Senior Distinction Recital
Rebecca Williamson, soprano
David Heid, piano

April 9, 2022  2:00pm  Nelson Music Room

From *Don Giovanni*  
Batti, batti, o bel Masetto  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

L'abbandono  
Vanne, o rosa fortunata  
Per pieta bell'idol mio  
Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)

From *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*  
Elle a fui, la tourterelle  
Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Fantoches  
Clair de lune  
Pantomime  
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

The Salley Gardens  
O Waly, Waly  
The Ash Grove  
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

From *Beauty and the Beast*  
A Change in Me  
Alan Menken (b. 1949)
A Brief Introduction to *Commedia dell’arte*

*Commedia dell’arte* (“art comedy”) originated in Italy in the early 16th century. The term *commedia dell’arte* describes a dramatic tradition involving the improvisation of dialogue around pre-prescribed character types (“stock characters”) and plot outlines (“scenarios”). These scenarios were created by the acting companies and, for the first hundred or so years that *Commedia* was prominent, orally passed down from older members to younger members. It was only in the early seventeenth century that many of these scenarios were written down and published; *Commedia*, therefore, was largely shaped by memorable plot tropes and the oral tradition of storytelling.

A significant portion of the music featured in this recital calls upon the *Commedia* tradition. The three featured Debussy pieces (*Fantoches*, *Clair de Lune*, and *Pantomime*, all from Debussy’s *Fêtes galantes* song cycle) are settings of poems written by Paul Verlaine that utilize *Commedia* characters and situations. By doing so, Verlaine is capitalizing on the familiarity of audiences with the stock characters to form a universal language; Verlaine writes this poetry at a very tumultuous time in his life, and he communicates his personal sentiments in *Fêtes galantes* using the language of *Commedia*. Another featured piece, *Batti batti o bel Masetto* (from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*) features reimaginations of two famous *Commedia* masks (the *innamorati*) in Zerlina and Masetto. Mozart built many of his operas, including *Don Giovanni*, using *Commedia* – the proven success of the *Commedia* formula catapulted Mozart’s operas into almost instantaneous fame at the time of their publication.

From Cirque du Soleil to Disney Channel television tropes, many facets of modern culture can be traced back to commedia dell’arte. *Commedia* is particularly notable due to its lasting presence over time and adaptability to evolving cultural trends; no other theatrical form has enjoyed the staying power that *Commedia* has seen. Commedia provides exemplary ways for actors to innovate, push boundaries, and make poignant commentary on the society in which they live -in short, it is highly unlikely that society will stumble upon an art form this influential and adaptable ever again.

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Rebecca (“Becca”) Williamson is a senior hailing from Sterling, Virginia. She is graduating from Duke this spring with a major in English and minors in Economics and Music. Aside from her six semesters of classical voice study, her other musical involvements on campus include: Out of the Blue (President), A Cappella Council (President), Hoof ‘n’ Horn (cast member), and Duke Opera Theater (cast member). When she isn’t at rehearsal, you can find her singing the National Anthem at Duke varsity sporting events, including men’s and women’s basketball, men’s baseball, men’s lacrosse, and women’s volleyball. After graduation, Rebecca will be staying in Durham and working for DUMAC, Duke’s endowment fund, on their Investment team.