Preparing for the Recital:
More than Just Singing

This recital was completed for partial fulfillment of the bachelor of music education degree. I chose most of the pieces for the recital by listening to them, studying the text, considering a variety of style periods, languages, tempi and moods. I researched each composer using various sources such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias* and various online sources. In preparation for the recital, I also memorized poetic translations, which are included with the program, for each selection in a foreign language. In addition, I practiced six days a week for an hour to an hour and a half and participated in vocal lessons with Dr. Sonya G. Baker, assistant professor of voice in the music department.

ABSTRACT

Sonya Gabrielle Baker, a member of the music faculty at Murray State University, has been heard in concert both nationally and internationally, including recent appearances in Canterbury Cathedral in England, Carnegie Hall in New York City, and her city of residence, Murray, Ky. Her debut recording, *She Says*, featuring art songs of American women composers, was released in October 2004. Highlights of Baker’s operatic roles include Elisabetta in Verdi’s *Don Carlo*, Donna Anna in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, Monisha in Joplin’s *Treemonisha*, and the title role in the U.S. premiere of Mascagni’s *Pinotta*. Along with a doctor of music from Florida State University, Baker holds a master of music degree from Indiana University and a bachelor of arts in American Studies from Yale University.

Rebecca Garmon
Class: Senior
Major: Music

Rebecca Gannon, originally from Bowling Green, Ky., began piano lessons at an early age and continued through high school. While in high school, she participated as a flutist in the marching band, concert band and the choir programs. In the fall of 2001 she began her college career at Murray State University in music education with a vocal emphasis. While at Murray State, Rebecca has participated in two Campus Lights musicals, concert choir, university chorale, chamber singers and has sung two recitals. She has also been a student ambassador for the music department for the previous two years. She plans to student teach in the spring of 2006, and then either teach music or pursue a master’s degree.

FACULTY MENTOR

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Most people come to a recital or musical performance and see the singers and instrumentalists singing and playing. They watch the musicians have fun and present a quality product that seems effortless; however, what the audience does not see is all of the time spent in preparation for those recitals. Singers engage in a process of learning, and the recital is simply the end product and the rewarding end result. In preparation for my voice recital, I chose music, I researched every composer and librettist, went through a process of learning each piece, and performed each piece during studio class as much as possible.

Typically, standard vocal recitals include selections in four languages (Italian, French, German and English), tempos and subject matters. The groups are usually sung in chronological order according to the dates of the composers, and the groups offer a variety of musical style periods. The program often begins with selections from the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Italian songs or arias, or even selections by Baroque English composers such as Henry Purcell. The standard recital would then include some German Lieder (German songs such as an accompanied art song) and French mélodies (French art songs with accompaniment). The second half of the recital would likely include a group of songs from the 20th century, perhaps a fifth language, and, in this country, the recital usually ends with an American group. This type of recital provides variety within unity and is very suitable for young singers since they have spent most of their time training their voices in the various languages and style periods. It would not be suitable for young singers to attempt a specialized program such as an all French Romantic program without having performed several standard recitals first.

I began choosing music for my senior recital during the last semester of my junior year with Dr. Sonya Baker. Baker made some suggestions of composers and songs for my lyric-coloratura voice type. The next step was to find the music, listen to it, and begin to choose music which appealed to me and followed the guidelines set above. I also had to calculate with a stopwatch and metronome the length of each selection so that the entire program would run about 50 minutes, the time for a full recital here at Murray State University.

The first selections I chose were the French ones by Cécile Chaminade because they were extremely challenging, due to their having a variety of subject matters and tempos. At about the same time, I chose the Rodrigo pieces; they were conceived together as a set of songs. I chose them not only because they were in Spanish, a new language for me, but also because they had a completely different harmonic sound. (All of these pieces are discussed in context in the supplementary material for each group of songs and composers.) The next piece I decided upon was the doll’s aria from Les Contes d’Hoffman. This piece offered variety to the program and required a great deal of acting on stage in order to imitate a mechanical doll. Next I chose the German songs by Hugo Wolf. Since these selections did not come as a set of songs, I had many more from which to choose. I selected songs I liked while also considering various tempos. The first song was faster while the second had an extremely slow tempo; the third song had a bouncy tempo and articulation (how the performer attacks each note), and the closing selection was slow and dramatic. The next pieces I chose were those by John Dowland. Originally accompanied by a Renaissance string instrument called the lute, I substituted guitar accompaniment. Since very few people are trained in the lute today, this substitution is commonplace. Dowland songs also require me to sing in the Renaissance style with more straight tone rather than natural, free vibrato. These songs demonstrated my ability to sing in different style periods. The last pieces to be chosen were the Cole Porter musical theater pieces. I wanted the end of my recital to be fun, exciting, and the pieces needed to be from the 20th century in order to have covered all of the style periods. I chose songs from different musicals all in various stages of their relationships. “Red, Hot, and Blue” was the flashiest of the Porter songs and would, therefore, provide the best “closer” for the program.

After choosing the music, each singer must go through the process of learning the music. This does not mean simply learning the notes and rhythms, but also memorizing translations, researching the composers, poets and librettists, and, most importantly, refining one’s interpretation. The process I go through in order to learn each piece begins with researching information on each composer, poet and/or librettist, and any other pertinent information about the songs or arias. If the selection is excerpted from an opera, I read a
PROGRAM OF REBECCA SHERRYL GARMON, soprano

Emily J. Trantham, piano          Ben Rice, acoustic guitar

Price Doyle Fine Arts Building • Performing Arts Hall
Sunday, April 10, 2005, 3:30 p.m.

My thoughts are wing’d with hopes .................................................. John Dowland
(1563-1626)
Flow, my tears
Come away, come sweet love
Click here for audio.

Villanelle .................................................. Cécile Chaminade
(1857-1944)
Viens, mon-bien aimé!
Aubade
L’Été
Click here for audio.

Fu_reise .................................................. Hugo Wolf
(1860-1903)
Verschwiegene Liebe
Der Gärtner
Verborgenheit
Click here for audio.

From Les Contes d’Hoffman .................................................. Jacques Offenbach
(1819-1880)
“Les oiseaux dans la charmille …”
Click here for audio.

Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios .................................................. Joaquin Rodrigo
(1901-1999)
¿Con que la lavare?
Vos me matasteis
¿De donde venis, amore?
De los alamos vengo, madre
Click here for audio.

From Anything Goes .................................................. Cole Porter
(1891-1964)
You’re the Top
From You Never Know
What Shall I Do?
From Red, Hot, and Blue
Red, Hot, and Blue
Click here for audio.
synopsis of the opera, and usually try to find a video so that I can watch the opera performed in its entirety. The next step is to translate each word and write the translations into the music. Along with this step, I also find or devise a poetic translation and memorize it. Poetic translations make more sense to memorize because they are written in poem form and make more sense than a word-for-word translation. After the preliminary work, I start by speaking the text of the selection in rhythm. I learn the notes soon after at the piano. After I have learned all the rhythms, translations and notes, I practice with my accompanist on a weekly basis, not only reviewing notes and rhythms, but discussing the meaning of the text and the expression of the character. I also work on the interpretation alone in the practice room during my daily practice time.

Because the Rodrigo selections varied a bit from “standard repertoire,” I had additional work to do. I consulted with a Spanish major at Murray State University, who coached me on the language so that my diction would be more authentic. This enabled me to focus on the interpretation of the songs and not merely the pronunciation of the Spanish. In order to better understand the poetry and compositional style, I searched for further information. There is currently only one book that discusses these particular pieces, A Singer’s Guide to the Songs of Joaquin Rodrigo by Suzanne Rhodes Draayer. This book contains poetic translations with explanatory notes as well as a detailed historical account of the composer. I found it valuable because it provided insight into the poetry that I could not have understood on my own and also made my interpretations clearer for performance.

In conclusion, the process of learning a recital is extremely complex and time consuming, but it is time well spent. Most of what the audience sees and hears is the result of several layers of research and analysis. For the performance, the process leading up to the recital is the most important work. If the singer fails to complete this process, he or she only makes the work of the actual recital more difficult and often misses the fun of performing. This process is usually an everyday event for singers who are preparing for any type of performance. Sometimes, it is an enjoyable process, and sometimes not; however, the reward lies at the end—a well-done performance.
**Fu_reise**
*(Journey on Foot)*
When, with fresh-cut stick,
at early morn.
I walk in the woods,
up hill and down:
Then, like the small bird in the trees,
singing and stirring,
or the golden grape
sensing the spirits of delight
in the first morning sun,
my dear old Adam feels
autumn- and spring-fever too,
God-hearted,
ever -foolishly wasted
first-delight-of-paradise.

So you are not so bad, old
Adam, as hard as preceptors say:
but keep on loving and lauding,
singing and extolling,
as if each were a new day of Creation,
your dear Creator and Keeper.

Would he grant it be so,
and my whole life
were the gentle sweat
of just such a morning journey!

**Verschwiegene Liebe**
*(Silent Love)*
Over trees and corn
into the gleam—
who may guess them,
retrieve them?
Thoughts go swaying,
the night is silent,
thoughts are free.

One alone guesses
who has thought of her,
as the woods murmur,
when no one keeps watch,
but the clouds that fly—
My love is silent
and beautiful as the night!

**Der Gärtner**
*(The Gardener)*
On her favorite mount
as white as snow,
the fairest princess
rides through the avenue.

The path where her steed
so delightfully prances,
the sand that I strewed,
it sparkles like gold.

Little pink hat,
bobbing up, bobbing down,
oh, throw a feather
secretly down!

If you, in return,
want a flower from me,
for one, take a thousand,
for one, take all!

**Verborgenheit**
*(Obscurity)*
Leave, oh world, oh, leave me be!
'tempt me not with gifts of love,
leave this heart to have alone
its bliss, its agony!

Why I grieve, I do not know,
my grief is unknown grief,
All the time I see through the tears
the sun’s delightful light.

Often, scarce aware am I,
Pure joy flashes
through the oppressive heaviness
-- flashes blissful in my heart.

**Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios**
*Con que la lavare?*
*(With what shall I wash?)*
With what shall I wash
the skin of my face?
With what shall I wash it?
I live in such sorrow.
Married women wash in lemon water:
In my grief I wash
in pain and sorrow.

**Vos me matasteis**
*(You killed me)*
You killed me,
girl with hair hanging loose,
you have slain me.
By the river bank
I saw a young maiden.
Girl with hair hanging loose,
you have slain me.
Girl with hair hanging loose,
you have killed me,
you have slain me.

**¿De donde venis, amore?**
*(From where have you come, my lover?)*
From where have you come, my lover?
I have been a witness.
Where have you been, my love?
I know well where.
Where have you been, my friend?
Were I a witness, ah!
I know well where!

**De los alamos vengo, madre**
*(I come from the poplars, mother)*
I come from the poplars, mother,
from seeing the breezes stir them,
from the poplars of Seville,
from seeing my sweet love,
from seeing the breezes stir them.
I come from the poplars, mother,
from seeing the breezes stir them,
from the poplars of Seville,
from seeing my sweet love.

**From Les Contes d’Hoffman**
*“Les oiseaux dans la charmille”*
In this scene, two toymakers are throwing
a party to show off their latest creation,
Olympia, a singing, mechanical doll. Hoffman
is in attendance at this social event, and as
Olympia sings, he begins to fall in love with
her.

The birds in the bower,
the sun in the skies,
everything speaks to the young girl of love.
Ah! That is the nice song,
the song of Olympia.

Everything that sings and resounds,
and in turn sighs,
moves her heart which trembles with love.
Ah! Everything speaks of love.
Ah! That is the cute song,
the song of Olympia.
### COMPOSERS

**John Dowland** (1563-1626) was an English composer and lutenist in the latter 1500s and early 1600s. According to *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, he wrote three collections of airs, the first in 1597, the second in 1600, and the third in 1603. His song “Flow My Tears” was one of the most famous songs throughout Europe (Kuhn 1999). The songs included in the recital are taken from the first two collections of airs originally written with lute accompaniment. The Renaissance style uses mostly straight tone and has a lighter vocal quality, as opposed to the fuller, richer sound of the voice required for performing work of the Romantic style period, such as the Hugo Wolf or Jacques Offenbach pieces. For of the lutenists, I substituted an acoustic guitarist, but the guitarist still used all of the same musical style characteristics of the lute.

**Cécile Chaminade** (1857-1944) was a French composer and pianist who wrote 400 piano and vocal works combined. According to Marcia S. Citron, she began composing in the early 1880s and studied privately with faculty at the Paris Conservatory. Chaminade helped to promote sales by touring extensively throughout Europe and the U.S. Even though she was a brilliant composer and musician, critics denounced her music because she was a woman; this criticism soon led to the decline of her popularity (Citron 1999). The selections from the recital were chosen from a collection of *Six Mélodies*.

**Hugo Wolf** (1860-1903) was an Austrian composer, pianist and violinist. He modeled much of his early music after Richard Wagner and greatly esteemed Franz Liszt. He spent much of his time teaching in Vienna, and also was Kapellmeister in Salzburg for a short time. After leaving behind a career in criticism, Wolf began composing again. He set many poems of Goethe, Mörike and von Eichendorff to music (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Wolf#Biography). The selections in this program are from the Mörike and von Eichendorff *lieder*.

**Jacques Offenbach** (1819-1880) was a German composer who decided to move to Paris and learn to play the cello. He later became the conductor of the *Théâtre Français*. His successful career was mostly devoted to composing operetta and opera comiques. *Les Contes d’Hoffman* was his last opera, left unfinished at his death. Offenbach’s friend, Ernest Guiraud, completed the work for him, and it premiered in Paris, France, in 1881. (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Offenbach#Biography).

**Joaquin Rodrigo** (1901-1999), a Spanish composer, had a successful career as a musician despite his blindness since the age of 3. He moved to Paris in 1927 to study at the *Conservatoire* and the *Sorbonne*. Later, Rodrigo was active as a music critic and wrote for several newspapers. In 1947, he was appointed as the Manuel de Falla chair of music at Complutense University in Madrid. As a composer and teacher, Rodrigo received many awards such as *Legion d’Honneur* (1963), member of Academie Royale des Sciences, Spanish National Award for Music (1982), and received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Salamanca, Southern California, Universidad Politencia de Valencia, and University of Alicante and Madrid. *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios* were written for four vocal students of Lola Rodriguez Aragon, a teacher in Spain. Rodrigo used baroque-style terraced dynamics in these pieces with few written crescendo. The final song is flamboyant in its use of guitar-like, strumming patterns in the piano accompaniment (Draayer, 1999).

**Cole Porter** (1891-1964) was an American composer, pianist and violinist who came from a prestigious family. While attending Yale University, he wrote a number of musicals and songs for the Yale Glee Club. At his grandfather’s request, Porter attended Harvard law school, but never finished; instead, he decided to pursue a music career in New York City. Later in his life, Porter suffered a horse riding accident, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down (http://www.coleporter.org/bio.html). Porter is most noted for his clever lyrics and catchy melodies. Some of his most famous musicals were *Anything Goes* and *Kiss Me Kate*.
References


