

From Celestial Seats Descending from *Hercules*

Inspired by the ninth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Handel's *Hercules* is a masterpiece of his later output, blending the grandeur of opera with the dramatic depth of oratorio. Written for the 1744–45 season as a secular counterpart to his sacred drama *Belshazzar*, *Hercules* explores the destructive power of jealousy with exceptional emotional intensity. The story centers on Dejanira, who, stricken with suspicion and jealousy upon her husband Hercules' return with the beautiful captive Iole, unwittingly causes his death by gifting him a poisoned ceremonial robe. As Hercules ascends to Olympus in immortality, Dejanira descends into madness, consumed by guilt. Amidst this tragic tale, Handel's music shines with extraordinary brilliance, especially in the complex portrayal of Dejanira, one of his most powerfully drawn roles. In Act II, Hercules' son Hyllus expresses his sorrow in the aria "From Celestial Seats Descending," following Iole's rejection of his love. This tender moment of vulnerability stands in stark contrast to the drama's broader themes of power and jealousy, demonstrating Handel's unmatched ability to weave human emotion into mythological grandeur.

Jacques Leguerney was a French composer whose music is full of character and vitality. He was too young to be a member of Les Six and was forced to go into business to support his family. Most of his sixty-eight mélodies were composed and published from 1940 to 1964. He was largely self-educated in music and was championed by Gérard Souzay and his sister Geneviève Touraine who left some superb recordings of his work. He turns to sixteenth-century poetry, which is colored by the era of Pierre Ronsard. His most important set of songs are the Poèmes de la Pléiade of which these songs belong. His later songs have been compared to those of Poulenc timbre, rhythmic structures, and text setting. However, with a closer look Leguerney's songs have a color and energy of their own. It is safe to say that his songs are largely neglected and his great misfortune was working during the same period as Francis Poulenc.

Je vous envoie/I send you

I send you a bouquet which my own hand
Has just selected from those open blooms
Which, had it not cut them this evening,
Would have fallen to earth tomorrow.
Let that be a clear example to you
That your beauty, though in its flower now,
In a short while will be withered away
And like the flowers will perish all of a sudden.
Time runs away, Time runs away my Lady -
Alas time does not go away but we, we do
And soon we'll be stretched under its knife,
And this love of which we are speaking
When we are dead will be no longer new.
So, love me, even though you are beautiful.

Je me lamente/I mourn

I mourn without being comforted
Remembering this death
That robbed me of my life's pleasure
Thinking of those eyes that were satisfied
To do with me what they wanted
I have no more desire to live
Alas where is this beauty
This springtime this newness
That will never have an equal,
From heaven she had all these gifts
Such perfection was not meant
To remain a long time in this world
May you live near God
Or in the Elysian Fields, farewell
Farewell a hundred times, farewell Marie

Ronsard never will forget you
Never will death untie
The knot that ties me to your beauty.

Genièvres hérissés/Bristling junipers

Bristling junipers and you prickly holly
One the guest of deserts, the other of the copse;
Ivy, the carpet of a fine wild cave
And springs which bubble from sandy roots
You wood-pigeons who relish your kisses
You doves who lament in eternal widowhood
Warbling nightingales who in your charming language
Sing night and day your poems of love
You red-throated swallows from foreign lands:
If any of you see my nymph go out this spring
To cut flowers among this new growth,
Tell her for nothing that I am awaiting her notice
And that, rather than suffer the pain that I have for her,
I would rather die than pine away for so long.

Bel aubépin/Beautiful hawthorn

Beautiful hawthorn becoming green
Flowering
Along this beautiful riverbank,
You are clad to the ends
Of your arms
With a wild climbing vine
The nice little nightingale
Young
With its dearly beloved
In order to fulfill his love
Comes to live

Every year in your arbor
Now, live noble hawthorn,
Live forever,
Live, so that neither thunder
Nor a hatchet nor the wind
Nor the weather
Can fling you to the earth.

Si mille oeillet/If a thousand pinks

If I embrace a thousand pinks or a thousand lilies,
Twisting them all around my arms
Tighter than a vine which in amorous style
Entwines its beloved branch in a thousand curves;

If care no longer jaundices my face,
If pleasure chooses to stay with me,
If I prefer the shadows to the day,
My divine dream, that comes from your favour.

Following you I shall fly to the heavens;
But this image which swims before my eyes
Always deceives my exhausted joy;

And then you flee from me in the midst of my happiness,
Like a flash of lightning which ends in nothing,
Or like a cloud which disappears in the breeze.

Three Songs on Poetry by Mihai Eminescu

Mihai Eminescu is considered the greatest and most influential Romanian poet. A representative of the Romantic literary movement, his works feature a wide range of themes, from nature, to love (often times unrequited love), history, and social commentary. The three songs performed today feature texts from poems that are unrelated and written at different times, but nonetheless illustrate the above-mentioned themes. The atmospheric opening song, “Somnoroase Pasarele” (Sleepy Birds) paints the image of a forest at night time – the voice serves as narrator, while the piano creates bird-like effects throughout the work. The passionate second song represents a cry for one’s lost love, and the constant reminder of what could have been. The last song is both introspective and tragic: it tells the story of a life gone by, of metamorphosis from youthful innocence to adult melancholy. In a sense, both the text and the song exemplify the life of the poet himself, who accomplished a great deal artistically and socially, but died tragically at a young age after a very trying existence.

Somnoroase Pasarele/Sleepy Birds

Drowsy birds even gliding
Round about their nest alight
in among the branches hiding
Dear good night

Silence through the forest creeping
Lula be the river sighs
In the garden flowers sleeping
Sleep in peace

Glides the swan among the bushes
To its rest where moonlight gleams
And the angels whisper hushes
Peaceful Sleep

O’er the sky stars without number
Raises up the proud moon
All is harmony and slumber
Good night, good night

Si Daca/And If

And if the branches tap my pane
And poplars whisper nightly
It is to make me dream again
And hold you to me tightly

And if the stars shine on the pond

And light the somber shoal
It is to quench my heart despond
And flood with peace my soul

And if the clouds their tresses part
And does the moon out blaze
It is but to remind my heart
I long for you always

Trcut-au Anii/The Years Have Passed

The years have passed like clouds across the dale
And never ever will return again
For they no longer move me as the lore
Of legends, songs, and mystical fairy tales
Brought yonder to my boyish brow of yore and mystery
Its meaning half unveil.

Your shade falls round me now to no avail
O twilight hour on evening’s secret shore
To tear a sound out of bygone life
To stir oh! Soul your one-time tremors
My hand numb across the lyre slides

As all is lost beneath the youth’s horizon
And mute is tender voice of bygone days
While time rolls up behind me
It gets dark

Franz Schubert wrote over 600 songs and set the texts of approximately ninety poets. His songs develop and anticipate every formal structure including strophic, strophic variation, through-composed, and declamatory. His songs explored the many possibilities of style and structure. In Schubert's songs the piano is an active supporter of the voice creating atmosphere and even commenting on the text. *Seligkeit* is a strophic song with a text by Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty. Its sweeping lines and wonderful text setting make it quite enjoyable. *Im Abendrot* comments on the beauty of the world when the Father's light shines down upon it. It is hymn like in nature giving the song a reflective quality. Schubert sets the text of Karl Lappe beautiful in this song. *Der Musensohn* is the classic Schubert song. Schubert masterfully sets Goethe's poem in 1822 after a twelve month break from setting the poets works. Its exuberant setting brings the text to life with its oscillating meter and contrasting keys.

Seligkeit/Bliss

Joys without number
Bloom in the halls of Heaven
For angels and transfigured souls,
As our fathers taught us.
How I'd love to be there
And rejoice eternally!

A heavenly bride smiles
Sweetly on everyone;
Harp and psalter resound,
And there's dancing and singing.
How I'd love to be there
And rejoice eternally!

I'd sooner stay here
If Laura smiles on me
With a look that says
I've to grieve no more.
Blissfully then with her
I'd stay forever here!

Im Abendrot/In the glow of the evening

How lovely is your world,
Father, in its golden radiance
when your glory descends
and paints the dust with glitter;
when the red light that shines from the clouds
falls silently upon my window.

Could I complain? Could I be apprehensive?
Could I lose faith in you and in myself?
No, I already bear your heaven
here within my heart.
And this heart, before it breaks,
still drinks in the fire and savours the light.

Der Musensohn/The son of the muses

Roaming through field and wood,
whistling my song,
thus I go from place to place!
And all keep time with me,
and all move
in measure with me.

I can scarcely wait for them,
the first flower in the garden,
the first blossom on the tree.
They greet my songs,
and when winter returns
I am still singing my dream of them.

I sing it far and wide,
the length and breadth of the ice.
Then winter blooms in beauty!
This blossom, too, vanishes,
and new joys are found
on the cultivated hillsides.

For when, by the linden tree,
I come upon young folk,
I at once stir them.
The dull lad puffs himself up,
the demure girl whirls
in time to my tune.

You give my feet wings,
and drive your favourite over hill and dale,
far from home.
Dear, gracious Muses,
when shall I at last find rest again
on her bosom?

Juliana Hall is an acclaimed American composer who focuses on art songs, creating music that beautifully blends expressive melodies with thoughtful artistry. Her more than 60 vocal works, including song cycles and monodramas, are known for their ability to bring poetry to life through music. After earning her master's degree at the Yale School of Music, she studied with the renowned composer Dominick Argento, launching a career that has seen her music performed in prestigious venues like Carnegie Hall and Wigmore Hall. Hall's songs are beloved by singers and audiences alike for their lyrical beauty, emotional depth, and connection to text. Through her music, she shares stories and emotions, making poetry and music a vivid, moving experience for all who listen.

Piano Lessons is a song cycle for tenor and piano that is set to the poetry of Billy Collins. The poems offer a whimsical view on taking piano lessons from several different perspectives. Hall creatively sets the texts of these poems weaving together the vocal line and piano accompaniment creating a colorful world. Piano Lessons was composed in 2018 and premiered at Lyric Fest in 2021.

Performer Bios

Zane Lynn is a versatile tenor with extensive performance experience in opera, concerts, and recitals. Some performance highlights include Fernando in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the Portland Opera Workshop, Herr Vogelsang in Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Mayor Upfold in Britten's *Albert Herring*, and the Evangelist in *The Life of Christ as Told through the Music of J.S. Bach* at Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN. He also performed as Marcellus in the world and European premiere productions of Nancy Van de Vate's *Hamlet* with the Moravian Philharmonic.

In addition to his performance career, Zane is a dedicated voice instructor at Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, MS. He previously taught at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, where he directed choirs, led a music theatre workshop, and instructed courses in voice and music theory.

A proud alumnus of Mississippi University for Women, Zane holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Education and earned his Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Mississippi. With a passion for both performance and teaching, he strives to inspire students while sharing his love for music.

Dr. William Reber is Choral Director at The W. He is Professor Emeritus of Opera and Music Theatre at Arizona State University where he was on the faculty for 24 years and served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Lyric Opera Theatre. He has been vocal coach, collaborative pianist, and conductor for the *Mittelsächsisches Theater* in Germany. Former Director of the 17th Air Force Men's Chorus in Germany, he was head of the vocal coaching program for the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria (1993-2004), and was Music Director of the German Opera Experience/German Singer Summer in Freiberg, Germany (2008-2017). In the summer of 2019, joined the faculty of Spotlight on Opera as conductor and collaborative pianist.

In addition to conducting symphony and chamber orchestra concerts in the United States and Europe, he has served as Music Director/Conductor for more than 150 productions of operas and musicals and has been conductor of the Corpus Christi (TX) ballet for 33 years.

As a collaborative pianist, he has performed recitals with singers and instrumentalists in Germany, Austria, Macedonia and throughout the United States. He is the pianist and music director for the annual *AIDS Quilt Songbook* benefit performances in Phoenix, AZ. Dr. Reber earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Opera and Conducting at The University of Texas at Austin under Walter Ducloux.

Pianist and composer **Valentin Mihai Bogdan** serves as Professor of Music at Mississippi University for Women. His compositions were performed internationally at the Assisi Festival of Performing Arts (Italy), Moscow Composers' House (Moscow, Russia), Prokofiev Museum (Moscow, Russia), Spectrum Festival (Kazan, Russia), Sala Patria (Brasov, Romanian), Transilvania University Concert Series (Romania). In the US, some of most significant performances are at Festival Miami, Music at MOCA Concert Series, 2017 International Trumpet Guild Conference, the Oregon Bach Festival, and at new music concerts hosted the College Music Society, NACUSA, the Society of Composers Inc. He has fulfilled commissions by trumpet virtuosos James Zingara, Randall Sorensen, the University of Alabama Birmingham Trumpet Ensemble, the Starkville-MSU Symphony, the AWC Concert Band, and Dranoff Two Piano Foundation of Miami. He is a two time winner of an Artist Fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission (2018 and 2024). Valentin was named the 2010 Florida State Music Teachers Association commissioned composer of the year, and the 2015 Mississippi Music Teachers Association commissioned composer. As a pianist, he has won awards at national and international competitions, and he has performed in Europe, Asia, and North America, including France, England, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Jordan, Canada, and the US. He is a graduate of Wayne State University, Michigan State University and University of Miami, with degrees in piano and music composition.