero provides a driving rhythmic foundation, the use of *rubato* is an act of envoiced

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<sup>2</sup> McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

control; by manipulating the tempo, the woman proves that she is the autonomous dictator of the flow of the musical tension. When the singer is able to stretch a chromatic turn or linger on an accidental, thus withholding the resolution of the return to the bolero's pulse, she forces the listeners to wait for her. This artistry demonstrates a total mastery over the musical space of the salon, transforming a seemingly simple invitation into a command of the listener's time and desires.

In performing this song, the challenge lies in navigating the balance between the driving pulse of the bolero and interpretive freedom of the *rubato*. Managing this requires me to hold the listener's attention through sustained phrasing and rapid shifts back into the bolero style, compelling the audience to engage with my performance. By commanding these shifts, I transform the act of singing from an invitation into an insistence of the listener's time and desires.

**“Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen” by Clara Schumann & “Intermezzo” Op. 118 No. 2**  
by Johannes Brahms

When Clara Schumann's (1819-1896) husband Robert Schumann (1810-1856) first encountered the young Johannes Brahms, he dubbed him the “heir to Beethoven”.<sup>3</sup> However, for Brahms, his career-long musical idol was Clara Schumann, a renowned virtuoso pianist who had been performing on international stages since her childhood. Following Robert's attempted suicide and commitment to an asylum in 1854, Brahms moved into the Schumann household to support Clara, helping to care for her seven children while she undertook concert tours to keep the family financially afloat. Despite the growth of an intense emotional bond, Brahms and Clara

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 39, No. 18 (October 28, 1853): 185–86.

never married. As biographer Styra Avins notes in *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters (1997)*, Clara's decision to remain a widow was rooted in a strategic preservation of her power. By not remarrying, Clara retained the legal right to manage her own contracts, travel independently, and control her own finances, thus choosing professional independence over her own personal romantic desires. Brahms highly valued Clara's musical opinions, and as Avins highlights, her agency was collaborative but clearly dominant; Brahms sought her "blessing" and approval and many scores that he produced.

In "Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen", Clara Schumann's agency can be found in the virtuosity that is required to play to piano accompaniment, although accompaniment is surely an inadequate label. The piano utilizes a barrage of sixteenth-note arpeggios that creates a "storm" of harmonic instability. By writing music that she, alone, could play with such authority, Clara asserts her physical agency over the instrument. This composition is neither charming nor delicate, but rather goes beyond the expected decorum of the salon. As Abbate might suggest, the "envoiced" authority in this piece actually lies beyond the soprano's melody, but in the pianist's refusal to simply accompany, and thus, Clara's refusal. In this way, the singer is not being swept away by the storm, but rather, she becomes the storm herself. She asserts her own emotional and physical intensity as a dominant force in the work.

Clara's choice of Friedrich Rückert's poem reveals a strategic and feminist alignment between the music and libretto. While many nineteenth-century Lieder focus on a woman being won over by a dominant male figure, such as Robert Schumann's *Frauen-Liebe und Leben* (1840), this poem presents a rare and balanced perspective of romance. The text asks: "Did I take his [heart]? Did he take mine?". By choosing a text that treats love as a mutual exchange of

power, rather than a conquest, Clara creates a space for her composition to enhance the female agency of the poem, rather than struggle to create it.

While Clara Schumann navigated the nineteenth-century musical industry through showcasing her virtuosity publicly and achieving financial independence, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) exercised a completely different form of professional autonomy. Brahms was known for his independence from the commercial pressures of the era; he frequently refused commissions, preferring to compose only when a work would meet his personal standards. In his late career, this allowed him to explore a more introspective musical language that belies its technical complexity.

His “Intermezzo in A Major”, Op. 118, No. 2 (1893) offers a clear juxtaposition in style to Clara’s piece. Unlike the technical difficulty or virtuosity found in the works of his contemporaries, many of Brahms’ Intermezzi are not characterized by extreme physical demands. Instead, Brahms puts the agency into the performer as an interpreter, rather than an athlete. The “Intermezzo” was written near the end of his life and sent to Clara, a relic of sustaining dialogue between the two. It offers a fascinating reversal of nineteenth-century gender roles; while Clara’s work is characterized by outward-facing power, Brahms’ Intermezzo offers lyricism and contrapuntal complexity.

For both composers, the piano serves as a site of shared agency, yet, as Reich suggests in *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, Clara was the undertone of all Brahms’ work. In this partnership, Clara was not simply the “muse”, but rather the ultimate authoritative voice of his repertoire. By navigating the industry through the strategic choice of widowhood and her masterful playing, Clara proved that she could be the dominant agent in their collaborative relationship, ultimately remaining the guiding authority for the “Heir to Beethoven”.

## “Chanson D’Amour” by Amy Beach

Amy Beach (1867-1944) was the first American woman to truly receive widespread praise as a composer of large-scale orchestral works. She was a child prodigy, harmonizing melodies at the age of two and performing Chopin at age seven. At sixteen, she made her professional debut at the Boston Music Hall. Upon her marriage to Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach in 1885, her career was redirected to becoming “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach”, a title she used to navigate the social hierarchy of the Boston elite at the time. As biographer Adrienne Fried Block notes in *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*<sup>4</sup>, her husband “allowed” her to continue composing, but restricted her public performances to only two per year. Beach quickly became a self-taught expert, often analyzing musical scores to teach herself the art of orchestration.

While writing “Chanson d’Amour” in 1893, Beach was gaining national recognition for her *Festival Jubilate*, composed for the Chicago World’s Fair. She composed “Chanson d’Amour” for soprano Emma Eames, a well-known star of the Metropolitan Opera, gaining immediate and significant attention. By setting a text in French by Victor Hugo, Beach was making a cultural statement. By setting Hugo, the voice of French Romanticism, Beach was situating herself beyond the confines of the provincial American parlor style. As biographer Adrienne Fried Block notes, Beach’s engagement with French literature allowed her to cultivate a more cosmopolitan style, moving beyond the rigid Germanic tradition that dominated Boston musical institutions. This choice was a form of intellectual agency, signaling that her musical voice would not be confined to New England domesticity.

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<sup>4</sup> Block, Adrienne Fried. *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867–1944*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

In “Chanson d’Amour”, Beach demonstrates Abbate’s idea of “envoiced agency”, utilizing restless chromaticism and a diverse harmonic palette that pushes the boundaries of tonality. Beach’s originality is strikingly evident in her choice to include a cello in the composition. This addition transforms the work into an ensemble piece, utilizing the cello as a countermelody to the soprano. This layered approach suggests that even within the confines of the song form, Beach may have been thinking in terms of instrumental chamber music. As seen in Clara Schumann’s work as well, the piano, along with the cello, is not merely an accompaniment, but a fully realized partner. Beach often utilizes appoggiaturas to emphasize the yearning of the singer for her lover to awaken to the beautiful day. By delaying the harmonic resolutions, she asserts control over the listener’s emotional journey. Finally, the singer herself must command agency through mastery of a vocal line that spans her range.

By embedding such lush instrumental and harmonic color into a seemingly “light” genre, particularly within the American parlor style, Beach bypassed the gendered restrictions of her marriage. She proved that even as “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach”, her music was entirely her own.

### “Notre Amour” by Gabriel Fauré

Gabriel Fauré composed “Notre Amour” in 1879. During this time, Fauré’s music was gaining popularity in the Parisian salons. As Jean-Michel Nectoux notes in *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, Fauré’s music was designed for intimate settings. The agency in this piece is subtle, while also exemplifying Abbate’s conception of “envoiced agency,” lying in the aesthetic precision that is required for the singer to perform a work that begins as delicate and stereotypically feminine but evolves to music that is vocally dense and emotionally extravagant.

The setting of Armand Silvestre's poem requires the performer to manage a psychological arch, as the text evolves from describing love as "light" and "charming" to "eternal" and "infinite".

The piano accompaniment serves as the engine of this progression. Its enduring sixteenth-note triplet pattern is exhilarating and suggests breathless excitement, even giddiness. In the opening verses, the vocal line sits primarily in the middle voice, characterized by a light quality that reflects the sweetness of the text. However, as the song reaches the third verse, declaring love as "an infinite thing", the vocal line shifts. This section begins in a lower vocal range, demanding a more guttural and grounding production of sound. This transition suggests that a different, more mature woman is emerging, one who is moving into a more profound reality.

This verse also begins on a dominant seventh chord, a harmony that is inherently unstable. In this moment, the singer holds the highest degree of agency as she is responsible for holding the tension in the room. Fauré utilizes an expansive dominant pedal in the piano, creating a sense of mounting anticipation that emphatically points towards the vocal climax on the high A. The singer remains in total control of this anticipation, navigating the low register before soaring to the sustained high A on the word "éternel." The use of a greater vocal range reveals a fully embodied woman, moving towards a powerful and physical declaration of love. Her agency is found in the mastery of such vast technical and harmonic tension, asserting both technical and interpretive authority.

As a performer, it is truly exhilarating to perform "Notre Amour" and embody the transition from the girliness of the opening to the grounded power required for the final verses. I thoroughly enjoy the shift into the lower register for the "infinite" verse that allows me to feel completely free and sing with abandon. This practice makes me feel more honest as a performer.

Crucially, the first and third verses are melodically identical, presenting an interpretive challenge: while the notes remain the same, the stakes of the poetry have shifted to be divine. As a performer, I must redirect the melodic repetition and increasing vocal intensity, shifting from a breathless quality to a richer, and more grounded resonance as the text shifts to describe love as “sacred”. When approaching the climax, the buildup to the high A takes vocal control as I navigate through a range that spans more than an octave. When I finally reach that climactic note, the sense of vocal freedom is a direct result of having successfully navigated the mounting harmonic pressure, allowing me to release the sound with power.

### **“Je Veux Vivre”** from *Romeo et Juliette* by Charles Gounod

In Charles Gounod’s 1867 adaptation of *Roméo et Juliette*, Juliette is reimagined through the lens of defiant, proactive agency. While the opera essentially opens with Juliette being told that she is to marry Paris, Gounod places her at the center of her own narrative from her very first entrance that exclaims, “Ah!”. In “Je Veux Vivre”, Juliette does not merely react to the plot; she asserts her autonomy before the tragic plot even has a chance to trap her and even before she has met Romeo.

To understand Juliette’s agency in Gounod’s adaptation, it is useful to compare her to another representation of the character. In Bellini’s adaptation (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*) which premiered in 1830, Giulietta’s first aria is a weeping lament that comes across as a surrender to her circumstances. However, Gounod’s Juliette refuses to weep and rather chooses to “live” (*vivre*) in a high-energy waltz. Because this aria occurs before she even meets Romeo, this proves that her desire for independence is not a reaction to a man, but a true internal declaration of self. She pushes back against the “cold winter” of marriage and those societal expectations

that are laid out for her, demanding instead to linger in the freedom and spring of her youth. With this insight into Juliette's character and desires before meeting Romeo, the audience perceives Juliette immediately as an autonomous character.

In this aria, Juliette exercises agency by dictating the energy of the scene. Juliette sets the tempo of the waltz herself, following the opening vocal flourish. The transition into the  $\frac{3}{4}$  waltz, a dance that normally requires metrical stability becomes a musical manifestation of her taking the reins, moving the focus to rhythmic freedom that ebbs and flows in tempi based on her excitement. The construction of the vocal line reveals Juliette's heightened emotional state using frequent quarter note rests in each measure, making the singer appear breathless with excitement and youthful energy. This itself is physical agency. The singer must use these brief silences to build momentum, showing a character who is so bursting with life and vigor that she challenges the metrical stability of the music. In addition to the momentum needed for the aria, there are frequent coloratura fireworks consisting of rapid scales and trills. By mastering these vocal acrobatics, the singer demonstrates a level of endurance of athleticism in a way that commands the entire stage.

As noted by Abbate, opera is a unique medium because, sonically, the high female voice is often more powerful than any male voice. This is evident from the demanding coloratura demands of this opera, immediately placing Juliette in a position of power. Her voice sits in a high and brilliant range that cuts through the orchestral texture. Juliette's agency is proactive rather than reactive. Because of this, she is not simply singing about freedom; she is embodying it.

In performing this piece, I focus intently on ensuring that the defiant opening "Ah!" that marks Juliette's autonomy before she meets Romeo is filled with energy and determination. The

primary challenge is the navigation of Gounod's coloratura. By mastering the rapid scales, I physically embody Juliette's refusal to be passive, using the brilliance of the high vocal range as a source of agency. In addition, I find that my agency as a performer is rooted in the management of my breath, where the frequent quarter-note rests build momentum for the next phrase. In these moments, I am not merely singing about freedom, I am truly exercising it, proving that Juliette alone is in control of her future.

As the program moves into the twentieth century, the nature of female agency shifts from the abstract towards something of a more pragmatic nature. In these upcoming selections, the act of being in love is no longer a guaranteed destination, but rather a negotiation. Whereas the previous songs were focused on the ingénue, we move towards female characters who are acutely aware of their social status and the restraints placed upon them by their environment.

For some of these women, the restraint is the vulnerability of youth and the need for a stable, protective environment. For the more mature women, the restraint is the stagnation of their domestic life, where they are forced to confront whether they are satisfied with their established life. Whether they are navigating the rigid expectations of a small town in the 1930s, the isolating shadow of a musical genius, or the everyday duties of a family bakery, these characters are defined by how they negotiate with their circumstances.

**“Steal Me, Sweet Thief”** from *The Old Maid and the Thief* by Gian Carlo Menotti

Commissioned by NBC in 1939 as an opera composed for the radio, *The Old Maid and the Thief* is a satirical comedy that explores the dark psychological complexities of desire and societal order. The aria, “Steal Me, Sweet Thief” serves as the emotional core of the opera, where the character of Laetitia finds her agency through her own internal reflection and self-

evaluation. Set in 1930s small-town America, the plot centers on Miss Todd, a prominent yet lonely “old maid”, and her housemaid Laetitia, whose lives are disrupted by the arrival of a handsome wanderer named Bob.

In this aria, Laetitia reflects on the fact that while Bob is rumored to be an escaped convict, the true thief is time, which is stealing her beauty and youth. Laetitia is a deeply determined and pragmatic character. She is clear-eyed, realistic, and entirely unsentimental about love. She is not overcome by a romanticized vision of her future; rather she is desirous of a life with Bob despite his obvious flaws. This is a harsh reality for a woman of her time—she knows full well what she is accepting, and her choice to pursue it is both courageous and inherently tragic. Her agency is found in her refusal to succumb to the outcome she sees mirrored in her employer, Miss Todd. She must be willing to compromise her moral standing and perhaps her deeper desires.

The aria itself moves between passages rooted in the style of *recitative* and lush, soaring melodic phrasing. The recitative begins when Laetitia evaluates the circumstance she has found herself in with both the thief, Bob, and Miss Todd. However, the melodic lines take over once she truly realizes her deep desire to be taken away by this thief.

The musical construction of this aria facilitates a high degree of technical agency through its rhythmic volatility. The piece features constant time signature changes, moving between 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 meters with a frequency that suggests instability. Because the meter is in such flux, the singer is leading the music and creating the structure of the aria in real-time. This volatility makes the singer in charge of the narrative pace, forcing the audience and accompaniment to follow her emotional lead.

Characteristically, this depiction of female agency is different from those that have come before in this program, and those that will come after. Laetitia is choosing to be taken by a man, not for the sake of true love, but for the fear of growing into the person she is most scared to be. While some may view this as weakness, this is Laetitia's strength in a world where social class dictated much of everything. By begging the thief to steal her before time does, she is effectively setting her own "price". This is, in fact, proactive; she is choosing a thief over the thief of time, reclaiming her future in this gorgeous, yet tragic, aria.

This piece features some of the most beautiful music in the entire program, in my opinion. The constant rhythmic shifts and lush harmonies and phrasing allow for a truly emotional performance. Because the time signatures change so frequently, I truly do feel as though I am creating the music, rather than simply following a set beat. This allows me to truly inhabit Laetitia's determination. There is a specific power in the way the music requires me to lead, turning my vocal expression into the force that dictates the architecture of the piece.

**"All I Ask of You"** from *Phantom of the Opera* by Andrew Lloyd Webber

"All I Ask of You" (1986) serves as Christine's deliberate rejection of the Phantom's isolating control. For Christine, choosing Raoul's love is not a passive surrender to romance, but a proactive pursuit of a fuller and safer existence. By actively seeking a relationship defined by stability, Christine exercises a protective form of agency. This duet represents her commitment to a life where she is an equal partner, rather than simply a muse, marking a significant choice towards her own independence.

Musically, Webber anchors the sentiment of safety in stable key areas and clear harmonic resolutions. Unlike the Phantom's chromatic motif that mirrors his troubled psyche, Raoul and

Christine's duet relies on tonal clarity. This harmonic stability provides the foundation from which Christine moves towards an independent and realized self.

The climax of the song, where the two voices sing in unison, is the most potent expression of agency in the work. Rather than an imbalance of power, the unison represents equality in the relationship. It is a musical manifestation of each character's commitment to mutual protection and love. Through this convergence, Christine is reclaiming her autonomy from her oppressor.

As a performer in this duet, I find that my agency is rooted in the transition from the tentative opening to the expansive climax in unison. By committing at this moment, I am not merely accepting Raoul's offer; I am actively choosing a reality that allows me to move beyond the Phantom's reach.

### **“Moments in the Woods”** from *Into the Woods* by Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim was a titan of late twentieth-century American music theatre, infusing the genre with psychological complexity and both melodic and lyrical wit. Sondheim distanced himself from the “happily ever after” trope that was present in most Golden Age musicals, and rather explored the complexity of the human experience. “Moments in the Woods” is quintessential Sondheim; it is a rapid-fire internal monologue where a character works through a moral predicament in real-time.

First premiering on Broadway in 1987, *Into the Woods* is a combination of multiple classic Brothers Grimm fairy tales. The first act follows Cinderella, Jack (from Jack and the Beanstalk) and Little Red Riding Hood as they achieve their personal wishes. However, act two

grapples with the difficult question resulting from those desires, asking: What happens after “happily ever after”?

The Baker’s Wife is the emotional anchor character of the show. Unlike the royal and magical characters that surround her, she and her husband, the Baker, are ordinary people who are forced to venture into the woods to break a family curse. Throughout the entire show, she is utterly pragmatic, often negotiating and bartering to merely survive. This song occurs in Act II, after her typical pragmatism dissolves during a brief, romantic encounter with Cinderella’s Prince. Suddenly, this ordinary woman has experienced a “fairy-tale” moment, leaving her to question how to return to her quiet life.

Sondheim provides agency to the Baker’s Wife through linguistic virtuosity and rhythmic complexity. The song is incredibly dense with internal rhymes and rapid-fire patter. To perform this piece, the singer must maintain complete vocal clarity often at high speeds. This creates a sense of a character whose mind is working faster than the world she finds herself in, asserting intellectual dominance over the confusing circumstances.

When the Baker’s Wife is mulling over her thoughts and has yet to reach a conclusion, the music moves in small and sometimes even chromatic intervals, opening into wider leaps when she reaches a conclusion. In this way, the music mirrors her internal navigation of the situation.

In the narrative context, the Baker’s Wife is defined by her domestic life, wanting a child and ultimately, stability. However, her encounter with the Prince offers her a moment of romance that exists outside of her daily reality. Instead of collapsing into guilt or shame, she utilizes the encounter to make broader realizations of the world around her. The Baker’s Wife narrative as a character ultimately lies in her rejection of the binary. She asks, “Why not both?”

questioning, “Must it all be either less or more, either plain or grand?”. By the end of the song, she is returning to her quiet life because she chooses to, having realized that the woods (a metaphor for a world of fleeting passion) do not supersede her desire for home.

Ultimately, the Baker’s Wife exudes existential agency. She does not look for external factors to validate her experiences; instead, she saves herself by choosing for her “moment” to be a part of her broader life story. She is the architect of her own “happily ever after”, recognizing that truth is found in the “and” rather than the “or”.

The challenge of performing “Moments in the Woods” lies in navigating the Baker’s Wife’s sudden shift from a frantic state of mind to a grounded, definitive acceptance of her own autonomy. My agency in this piece is found in the management of the tempo. In moving through the fast patter sections and the lyric portions, I am essentially piecing together her internal thoughts in real-time. By the time I reach the conclusion of the song, I add a vocal weight to the sustained phrases that represents a confident acknowledgement of her experiences in the woods and the realization of the importance of “moments”.

**“Meadowlark”** from *The Baker’s Wife* by Stephen Schwartz

Stephen Schwartz—the composer behind *Wicked* and *Pippin*—is the master of the song of soaring aspirations. “Meadowlark” is a story-song lasting seven-minutes and acting as a dramatic monologue from the 1976 musical *The Baker’s Wife*. In this piece, the character Genevieve reaches a breaking point, utilizing a metaphorical folktale to justify her radical act of self-liberation.

The musical is set in a provincial village in Provence, France. The story follows a middle-aged baker and his much younger and beautiful wife, Genevieve. The small town is

thrust into chaos when Genevieve runs away with a handsome young chauffeur, causing the heartbroken baker to stop baking bread.

Genevieve is a tragic character, trapped by gratitude. She cares deeply for her husband but desires a passion and a life beyond the bakery. “Meadowlark” occurs at the pivotal moment of her departure. She sings, struggling with the choice to stay in the safe life or the “fly away” with Dominique.

Genevieve exercises agency through the power of her narrative voice. She does not simply sing her feelings; she recites a parable to rationalize her own choice. The song is structured as a story about a Meadowlark, a King, and a God of the Sun. By projecting her situation onto a myth, Genevieve exerts intellectual agency. She distances herself from the scandalous adulterous wife and reframes her departure as a natural necessity. She is not simply leaving her husband, she herself is the Meadowlark who must fly away or die.

Compositionally, Schwartz gives ultimate agency to the singer during these seven minutes. The song is famous for its relentless, building energy. It begins as a delicate folk song, expanding into a powerhouse belt. The sheer length and physical demand of the song create an undeniable stage presence for the actor. By the time she reaches the peak of the song, lamenting that she must leave “before [her] past, once again, can blind [her]”, the singer has literally exhausted the air in the room. This physical triumph mirrors Genevieve’s own emotional breakthrough, realizing that she must leave. In addition, the piano accompaniment uses a constant, rolling triplet figure that mimics the beating of wings. Genevieve must navigate her emotions against, and sometimes with, the constant pulse of the accompaniment.

Genevieve ultimately represents agency as a form of self-preservation. Her choice is not to harm the Baker, but is about her refusal to be blinded and die in a gilded cage. By choosing

Dominique over the Baker, she asserts that her primary responsibility is to her own soul's survival. She chooses the dangerous flight over the safety and comfort she already has, ending the song with a declaration of total autonomy<sup>5</sup>.

“Meadowlark” is the perfect way to end this program. Personally, this song is the ultimate release and the final manifestation of the theme of envoiced agency. As a performer, I shape the pacing of the narrative; I must act as both the storyteller as well as the Meadowlark herself. This song also requires me to hold back my vocal power during the early, intimate verses and release it with precision during the final, soaring lines. This piece is the most vulnerable and authoritative moment of the program, claiming the ultimate authority of freedom.

While both the Baker's Wife from *Into the Woods* and Genevieve from *The Baker's Wife* are defined by their roles as the “Baker's Wife” and find themselves tempted by a charismatic younger man, their divergent paths are rooted in their vastly different stages of life. For Genevieve, youth is a flickering candle; she is a much younger woman married to a middle-aged man out of gratitude rather than passion. Her decision to “fly away” is a radical act of self-preservation because she views her current life as a cage where her soul is deteriorating and literally dying. In contrast, the Baker's Wife in *Into the Woods* is already more mature and grounded, having built a life with a partner her own age and class. She chooses to integrate her fleeting moment of passion into her existing narrative rather than upending her world completely. For her, the comfort of her life and the passion of the woods can coexist. Genevieve, on the other hand, sees a binary choice between “the King” and “the Sun God”, comfort or passion. She exercises agency through action, believing that she must leave for her soul to survive.

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Genevieve ultimately returns to the Baker at the end of the musical.

The diversity of female agency presented in this program, ranging from the social maneuvers of Zerlina to the existential clarity of the Baker's Wife, reveals that femininity is a vast emotional landscape explored by self-directed women. Throughout these centuries of vocal literature, there is a constant negotiation that female characters face with the expectations of the time. Whether navigating the rigid class structures of the eighteenth century or the domestic restraints of the twentieth, these characters prove that being a "woman in love" does not result in a loss of self. Rather, love often serves as the very catalyst that forces a woman to claim her own space.

Ultimately, the unifying force of this program is envoiced agency. As a performer, the act of singing these diverse roles has allowed me to witness how the female voice, in conjunction with the composer's musical choices, is able to subvert any victimhood or passivity that the libretto might suggest. By manipulating tempo, mastering coloratura passages, or producing a powerful belt, the singer becomes the primary architect of the narrative. This recital is a celebration that women have the unique ability to occupy every emotional space; the pragmatic and the romantic, the submissive and the dominant, the feminine and the masculine. In reclaiming these voices, we find that the true power of the female experience lies in the rejection of the binary, recognizing that a woman's autonomy and power is most vibrantly expressed when she expresses the complexity of the "and" rather than the "or".

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