A SURVEY OF TRAGIC LOVE IN VOCAL REPERTOIRE FOR THE LYRIC SOPRANO

by

JESSICA LUCZAK

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Major Professor
Dr. Patricia Thompson

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Abstract

This report contains biographical, historical, and analytical commentary on the following composers and their pieces for soprano voice: Henry Purcell and *The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*; Franz Schubert and *Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, Op. 62, D. 877*; Jacques Offenbach and *Les oiseaux dans la charmille,* from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; Libby Larsen and *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*; Charles Gounod and *Ah! Je veux vivre,* from *Roméo et Juliette*. These selections, unified by the theme of tragedy in various forms of love, were presented in a graduate recital in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy degree.

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Preface

The research for this report is intended as a performance aid in the form of extended program notes. The theme of tragedy in various forms of love was initially used for the purpose of unifying the pieces selected for the recital; however, after choosing the pieces and compiling each composer's biographical information, it became apparent that tragedy in love is a recurring theme, not only in music, but in life. In the case of the composers discussed in this report, all but one had experienced a significant amount of tragedy in his life. This realization guided my research to acquire a better understanding of the intricate relationship between each composer's life experience and his music. The conclusion that I have found in this research is that composers may be drawn to certain texts because of their shared personal experience. Likewise, singers may be drawn to certain songs because they recognize the composer's deep understanding of the textual situation through the musical setting and, through that portrayal, are better equipped to feel and emulate that situation. This relationship between personal experience and portrayed experience increases the power of the message as understanding is established and reiterated with a new level of personal reality. Beyond the production, audience members will also find a connection to and empathize with the characters whether they have actually experienced that form of tragedy. It is the human condition to seek out love, whether it be romantic, familial, or friendly. Though we may not have experienced tragedy, we understand how devastating the loss of love could be and, in that sense, have a deeply ingrained reaction to empathize with those who have experienced tragedy. Our understanding of love and the tragedy that can occur because of it is what makes this theme so powerful and so common in music.

CHAPTER 1 - Tell Me Some Pitying Angel: The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Henry Purcell's brief life of thirty-six years was an amalgam of political interference, personal tragedy, and perseverance. Under the reign of three different kings, Purcell struggled to maintain his position as court musician and provide for his family. In a time of war and disease, he saw poverty and plague and experienced the death of multiple family members. He was steadfast in his music, holding numerous positions and working himself to a point of exhaustion that would eventually lead to his demise. Despite these setbacks, Purcell was an established musician and composer, and contributed to the rebirth of English music, becoming the leading composer of seventeenth century London.

Henry Purcell's life began in tragedy, yet this tragedy would lead him to the path of becoming a court musician. Henry Purcell was born September 10, 1659 just after the Civil War and just before the reign of King Charles II and the Restoration. This was a time of insecurity for most of London. While over sixty percent of the population was left in poverty from the war, Purcell was born into a family with a secure income, though their comfortable lifestyle did not last. At the young age of five, Henry Purcell and his family were thrown into poverty when the bubonic plague swept through London and took Purcell's father. His mother struggled to provide for her six children on the meager widow's pension, but when Thomas Purcell, Henry Purcell's uncle, stepped in to help support his brother's children financially, everything changed for the family, especially for Henry.

After the Civil War, the vestiges of English music and artistic culture were of little consequence, yet Henry Purcell's uncle saw his nephew's potential and urged him to become a court musician. Until King Charles II took the throne in 1661, music was banned under the puritanical rule of the Oliver Cromwell Commonwealth.[1] England was slow to come out of its artistic repression, leaving English music underdeveloped compared to the music of other

[1] Jonathan P. Wainwright, "Purcell and the English Baroque," in *The Purcell Companion*, edited by Michael Burden, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 48.

nations. Thomas Purcell was aware of the state of English music, but when he noticed some early signs of young Henry's musical talent, he knew he had to help him enter the musical world. In 1668 he helped Purcell gain admittance into the prestigious Chapel Royal as one of the 12 boy choristers.[2] Purcell loved his new responsibilities as a chorister, which included learning the keyboard, violin, and theory, but when his voice broke in 1673, he could no longer perform. At this point, Purcell decided to remain with the Chapel Royal and took on the position of assistant to the Keeper and Tuner of the King's Instruments.[3] While Henry Purcell developed his skills in keeping instruments at the Chapel Royal, King Charles II was working to restore the English court in the example of the lavish French court of Louis XIV. This inspired the appointments of over fifty new court musicians in 1860, one of which was Henry Purcell.

While Henry Purcell thrived in the musical spotlight, he struggled with family tragedy and an unstable position in court. Soon after his appointment as court musician, Henry Purcell married Frances Peters. They immediately had a child, but lost him after just a few weeks. They would lose two more infants before finally having a daughter and a son. In 1682, Purcell also received the news that his uncle Thomas, the man who nurtured his musical talent and filled his father's role from the age of five, had died. To cope with these tragedies, Purcell dove into composition. While dealing with the tragic loss of his children and uncle, and while starting a new family, Purcell began to feel the effects of King Charles II's lavish spending for his "French" court. As the royal money funded more events and hired more artists, the court musicians already in hire were paid less often or not at all. While he held other positions such as organist at the Chapel Royal and Keeper of the Royal Instruments, Purcell struggled to provide for his family.

When King James II succeeded King Charles II in 1685[4], Henry Purcell had high hopes that he would find more stability in his court position, but his position grew even more precarious. Through King Charles II, English music had experienced a rebirth, but when King James took the throne, he diminished the role of music in the court, bringing its evolution to a halt. Though he retained some of the late King Charles II's appointments, he cut down on royal expenditures by dismissing many of the court musicians. Henry Purcell retained his appointment, though he continued to be underpaid. He, like most other musicians during this time, had to

[2] Andrew Pinnock, "The Purcell Phenomenon," in *The Purcell Companion*, edited by Michael Burden, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 3.
[3] Simon S. Heighes, "Henry Purcell," *BBC Music Magazine* 17.7 (2009), p. 48.
[4] Robert King, *Henry Purcell*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994), p. 117.

supplement his income by teaching privately and becoming a freelance composer. Purcell's position as organist at the Chapel Royale was also in peril since the new, Catholic monarch arrived. Under King James II, the Anglican Church was greatly diminished and replaced with the new Roman Catholic chapel. Italian music, composers, and musicians were brought into England on appointment to prepare for the new services while the Anglican church and its musicians struggled to survive. As the role of the Anglican Church diminished, Purcell's music moved away from sacred works for the church or chamber music for the court and toward developing his new style, the devotional song, such as *the Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*.

After years of struggling under inadequate monarchs Purcell decided to spend his final years solely as a freelance musician and composer. In 1689 King James II fled England under the invasion of William of Orange.[5] Though the new King William was Protestant, little improved for the musical situation in the Anglican Church. Purcell continued to support his small family with freelance work, teaching, publishing scores, holding public concerts, and composing for the commercial stage. He worked constantly into all hours of the day and night which eventually took its toll on his life. In 1695, after nearly six years of his sleepless lifestyle, Henry Purcell fell ill of pneumonia.[6] He died in his home in Dean's Yard, Westminster on November 21, 1695.

Henry Purcell is remembered today, not for his personal tragedies and life-long struggle for his career, but for the mark he left on seventeenth century English music. He held many prestigious positions in court and in the Anglican Church and gained musical fame early in his career. Despite the constant battle with unstable income and family disaster, Henry Purcell continued to work diligently toward bettering his family, his music, and the music of England as a whole. Today he is remembered as one of the greatest English composers in history.

[5] Robert King, *Henry Purcell*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994), p. 165.
[6] Simon S. Heighes, "Henry Purcell," *BBC Music Magazine* 17.7 (2009), p. 50.

Figure 1.1 An engraving of Henry Purcell

Stylistic Characteristics of Henry Purcell's Music

Henry Purcell was the greatest English composer of his time. His musical style shows a direct influence from the social and political climate of seventeenth century London, his musical family and early education, his various court appointments, and his church appointments. Despite his renowned English style, his technique actually shows a significant influence from his French and Italian contemporaries. In his time, Henry Purcell composed in all of the current English musical genres and even developed and mastered some that were uniquely his own.

It is in Henry Purcell's early compositions that the more archaic English style is presented. As a young musician Purcell had studied the compositions of early English composers such as Henry Lawes and Matthew Locke, men who had been close friends with Henry Purcell, senior.[7] Much of young Purcell's chamber music, fantasias, and odes displayed the clever counterpoint, lengthy solo sections, and elaborate ornamentation of his predecessors. Purcell's best known songs come from his semi-operas, the new English musical genre specifically created by Purcell.[8] The fully sung Italianate opera was not popular in England until the eighteenth century. Until that time, the semi-opera/dramatick opera developed as a form in which all drama is spoken and the music is mostly incidental for scene changes or as accompaniment for less important characters.

Soon after the Restoration in 1661, the French musical style gained in popularity in England. A chamber group of French musicians, called the French Musick Society, developed to provide employment for French musicians in the English establishment. Two types of songs that

[7] Robert King, *Henry Purcell*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994), p. 20.

[8] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), p. 357.

developed out of this time were the light verse songs and the serious verse songs. The light verse were strophic dance songs, usually set at minuets or gavottes. The music of a light verse was meant to display the text literally, with a correlation between the poetic rhythm and the musical accent-- the line endings conclude with the phrase endings and the rhyme schemes conclude with the cadence points. One of the most popular settings for the light verse was the French *rondeau*. The serious texts were set in a more declamatory style, using a melodic line that closely followed speech inflections, usually in the French *allemande* style. The latter was the most influential for Purcell's later recitative sections of multi-sectional songs, such as *the Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*. As the political relations between France and England grew strained, the French musical influence on English music was replaced with a more Italianate style.

When the Italian musical style came en vogue, Henry Purcell began to explore its potential in his own compositions. The Restoration brought many Italian immigrants since King Charles and King James called for Italian music in their courts. One of the most popular Italian composers in the mid seventeenth century was Giacomo Carissimi, who was renowned for his motets and cantatas. Purcell may have studied Carissimi's work as he transcribed various imported pieces from Italy.[9] Purcell's welcome songs and odes followed the Italian five-part writing style, using contrapuntal movement rather than the French dotted passages. Perhaps one of the greatest influences on Purcell's pieces was the Italianate ground bass. This technique involves a repeated, ostinato-type figure in the bass with a variable vocal line above it. The ground is usually diatonic, using sequences, scalar passages, and most often downward movement. This is used quite often in Purcell's devotional songs.

The genre most unique to Henry Purcell is the devotional, which will be explored in more detail when discussing *Tell Me Some Pitying Angel: the Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*. In the late 1680s, Italian cantata-like pieces began to circulate London. From these pieces, Purcell developed multi-sectional songs based on religious themes, called devotionals. These small-scale works expressed more personal sentiments and were intended for an intimate setting. These usually consisted of a few recitatives broken up between longer arioso sections. The accompaniment was quite small, using a chamber organ, string bass, and theorbo. Perhaps because of Purcell's own experience as a singer, he created beautiful vocal lines, setting the

[9] Johnathan Wainwright, "Purcell and the English Baroque," *The Purcell Companion*, edited by Michael Burden, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 23.

English text in the most natural way. He also had a natural sense for accurately and dramatically depicting a wide array of human emotions, particularly in his recitatives. He took certain liberties with the texts, with repetition, rhythm, accentuation, pitch, and rests, and used text painting to bring out the most dramatic effect. Also unique to Purcell's compositional style was his use of irregular phrase lengths and dotted rhythms, which are both seen in *the Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*.

Considerations for Practice and Performance of The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation

Tell Me Some Pitying Angel: The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation is perhaps one of Henry Purcell's most famous devotional songs. Henry Purcell set Nahum Tate's reworking of St. Luke's gospel, Chapter 2, verses 41 through 52, in 1693 using the latest Italian trend of dividing songs into distinct sections, in this case, five sections, in the Italian cantata style. This song embraces a wide range of emotions through the use of text painting, rhythm, accents, pitch, key centers, and form.

Luke 2: 41-52 tells the story of a trip Mary and twelve-year-old Jesus take to the temple. Nahum Tate picks up the story from the moment that Mary realizes she has lost Jesus and is immediately thrown into a desperate search for her child. At first she cries out for an angel, specifically Gabriel, to tell her where Jesus has gone. Then, as memories of Herod's slaughter of the innocent children come to mind, she begins to worry that perhaps Jesus has fallen into his cruel hands. She cries out to Gabriel, but when she receives no answer, she loses all hope. This desolation is followed up with the light arioso "Me Judah's Daughter," in which she reminisces about how blessed she was to be chosen as Jesus' mother. Immediately at its end, she is drawn back to reality as she begins to realize how important Jesus truly is and how serious it is that she has lost him. She resumes her search in a quicker, more anxious arioso "How Shall My Soul Its Motions Guide?" Finally the most desperate recitative concludes the song as Mary realizes, with agony, that she has lost the most important child ever created.

The first recitative of *the Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*, "Tell Me Some Pitying Angel," portrays Mary as she initially realizes that she has lost Jesus. The piece opens in an outline of a B-flat minor chord with a quickly rising line, showing Mary's panic. The descending leap of a minor sixth on "pitying" in measures 2-3, the drawn out line on "sweet" in measures 6-7, the

angular melisma on "cruel" in measures 10-11, the wandering line on "through" in measures 17-18, the harsh melisma on "tyrant" in measures 24-26, the flowing major melisma on "wondrous" in measures 33-34, the rising line on "hopes" in 52, and the lamenting half steps on "farewell" are all moments of incredible text painting. Purcell's use of rhythm on such words as "quickly" in measure 4, and "no vision" in measures 35-36 show Mary's growing urgency as the time since she last saw Jesus keeps passing. The dotted rhythms and rising line of the "I call" section of this recitative serves as a kind of trumpet call, first stating "I call" five times with moments of contemplation, then just three times as her situation grows ever more urgent. The four cries of "Gabriel" show Mary's panic over a descending ground bass. After modulating a few times, this recitative ends with a sorrowful good-bye to all hope in finding Jesus, back in the key of B-flat minor.

The first arioso, "Me Judah's Daughter" is a momentary relief from the panic Mary initially felt as she recalls the joy and blessing of being chosen to be Jesus' mother. This very short arioso begins in B-flat major with a repetition of the opening irregular five-bar phrase. The dotted rhythms portray Mary's happiness at the thought of her blessed motherhood. This is a short moment of reflection, immediately followed by the even shorter recitative-like passage, "Now Fatal Change," that sets up the following search arioso. As reality once again sets in, Mary's dotted rhythms and use of the descending augmented fourth and fifth on "mothers" portray her sobs. The final word "distressed" uses the Italian *gorgia* ending on a half cadence that leads directly into the search for Jesus in "How Shall My Soul Its Motions Guide."

The second arioso portrays the most urgent moment for Mary as her actual search for Jesus begins. The dotted melisma on "motions" in measures 93-96 and 105-107 and the galloping sixteenth note figures and sequencing on "various" in measures 112-113 and 123-124 and "lab'ring" in measures 115-118 and 126-129 again are moments of text painting. The repetition of the opening line "How shall my soul its motions guide?" in measures 88, 91, 99, and 103, show Mary's increased panic and anxiety as she cannot figure out where to search, almost as if she is hoping for a revelation. The change from B-flat minor to D-flat major in measure 108 and the following struggle between these tonalities show Mary's sudden hope that perhaps her faith will help her find him, while the doubt continues to creep into her mind, ending again in B-flat minor.

The final recitative, "For Whilst of Thy Dear Sight Beguil'd," closes the piece. Though it consists of just a small amount of text, Purcell uses repetition to create a much bigger unit out of a small unit, a practice he was quite fond of and used often in his compositions. The descending interval of the perfect fifth on the first "dear" in measure 131, followed by a reiteration on the interval of a descending minor seventh changes the tonality from major to minor to set up the word "beguil'd" which can have both a positive and deceptively positive connotation. The half steps on the phrase "I trust the God" in measures 133-134 seem almost wary. The uneven, dotted melisma on "but oh" in measures 135-138 is almost a tortured whimper of grief leading up to Mary's final realization of how precious Jesus really is, "I fear the child."

When practicing *Tell Me Some Pitying Angel: The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation* for performance, there are a few concepts to consider. First, Henry Purcell's recitatives show his meticulous care of placing accents, through musical markings, rhythmic choice, and shape and length, to best portray the natural flow of English speech. Unlike many recitatives found in the Baroque style which allow freedom of interpretation to portray the text, Purcell created that portrayal directly in his composition, so it is best to stay as close to his composition as possible. Since the work is presented for voice and figured bass, each performance of this song will be different. Though printed realizations such as the Michael Tippett and Walter Bergmann arrangement exist, it may be better, for learning purposes and to retain the integrity of the song, to use the international version with just the figured bass and vocal line. With a better understanding of the story and anticipation of the musical devices used to portray that story, the performance will be more accurate, more personally involved, and in the end, more rewarding for both the performer and the audience.

CHAPTER 2 - Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, Op. 62, D. 877

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Franz Schubert is revered today as one of the greatest composers of the German Romantic era, yet he never experienced that reverence in his lifetime. Throughout his entire existence, Schubert struggled. Against his father's wishes he sought the life of a musician and worked hard to maintain a livelihood. Though his musical output was vast, he labored to find a publisher and had little recognition. He suffered from bouts of depression and illness which, coupled with his inexhaustible compulsion to compose, led to his untimely demise. Despite these afflictions, Franz Schubert achieved fame beyond his lifetime as the creator and greatest composer of the High German Lied.

The tragic beginnings of Franz Schubert's life set the mood for the rest of his life to come. Schubert was born on January 31, 1797 in Vienna, Austria as one of fourteen children. At a young age he experienced the death of nine siblings due to illness or stillbirth and struggled with his four surviving siblings on his father's meager school teacher wages. As the son of a school teacher, Schubert had an early exposure to music which laid the foundation for his musical aspirations. This musical background led to Schubert's admittance into the Hofkapelle Chor at the Kaiserlich-Königliches Stadtkonvikt, the top boarding school for less fortunate children. Though he attended an honorable school that could better his life, Schubert could not escape tragedy. During his five years at the Stadtkonvikt, he experienced the throes of war as Napoleon invaded Vienna, and missed the passing of his beloved mother. Despite these obstacles, Schubert was not deterred from his path toward becoming a musician.

As a young man, Franz Schubert struggled to balance his responsibility as a man to find a secure income and his dream as a musician to live for music. Though he desired to be a composer, his father urged him to find security as a school teacher. Schubert despised the job and spent all of his free time composing. After two years of misery teaching six-year-olds, he left his job and forfeited his place in his father's home to pursue composition. Since Schubert no longer had a steady income nor the support of his father, he relied on his friends for emotional and monetary support. He quickly grew restless and depressed as he moved from one friend's home

to another. His friends were dedicated to his musical cause and supported every choice he made as part of his musical genius. Though they were happy to take him in, he did not stay in one place long as he constantly searched for something better and something inspiring.

Despite Schubert's extensive musical output and active search for self-improvement, he was unsuccessful as a composer. Schubert was completely dedicated to music composing at least sixty-five bars of new music every day.[1] Schubert had a deep love for literature, which is exemplified in his treatment of the texts in his High German Lieder. In his lifetime he set the texts of over ninety poets. Because of this love for literature, he did not regard a poet's status in the literary world when choosing texts to set, but rather chose texts that moved him. This habit brought on criticisms that he only chose second-rate poetry. Though his music far surpassed many of his contemporaries, Schubert struggled to find publishers for his work. In fact, much of his work was left unpublished until after his death. He experienced a great amount of embarrassment after being rejected by multiple publishers, and grew self-conscious and protective of what he revealed. His greatest humiliation occurred in 1816 when one of Schubert's friends sent a package of twenty of his unpublished Goethe Lieder to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a literary whom Schubert held in the highest esteem. Despite their genius, Goethe promptly sent the package back without any acknowledgement. It was another ten years before Schubert sent another package to Goethe, which again was returned without recognition. Schubert was humiliated and fell into a depression.

Just as it began, Schubert's life ended in tragedy. Along with having a seemingly unsuccessful musical career, Schubert often suffered from illness and depression. In 1823 Schubert was hospitalized with early symptoms of syphilis,[10] the disease that would eventually take his life. Schubert spent the last five years of his life tormented by migraines, body sores, and an aching, dying body, though his musical output never slowed. After a life of moving from one friend's home to another, Schubert finally settled in with his favorite brother, Ferdinand, too secretive about the severity of his illness to stay with friends and risk its discovery. He spent his final days in bouts of delusional singing and unconsciousness. On November 19, 1828, Franz Schubert's life came to an end. He was only thirty-one years old.

[10] Peter Gilroy Bevan, "Adversity: Schubert's Illnesses and their Background," *Schubert Studies*, edited by Brian Newbould, (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), p. 245.

Figure 2.1 A sketch of Franz Schubert

Goethe and Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was the leading national literary figure of German Romanticism whose works inspired countless plays, operas, and Lieder during and after his time. Though his life was not tragic, he created the most tragic characters and situations in his writing, revealing the dark recesses of man's visceral desires and fears. Perhaps it was his deep despondency from the law career he hated, or his scandalous sexual encounters and failures in love, or perhaps it was simply an innate understanding of mankind that made his writing so powerful. Goethe's work was an evolutionary force in German literature. He transformed the German literary focus from the superficial, safe, external world to an internal focus on the individual, on the mind, and the body. One of his most innovative works, the one which inspired the most Lieder, is his novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*.

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, published in 1795, influenced nineteenth century thought and set the standard for the Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story-- a new concept in the early Romantic Era.[11] This novel, set in six volumes, follows the protagonist, Wilhelm Meister, on an emotional and spiritual journey across Europe. Wilhelm Meister is the son of a middle-class merchant, expected to join his father's business, but whose life-long dream is to perform on stage. When he falls in love with a young actress, he abandons his father's business and follows her company as they travel across Europe. He finds that he has a knack for acting

[11] Lambert Sterling, "Schubert, Mignon, and Her Secret," *Journal of Musicological Research*, 27.4 (2008), http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?sid=0e0100f7-f4b0-4fec-bf3bdeff84c98eef%40sessionmgr11&vid=41&hid+=7>.

and directing and is eventually allowed to join their company. Through his middle-class connections, he stumbles into a secret society of reform-thinkers called the Gesellschaft vom Turm, which begins to dictate his life choices. Due to the society's influence, Wilhelm Meister falls into the life he was initially trying to escape, though more wealthy than he could have ever dreamed in both monetary riches and knowledge.

During his travels Wilhelm Meister develops intense relationships with two integral characters to the story-- Mignon and the Harper. Mignon is a twelve-year-old girl whom Wilhelm Meister rescues from a troupe of acrobats. Due to her experiences, Mignon is incredibly naive, yet mature beyond her years. Though she appears androgynous, she is a young woman bursting with sexual desire for Wilhelm, a desire that she is incapable of fully understanding. Her character is cloaked in secrecy, despair, and an intense inner turmoil that is not fully revealed until the end of the novel when she dies of heart failure. The Harper is a travelling poet and musician whose character is also shrouded in immense guilt and despair, stemming from the secret that he has kept his whole life-- that Mignon is, in fact, his own child, and that she was born of incest. When this secret is revealed in the end of the novel, the Harper commits suicide. Since both of these characters are musicians, Goethe writes many of their lines in lyric form. It is the lyrics of these two intensely tragic characters that inspired countless songs and which inspired Franz Schubert's four-song set of *Gesänge aus "Wilhelm Meister," Op. 62, D. 877*.

Schubert's Settings of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre

Franz Schubert lived in a time of overlap between two musical eras. Because of this overlap, his style is marked by both Classical and Romantic characteristics. Where his musical forms most often follow a Classical tradition, his key relationships and harmonic structures show a movement toward Romantic innovation. Schubert's main innovative attribute to early nineteenth-century music, however, is his treatment of text in song. Before Schubert, the text was considered inferior to the music, but he created an equality between text, melody, harmony, and accompaniment. He was so moved by literature that he immediately created a melody for the text upon reading a poem or story. Beyond the melodies he created, Schubert further portrayed the essence of a text with the character of the accompaniment and choice of harmonies-- all parts were equal and all parts worked together to portray not only textual meaning, but the human emotions linked to that meaning. Schubert was known for finding various meanings in the same

text, leading to multiple re-settings of a text, which was an unusual practice for his time. His set of four *Gesänge aus" Wilhelm Meister," Op. 62, D. 877* is a perfect example of Schubert's compositional practices.

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* was an important piece of nineteenth-century literature that inspired many musical settings. Of the eight poems belonging to the two main characters in the novel, Mignon and the Harper, Schubert composed at least seventeen different settings. It is believed that Schubert's earlier settings of the Mignon and Harper texts were composed on a whim after reading the poems from an "Aus Wilhelm Meister" collection of Goethe's music. Because of the separation from their novel context, his earlier settings did not fully portray the psychology of the characters nor the complexity of their situation. Though the poems of these characters can stand independently from the novel, the situation of the characters and the meaning of their texts are so intertwined that without the full context of the novel, a substantial part of the overall idea is lost. This loss was seen in Schubert's pre-1826 settings. It is also believed that the change in compositional approach from the earlier settings to the 1826 settings is due to Schubert's contraction of syphilis in 1823. Perhaps because of this illness Schubert was drawn to these poems, nearly ten years after his previous settings, because he related to Mignon and her deep sadness and suffering from her own terminal condition. This may also explain why these final settings of Goethe's poems are atypical of Schubert's style. Whatever inspired these final settings of the Mignon and Harper songs, they are, perhaps, the most beautiful settings and the most personally driven pieces of Schubert's Goethe Lieder.

"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" is the text used for both the first and fourth song of the *Gesänge aus "Wilhelm Meister"* song set. The first is a setting for soprano and tenor from the perspective of Mignon and the Harper, while the last is a setting solely from Mignon's perspective. Each of these settings reveals Schubert's strong connection to text. In Goethe's novel, the "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" lyrics were sung as a duet between Mignon and the Harper, so it is natural for the first song of this set to be a duet. Schubert set this version in B minor, the key he often used to express loneliness and alienation, traits which both characters know too well. Though neither Mignon nor the Harper have a lover far away as is suggested by the line in measures 23-25, "der mich liebt und kennt is in der Weite," this can be interpreted as a general statement made to describe their overall feeling of nostalgia for a home far away. The dominant word, "Sehnsucht," signifying an intense longing, is often accompanied by a more

introverted musical style, which Schubert uses in both settings. For example its first iteration in measure 6 is presented on a single repeated note in the mid range of the soprano voice with a homophonic texture in accompaniment showing Mignon's stoicism. Its reiterations in measure 7 of the tenor voice and in measure 40 of the soprano voice show more longing with the descending minor second and the final reiteration of "Sehnsucht" in measure 44 of the soprano line is the most dramatic with the descending octave leap. In the first setting, the accompaniment is more homophonic, creating a sense of reservation and false control. In the fourth setting, written in A minor, Schubert better achieves the "Sehnsucht" idea with his use of broken chords, accompanied by open octaves, creating a haunting emptiness. This empty self control in both cases is interrupted, in measures 33-37 in the first song and measures 27-34 in the second, with a similar melodic and harmonic figure when the control is lost to a violent outburst of frustration-- a rattling left hand piano figure with a dotted eighth to sixteenth note melodic line-- a moment when the present, physical realities of the character interrupt the distance of a superficial control. Both pieces return to the initial reserved musical idea, as if the emotional outburst was too exhausting for such frail character as Mignon or the Harper.

The second song of the Wilhelm Meister set is based on the text, "Heiss mich nicht reden." This poem deals specifically with Mignon and her secret, though the extent of her secret is still unclear at this point in the novel. The three stanzas show Mignon's evolution as she first discusses her secret as her unwanted duty imposed by fate, out of her control, followed by a stanza of self-revelation and understanding of mankind as she tries to gain control, and finally a sworn oath to keep her secret as she regains control of herself and remembers her duty. This song begins in E minor as Mignon struggles with her secret, modulates to the submediant key of C major, then ends in the parallel major, E major, suggesting that she has accepted her secret and has confidence in her own will. Of the four songs in this set, the second is the most revealing of Mignon's psyche, and perhaps for this reason, it has the most operatic qualities with a rich melodic variety and embellishment, such as the trills in measure 12 on the word "es" and in measure 40 on the word "aufzuschliessen." The use of a chromatic descending accompaniment figure often used in the operatic lament style or in the Italian *ombra* style is present in the bass line of measure 11 as Mignon laments the word "fate," and in measures 31-38 as she swears her tragic oath to keep her secret locked up forever. Overall the text is set in a clear declamatory style often used in operatic recitatives to reveal the true feelings of Mignon.

Despite its seemingly light, almost happy mood, the third song from the Wilhelm Meister song set, "So lasst mich scheinen," is perhaps the most tragic of the four songs. This poem was written in 1796 specifically for the moment when Mignon dies. Throughout the novel, Mignon is an androgynous character, a young girl of twelve who was always forced to wear boy clothes. At the moment of this poem, she has worn a dress for the first time, a white gown meant to depict the image of an angel for a birthday celebration, foreshadowing her imminent death and transfiguration. When it is time for Mignon to return to her own clothes, she sings this song instead, expressing her joy of having worn the dress in a light B major key. Her excited description of her white gown in measures 21-23, the heavenly spirits in measures 26-27, and a beautiful life in measures 32-33 all suggest that Mignon knows that she is about to die. The ease with which she discusses these topics shows her comfort and acceptance of the idea of death and her youthful wisdom. Still, as the song progresses and modulates to G-sharp minor on the word "Schmerz" in measure 38, Mignon expresses the deep pain she would feel to take off the dress and her sorrow from being forced to grow up so quickly. Her final line in the song is a kind of premonition or wish, "macht mich auf ewig, auf ewig wieder jung!" to be forever young. Perhaps this is a wish to preserve this perfect moment of wearing the dress and experiencing true joy, or perhaps it is a statement of regret that she missed her childhood. What is certain is that at this moment in the story, Mignon knows that her time on earth is almost over and she is dealing with the emotions that come with that realization, making this the most powerful song of the set.

Text Translations

I./IV. Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt	I./IV. Only he who knows suffering
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt	Only he who knows suffering
Weiss, was ich Leide!	Knows what I suffer!
Allein und abgetrennt	Alone and cut off
Von aller Freude,	From all joy,
Seh ich aus Firmament	I look toward the Heavens
Nach jener Seite.	In that direction
Ach! der mich liebt und kennt,	Ah! he who knows and loves me
Ist in der Weite.	Is far away.
Es schwindelt mir,	My head swims,
Es brennt mein Eingeweide.	My vitals burn.

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss was ich Leide!

Only he who knows longing
Knows what I suffer!

II. Heiβ mich nicht reden

Heiβ mich nicht reden, heiβ mich
schweigen,
Denn mein Geheimnis ist mir Pflicht,
Ich möchte dir mein ganzes Innre zeigen,
Allein das Schicksal will es nicht.
Zur rechten Zeit vertreibt der Sonne Lauf
Die finstre Nacht, und sie muβ sich
erhellen,
Der harte Fels schlieβt seinen Busen auf,
Miβgönnt der Erde nicht die tief verborgnen
Quellen.
Ein jeder sucht im Arm des Freundes
Ruh,
Dort kann die Brust in Klagen sich
ergieβen,
Allein ein Schwur drückt mir die Lippen zu,
Und nur ein Gott vermag sie aufzuschlieβen.

II. Ask me not to speak

Bid me not to speak, bid me be
silent
For my secret is my duty,
I wish I could bare my soul to you,
But fate does not will it.
In its right time, the sun will dispel
The dark night, and night must be
illuminated.
The hard rock will open its bosom;
Ungrudgingly the earth will open its deep
springs
Others may seek peace in the arms of a
friend;
There one can pour out one's heart in
lament,
But for me alone, a vow seals my lips,
And only a god has the power to open them.

III. So lasst mich scheinen

So lasst mich scheinen, bis ich werde,
Zieht mir das weiβe Kleid nicht aus!
Ich eile von der schönen Erde
Hinab in jenes dunkle Haus.
Dort ruh' ich eine kleine Stille,
Dann öffnet sich der frische Blick;
Ich laβe dann die reine Hülle,
Den Gürtel und den Kranz zurück.

III. So let me seem

So let me seem until I become so;
Don't take the white dress away from me!
From the beautiful earth I hasten
Down into that solid house.
There I will repose a moment in peace,
Until I open my eyes afresh;
Then I will leave behind the spotless dress,
The girdle and the wreath.

Und jene himmlischen Gestalten
Sie fragen nicht nach Mann und Weib,
Und keine Kleider, keine Falten
Umgeben den verklärten Leib.
Zwar lebt' ich ohne Sorg' und Mühe,
Doch fühlt' ich tiefen Schmerz genung.
Vor Kummer altert' ich zu frühe;
Macht mich auf ewig wieder jung!

And those spirits of heaven
Do not ask whether one is 'man' or 'woman,'
And no clothes, no robes
Will cover my transfigured body.
Though I have lived without trouble and toil,
I have still felt deep pain.
Through sorrow I have aged too soon;
Make me forever young again!

CHAPTER 3 - Les oiseaux dans la charmille

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Jacques Offenbach spent his life struggling to realize his musical dream. Though he built his successful career from nothing, became the greatest virtuosic cellist of his time, performed in multiple orchestras and opera houses, and even developed a new and popular musical genre, he was never satisfied with his position. His greatest desire was to be known and respected as a serious opera composer, and though he achieved that desire, he did not live to see it come to fruition.

Jacques Offenbach's constant need for improvement was instilled in him at a young age as he experienced tragedy and misfortune early in his life. He was born Jakob Eberst in Cologne, Germany on June 20, 1819. He was one of ten children, though five did not survive into childhood. His father was a cantor at the local synagogue and played the violin in local taverns, but his wages were insubstantial for supporting his large family. To supplement his income he took on a book binding position and formed his children into a musical trio to earn some extra money in the local taverns. This trio, in which Offenbach played the cello with his brother Julius on the violin and his sister Isabella on the viola, was the catalyst for his hard-working musical lifestyle.

As his musical talent became more apparent, Jacques Offenbach began to take the steps to becoming a professional musician in the real world, though he struggled to maintain his position there. When Offenbach was thirteen, his father took him, along with his brother Julius, to audition for a position in the Paris Conservatory. It was more arduous a task to secure an audition than Offenbach's father had planned since the director, Luigi Cherubini, had strict rules prohibiting foreign prospective students from auditioning. After hearing Jakob and Julius play, however, Cherubini defied his own rules and accepted both boys immediately. Their father had planned to stay in Paris to reestablish himself as the great musician he once was, but failed to find a paid position, so he returned to Cologne and his family, leaving the two Offenbach boys to fend for themselves in the foreign country. Julius, who was known as Jules, and Jakob, who was called Jacques, supported themselves by singing in the local synagogue choir. Though his brother succeeded in the Conservatory, Offenbach struggled. He despised formal music education and Cherubini's tyrannical teaching methods. He began to move away from

performance as he developed a deep interest in theatre, and after one year at the Conservatory, he finally left to pursue a career in theatre.

After leaving the Conservatory, Offenbach spent years working toward becoming a theatre composer, though the process was laborious and he was often deterred by monetary struggles. Soon after leaving the Conservatory, Offenbach began taking composition lessons from Fromental Halévy (1799-1862), a famed opera composer. At this time he also began to play the cello in the Opéra-Comique orchestra where Halévy conducted, and even wrote some incidental music for the productions. His first incidental music appeared in the Opéra-Comique's production of *Pascal et Chambord*, but critics found it mediocre, squelching his dream for a time. Discouraged by the bad reviews and suffering with little monetary gain, Offenbach had to put his theatre dream on hold as he travelled and performed in public concerts as a virtuosic cellist. In 1840 he and his brother Julius held a public concert back in their hometown of Cologne. It was during this trip that Offenbach's true desire to be a serious opera composer was revealed after the unexpected deaths of his mother and youngest brother.

When Jacques Offenbach returned to Paris, he was again sidetracked from his true dream of composing a serious opera as financial instability directed his career toward more lucrative ventures. He returned to Paris with very little, so he set aside his desire to compose for opera and began to write in the more popular burlesque style. His light, frivolous work quickly gained fame in the salons and he made a substantial enough amount of money to quit his job as a cellist at the Opéra-Comique to become a full-time society entertainer. After one of Offenbach's concerts, a wealthy benefactor offered him the opportunity to write a one-act Vaudeville piece, *l'Alcove*, which he quickly accepted. Unfortunately after completing the work, Offenbach found it difficult to contact the benefactor and so the performance never happened. This inspired Offenbach to perform a solo concert of *l'Alcove* which impressed the impresario of the Opéra-Lyrique enough to commission a comic opera for the following year. Unfortunately for Offenbach, this performance also never happened as the French Revolution broke out in 1848 forcing Offenbach to return to Cologne until the war subsided. When he returned to Paris in 1850, he had nothing and was forced to restart his career as a virtuosic cellist. He continued to compose, though he could not get his works on stage.

After many rejections, Offenbach decided that he needed to take active control of his career if he wanted to see his works performed in a real opera house. In June of 1855, Offenbach

secured a lease for his first theatre, the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, which officially opened July 5, 1855. The theatre was small, seating only fifty people, which meant that even a full house would not bring much revenue, and the Paris licensing laws prohibited operas larger than one act and with no more than three actors on stage. Despite the limits these stipulations set for the librettos, the new theatre was a huge success and Offenbach found himself as a busy and successful composer for the comic opera. As the theatre's popularity grew, Offenbach decided that he needed to lease a bigger theatre to accommodate for its growing public. This new theatre was called the Théâtre des Jeunes Élèves. Though it was not much bigger than the first theatre, its location was in the center of Paris and the licensing laws allowed for four speaking parts on stage and thirty orchestra performers, broadening the options for the librettos. This opera house officially opened on December 29, 1855. Despite its continued success, Offenbach had poor business sense and a big heart and began to lose money. He spent a lot of money on remodeling the theatres, believing the visual, acoustic, and aesthetic experience should be equals, and often helped his less fortunate employees. Due to this poor business sense, Offenbach's theatre did not last long.

Beyond his own poor business sense, the changing social and political climates created circumstances that would bring Offenbach's opera house to a permanent close and his opera career to an indefinite halt. In 1858 Offenbach's partnership with librettist, Ludovic Halévy, came to an end when Halévy was offered a more beneficial job. His new librettist, Hector Crémieux, was much newer and slower than Halévy and hindered Offenbach's output. While his own theatre was losing money, Offenbach tried to supplement his income by writing small works for the Opéra-Comique, though they gained little recognition. In 1862, after years of running from creditors, Offenbach was forced to resign as director of Les Bouffes Parisiens.[12] Though he no longer had a stable income, he continued to write, but as the beginnings of the Franco-Prussian War threatened Paris, government censors began to suppress his satirical style and his popularity waned. After the war, Offenbach was considered too "Prussian" because of his German heritage, and the public could not easily return to his frivolous and satirical style, they once loved after such a terrible war. Around this time, Offenbach also became very ill with gout.

[12] Andrew Lamb, "Offenbach, Jacques," *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/20271.

He was discouraged, depressed, and unwell, and he completely stopped composing for the next two years.

Offenbach's final years were spent in desperation and obsession as he struggled with his illness to reach his goal of writing a serious opera. After his two-year hiatus, he decided to dive back into the musical world and took over the Théâtre de Gaité. Desperate for the success he once had, he attempted to revive his old music, bankrupting yet another theatre. To pay off his debts, Offenbach sold most of his belongings and became a recluse. His obsession to write a serious opera led him to take on *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, which he officially began to work on in 1873 for le Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin.[13] He spent six years working on sketches for the opera before he started working on the final product. Unlike his usual fast-paced compositional output, he felt daunted by the pressure of proving himself as a serious composer and was affected by his librettist's constant changes, and the requirements of the opera house for which he was composing. When le Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin went bankrupt, Offenbach made one final attempt to have the opera produced by contacting the one opera house that had turned him down so many times before-- the Opéra-Comique. Surprisingly the Opéra-Comique accepted, but with the stipulation that Offenbach submit to any suggestion the impresario, Léon Carvalho, desired. Knowing he did not have much time left, Offenbach accepted the terms and submitted to Carvalho's tyrannical supervision. Despite urging Carvalho to speed up production so that he might see the opera on stage, production was slow and Offenbach's illness took its toll. On October 4, 1880 Offenbach fell unconscious during one of the rehearsals. The following day he passed away.

Though he was a successful composer in his time, Jacques Offenbach never felt completely fulfilled. He experienced many setbacks in his career path including financial instability, family death, war, social change, and illness, yet he worked hard for his dream. Though he desired to be a serious opera composer, he never lived to see that dream realized. This unfulfilled life-long dream makes Offenbach one of the more tragic composers of his lifetime.

[13] Mary Dibbern, *The Tales of Hoffmann: A Performance Guide*, (New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), p. xvii.

Figure 3.1 A photograph of Jacques Offenbach

Offenbach's Final Years and His Work on Les Contes d'Hoffmann

In order to be known as a serious composer, Offenbach began to focus on a play he had seen in 1851, *Les Contes Fantastiques d'Hoffmann*. This was a drame-fantastique in five acts by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, based on four of E.T.A. Hoffmann's stories, *Der Sandmann, Rath Krespel, Signor Formica,* and *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht*. A libretto had already been written, and in 1867, composer Hector Salomon completed a five-act version for the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin. Due to a legal battle, however, Salomon's version was never performed. Salomon withdrew his rights, after which, Offenbach requested permission. Barbier gave him the libretto and in 1873, Offenbach began working on his masterpiece, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. Offenbach saw this as his last chance to be seen as a serious opera composer, and he dedicated much of his time to working on it.

Despite his usual quick output, Offenbach spent six years working on sketches for the opera before he started work on the final creation. Part of this is due to the fact that Barbier worked slowly and often offered Offenbach alternate versions of scenes, creating confusion in his composition. On top of this, two of the theatres Offenbach had planned to write this opera for went bankrupt and he had to submit to the demands of each. He was also losing energy as his

gout and depression worsened and as he struggled to make some money on the side by writing small opéra-bouffes for various theatres.

When Jacques Offenbach won the commission at the Opéra-Comique, he had to submit to the desires of the impresario, Léon Carvalho. At the Opéra-Comique spoken dialogue was required and the main performer had to be a tenor. In agreeing to rewrite his opera for the Opéra-Comique, Offenbach had accepted any suggestion Carvalho may make, as he was sure to do. After working diligently on this opera, Offenbach presented what parts he had finished in his home in 1879. He knew he did not have much time left and became completely submerged in the piece. He urged Carvalho to hurry the stage production so that he could live to see his work performed, but the opera kept him waiting due to costume and set delays. By this point he was so sick he could only attend a few musical rehearsals. While attending a rehearsal of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* on the night on October 4, 1880, Offenbach had a choking fit and fell unconscious. He was brought back to his home where he passed away the following day. The gout from which he had suffered for years had finally affected his heart. Offenbach never saw his greatest opera in performance.

Since Offenbach died before the opera was completed, it is unclear how much of the final product was actually orchestrated by him. Two months before his death, Offenbach still had to complete the end of act four and the entirety of the fifth act. When Offenbach died, it is probable that he had left all of his piano-vocal score sketches, but no orchestrations and none of the recitatives. The family was anxious to see the score completed by someone who would stay true to Offenbach's style so by the request of Offenbach's son, Ernest Guiraud (1837-1892) was invited to finish the opera. Offenbach's son was careful to watch Guiraud as he finished his father's work. Guiraud was so dedicated to Offenbach he even postponed his own opera, *La Galante Aventure*, to complete the score. Offenbach had left behind an orchestrated prologue and first act, creating a stylistic guide for Guiraud. Offenbach had planned for spoken dialogue in his opera, but after his death, Carré decided it needed to have recitatives. Guiraud wrote all of the recitatives and completed the rest of the orchestration, though the opera impressario, Carvalho, also made many changes to the score.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann premiered in Paris on February 10, 1881 at l'Opéra-Comique. Due to some rehearsal difficulties and fear that the opera would be too long, Carvalho cut the Giulietta act and moved some songs around for the premier. Still, the first performance was a

success and was followed by one hundred more performances, though many more changes were made to the score in that time. A Viennese production was scheduled to open ten months after the Paris premier. When Offenbach's score was complete, it was published in its corrupt form. After the original publication, it had been published in revised, reorganized, and completely changed editions so it is difficult to say what music belongs solely to Offenbach and what has been changed. Not only did Guiraud complete the score and Carvalho incorporate his own changes before the premier, the librettist, Carré, made changes, each conductor at the opera houses in which it premiered made changes, and even the publishers, like Oeser, made changes. Fortunately, in recent years, Antonio de Almeida (1928-1997), a conductor and musicologist, searched for and brought forth much of the original material, though there was not enough original material to complete the score.

After the initial hype of the premier of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, it was not performed again until the early twentieth century. The biggest factor for this was the superstitious climate of the opera house. In May of 1881, the opera was to be staged at the Salle Favart, but a fire broke out, destroying much of the musical material. No one was hurt, but some of Offenbach's work may have been lost. Then in December of 1881, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* was to be staged at the Ringtheater in Vienna. The first night was a huge success, but on the second night disaster struck. After the success of the previous evening, an even bigger crowd appeared, filling the theatre to capacity, but just after the curtain went up, a fire broke out, killing many audience members. The opera became known internationally as a jinx opera and was shunned until its revival and success in Berlin in 1905.

E.T.A. Hoffmann and Offenbach's Setting of Les Contes d'Hoffmann

Les Contes d'Hoffmann is an operatic tribute to famed German Romantic writer, Ernst Thomas Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822). Hoffmann worked as a writer, composer, orchestral conductor, painter, critic, law officer, and jurist and had a very strong connection to music, fantasy, and humor. Hoffmann's stories are fantastical, dreamy, and weird and Offenbach's setting of Carré and Barbier's libretto portrays this fantasy. The fantastical character of Hoffmann's story is portrayed through the form and structure of the work; it is in the manner of the story-telling, the presentations of the stories, and the manipulation of reality and unreality that make the opera true to Hoffman's style. Hoffmann is a dreamer, detached from reality. He

did not conform to the expectations of society in his writing and in the opera, Hoffmann did not fit into society at all. The opera's portrayal of Hoffmann as a narrator and as a protagonist is a representation of his self depiction and the personality he used in his own essays and fiction.

Since Jacques Offenbach was working on developing a style he had not previously used in his career, his musical depiction of Hoffman's story shows a conflict between his changing musical genre. During Offenbach's time spent at the Opéra-Bouffes, he had unintentionally created a new genre of music known as the operetta. This was a kind of light, small opera that nicely contrasted the current popular French trend of melodrama. Offenbach's greatest talent was his ability to create beautifully lyrical melodies out of anything. Offenbach had to produce pieces very quickly for his opera house, so he often reused his own material and quoted other composer's work for humorous effect. Despite recycling his own music, Offenbach was always looking for new ways to set his pieces, using new and unusual effects and devices, allowing his art to develop quickly. As previously mentioned, by the end of Offenbach's life, he was trying to move away from his own, frivolous style toward a more serious work, which he hoped he had achieved in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. This opera proved to be an extreme contrast to Offenbach's previous operas. While it still has moments of his old subtle humor, he expanded the dramatic complexity of the story with a mixture of dramatic Romantic harmonies and melodic language, and a sort of distance or reserve.

Plot Synopsis of Les Contes d'Hoffmann

Les Contes d'Hoffmann is an opera in five acts based on a libretto by Jules Barbier (1825-1901) and Michel Carré (1819-1872). The libretto was an adaptation of Barbier and Carré's 1851 play, *Les Contes Fantastiques d'Hoffmann*, based on various short stories and novels by E.T.A. Hoffmann, specifically *Der Sandmann*, *Rat Krespel*, *Die Gesellschaft im Keller*, and *Das verlorene Spiegelbild*. In *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, E.T.A. Hoffmann becomes a character in his own stories, telling three specific stories about past loves that ended in disaster. Each love affair, presented in the past, shows how Hoffmann came to be the amoral, despondent man portrayed at the beginning of the opera.

Each of Hoffmann's three past loves is presented in separate acts, surrounded by a prologue and epilogue in which Hoffmann tells these stories while waiting for his current love interest, Stella. Despite the differing stories with the varying characters and settings, an

underlying unity draws Hoffmann's life to the moment in the bar in the prologue of the opera. E.T.A. Hoffmann, as a writer, was obsessed with the idea of the doppelganger. He loved the idea that the personality could be separated into multiple parts, each unique, but shared. In *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, the unifying factor of the stories is that each of the main characters is a double of the characters from the other stories. For example, the three sinister characters, Coppelius, Dr. Miracle, and Dapertutto are all sung by the same performer who portrays Hoffmann's nemesis in the prologue, Councilor Lindorf. The three loves, Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta, are embodiments of Hoffmann's current love in the prologue, Stella. And Hoffmann's constant companion in all of these stories is actually his muse who is secretly in love with him, but will never be seen as more than just his friend. In a way the overlapping characters show the cyclical nature of Hoffman's fantastical life.

The main theme that develops in this opera is the constant persecution by a nemesis and the disingenuous nature of the perceptively ideal woman. These themes are portrayed in the three inner acts of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. The first act opens as the prologue to Hoffmann's stories. He is waiting for his current love, Stella, in a tavern close to the Nuremberg opera house with his companion and muse, Nicklausse. When Councilor Lindorf, the man who has expressed his competing desire for Stella, enters the tavern, Hoffmann recognizes the threat, but is distracted when his companions urge him to drink and tell the stories of his past loves.

As act two begins, the audience is propelled into the past as a younger Hoffmann appears with the physicist Spalanzani in an eccentric laboratory. Spalanzani has created a mechanical doll with his partner, Coppelius, and believes that it will earn him enough money to pay off his banker. Because of this, he does not want to share her with Coppelius, creating violent plot tension. When Hoffmann sees what he believes is a young woman sleeping behind a curtain, his interest peaks. Spalanzani has given Hoffmann a pair of magical spectacles that make everything he sees more beautiful, so when the mechanical doll, Olympia, appears, Hoffmann falls in love immediately. Just as Coppelius is about to make a scene, a crowd of guests enter and Olympia begins to sing for them, "Les oiseaux dans la charmille." Later Hoffmann is alone with her and as they begin to dance, Olympia malfunctions and begins to throw Hoffmann around. When she finally breaks his glasses in one of her spasms, he realizes that she is cold, though he still does not recognize that she is just a doll. It is not until Coppelius sneaks into her room and dismantles

her that Hoffmann realizes his folly and is heart-broken. The act ends with the crowd making fun of the destroyed Hoffmann's foolishness.

In the third act, Hoffmann is in Munich and has fallen in love with the beautiful singer, Antonia. Because of a specific illness of the lungs which had killed her prima donna mother, Antonia's father, Crespel, keeps her secluded and does not allow her to sing. When Hoffmann arrives, he believes Antonia is not there and begins to sing and play at the piano, which Antonia hears and joins. Her father arrives with Antonia's doctor, Dr. Miracle, during their love duet and Antonia flees the room while Hoffmann hides. Dr. Miracle claims that only he can cure Antonia of her illness, but when he is alone with her, he knowingly urges her to sing herself to death. In the end, Dr. Miracle vanishes and Hoffmann is left, crushed once again.

The fourth act opens to a wild party in Venice where Hoffmann is singing and drinking. The beautiful courtesan, Giulietta is provoking Hoffmann with jealousy as she flaunts her current lover in front of him. She wishes to get Hoffmann alone for the evil magician, Dapertutto, who has promised her a diamond ring if she will steal Hoffman's soul. When they are finally alone, Giulietta asks Hoffmann for his reflection, which he gives in a haze of lust. Afterward, her current lover walks in and in jealousy fights Hoffmann who kills him immediately. After the fight, Hoffmann finds Giulietta already in the arms of another man, having forgotten Hoffmann and completely un-phased by her previous lover's death. Hoffmann is dragged away by his muse as Dapertutto mocks him.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann closes as it began, with Hoffmann sitting in the tavern, having just told all of his stories. Hoffmann is depressed after reminiscing and drowns himself in wine. When the awaited Stella arrives, Hoffmann no longer sees the woman he loves, but a compilation of his three past loves and rejects her. Hardly faltering, she leaves with Councilor Lindorf and Hoffmann sinks into drunkenness.

On Being Olympia: Stylistic and Technical Considerations

When taking on the role of Olympia, a singer is taking on a great challenge and responsibility. First the technical difficulty of Olympia's aria, "Les Oiseaux dans la Charmille," has its own challenges as Olympia is a mechanical doll and must sound super-human and flawless. Offenbach set this aria in a high coloratura range to dehumanize the performer. Since coloratura singing is such an obvious display of vocal technique, when used indiscriminately, it

becomes completely meaningless, with the only message being that the performer is capable of that kind of technique. Despite Offenbach's attempt to move toward a more serious writing style, Olympia's aria demonstrates many techniques of his old operettas with jerky arpeggiated melody, staccato chordal accompaniment, short repeated phrases, and bouncy embellishments at the end of each phrase. The melody and the accompaniment both have a pulsing, quickly moving line, and when the added staccato passages are performed, the melody loses all human effect. The more successfully a singer can produce this coloratura sans emotion, the more amazed the audience will become and the easier it will be for them to forget that the performer on stage is actually human.

Beyond her super-human vocal ability and perfection, Olympia is also the embodiment of the nineteenth-century ideal, or perhaps less-than-ideal, woman. Hoffmann sees Olympia as a completely perfect being, though the actual writer E.T.A. Hoffmann would not have trusted her. So often in Hoffmann's writing, he portrayed women as either dangerous flirts or rebellious deviants, never having any kind of domestic virtue. He especially portrayed the prima donna as a dangerous being who was both desirable and fearsome in her vocal ability. Olympia also represents the courtly stiffness and decorum that was expected of a good nineteenth-century French woman. In fact, throughout the entire opera, when Olympia is not singing, the only other words she says are "ah" or "oui," an aspect that should have triggered suspicion, yet went unnoticed as normal female behavior. Though Olympia lives in the real world, she is completely removed-- set apart as an entity from the ideal world, both contemporary and demonic.

Finally, Olympia is not just an embodiment of the ideal woman; she also represents Offenbach's operetta style and its end. "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" is the epitome of Offenbach's operetta with the winding couplets, comical moments of her winding down, and repetitiveness that is devoid of warmth and organic life. This aria is a nineteenth-century coloratura waltz song with two identical verses. Offenbach left no room for ornaments or cadenzas that would usually occur in the second verse since Olympia is a mechanical being incapable of the emotion or desire to show off her talent. Though it seems that Offenbach preferred a straight performance of this aria, many singers still add ornamentation, though maintaining the detached spirit and mechanical drive. It seems that Offenbach was making a statement about his own operettas in this aria. The inauthentic, whimsical mood of the aria is only a cover for the emptiness of the music-- the same empty, repetitive style that critics claimed

plagued Offenbach's operettas. Some suggest that Olympia's demise at the end of her act is a symbol of Offenbach's destruction of his operetta, as an attempt for Offenbach to disconnect himself from the art that he had created. Olympia's aria is the last piece written by Offenbach in his operetta style and the end of her act marks the end of Offenbach's operetta forever.

Text Translation

Les oiseaux dans la charmille	The birds in the hedges,
Dans les cieux l'astre du jour,	The star of daylight in the sky,
Tout parle à la jeune fille d'amour!	Everything speaks to a young girl of love!
Ah! Voilà la chanson gentile	Ah! This is the sweet song,
La chanson d'Olympia! Ah!	The song of Olympia! Ah!
Tout ce qui chante et résonne	Everything that sings and sounds
Et soupire, tour à tour,	And sighs, in its turn,
Emeut son coeur qui frissonne d'amour!	Moves her heart, which trembles with love!
Ah! Voilà la chanson mignonne	Ah! This is the darling song,
La chanson d'Olympia! Ah!	The song of Olympia! Ah!

CHAPTER 4 - Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII

Libby Larsen (b. 1950)

Libby Larsen is a celebrated and prolific modern American composer. Despite the paradigm of the complicated lifestyle and untimely demise of many composers, Larsen breaks the mold. She discovered her musical talent at a young age and developed a support system that followed her throughout her career. She has composed for many organizations and has won several awards. Her creative melodies and realistic portrayal of speech and emotion draw audiences to her pieces and help her to continue to find commissions today.

From an early age Libby Larsen discovered her musical talent and began to work toward her musical career. She was born on December 24, 1950 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Though she was not formally taught, at an early age she began to experiment with composition, creating melodies naturally as an expressive outlet. At the age of seven, Larsen learned to read music in her Catholic school in order to be able to sing in Gregorian chant for the services and daily mass. At this time she also began taking piano lessons. Though she began to have some music training, her initial experimentation with composition set her up for a musical freedom that continued to exist in her music. Her music was never hindered by lessons in old musical style or technique. It was not until college that she began any formal studies of music.

Larsen's formal studies in music set her up for a lifetime of accomplishment. At the University of Minnesota, Larsen studied composition with the great American composers, Dominick Argento, Eric Stokes, and Paul Fetler.[14] She received her Bachelor of Arts in Music in 1971, then continued on to her Master of Music, which she received in 1975, and finally attained her doctoral degree in 1978.[15] Though many composers who achieve a doctoral degree continue to work for a university, Larsen wanted a career outside of the normal university position. To ensure that she could find such a position, she cofounded the Minnesota Composers Forum, a

[14] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), p. 331.

[15] Mary Ann Feldman, "Larsen, Libby," *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/42676.

composers' cooperative group, in 1973.[16] Along with her own organization, Larsen has also served on the music panel of the National Endowment of the Arts and acted as vice president of the American Music Center. She has also served on the boards of the American Symphony Orchestra League, and Meet the Composer.[17] She has worked as visiting professor and guest lecturer at numerous institutions, such as the California Institute of the Arts, the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, the Philadelphia School of the Arts, the Cincinnati Conservatory, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Colorado Symphony. She has also been commissioned by highly respected musical organizations such as the St. Louis Symphony, the Cleveland Lyric Opera, the Ohio Ballet, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, to name a few.[18] Despite her busy lifestyle and demand as a musical figure, Larsen has a well-rounded life with a loving family and friends, and continues to produce great works at a rapid pace.

Figure 4.1 A photograph of Libby Larsen

Stylistic Characteristics of Libby Larsen's Music

Libby Larsen is one of the most prolific living American composers. She has experimented with nearly every genre, having completed over 200 works for orchestra, dance, opera, chorus, theatre, chamber ensembles, and solo performers. When commissioned to write a piece, she does not compose specifically for the abilities of the ensemble or soloist, but rather plays to their strengths, which any musician in that area might aspire to have, attracting more

[16] Mary Ann Feldman, "Larsen, Libby," *Grove Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music42676.

[17] Libby Larsen, *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), p. 1.

[18] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), p. 331.

people to her pieces. She constantly adapts to the rapidly evolving culture and musical preferences of society. Larsen's style has been described as contemporary, yet accessible to the average audience. She uses clear textures, accessible yet diverse rhythms, and appealing melodies that convey natural expression. Her music is full of energy, color, and liberated tonality, though rarely, if ever, uses harsh dissonances found in contemporary or avant-garde music.

Though she composes in all genres, Larsen is particularly drawn to vocal music. Like Argento, she uses prose rather than poetry because of its rhythmic freedom, first-person point of view, and raw emotion. Larsen is very concerned with conveying the truth in music, not just of the text and the character, but her own personal truth in relation to that text or character. She attempts to say and incorporate everything she feels about a piece through the piece. Though she is not radically feminist, she searches for an understanding of the human condition, particularly through feminine subjects. This may also contribute to her need to search for her own personal truth in relation to the text. It is this connection to her work that makes her such an effective composer, but also what makes her such a busy composer. Larsen sets aside five hours each day to commit to composition. Larsen has added to this routine scheduled social events so that she does not lose herself completely in her work. Though she does not always have a deadline for her compositions, she sets her own to create a sense of urgency and pressure, under which Larsen feels she works best. It is this dedication and search for complete understanding that makes Libby Larsen's work so effective.

Taking on the Role of Henry VIII's Wives: Performing the Try Me, Good King Cycle

Libby Larsen composed *Try Me, Good King* for Megan Miller and Brian Zeger at the Marilyn Horne Foundation in 2001.[19] This cycle of five songs for soprano and piano includes actual quotes from the letters and gallows speeches of five of King Henry VIII's six wives; Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Howard. Though King Henry VIII had six wives in his thirty-eight year reign, Larsen does not include texts from the sixth, Katherine Parr, since she outlived the king and did not suffer from his

[19] Libby Larsen, *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), p. 1.

power. It is the anguish inflicted on each woman by the royal matrimony that ties these characters together in this cycle. Larsen hand-picked the libretto for each song in this cycle, choosing a quote or letter from the most dramatic and defining moment in each woman's life.

Beyond the unifying element of King Henry VIII's tyrannical reign and actions in his marriages, Larsen also ties these songs together through the use of musical devices and quotations. In the royal court, any event of note was signaled by the tolling of bells. Larsen uses this bell idea in each of the songs at the moment of the highest dramatic tension. She also weaves selected Elizabethan lute songs into the musical texture of each song as musical commentary on the action in the text. Not only does this add depth to the story and add double meaning and message in each song, it also creates an ambience of Tudor England, completely submerging the listener into the time period and action.

Katherine of Aragon

Larsen's song cycle begins on the deathbed of King Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon (1485-1536). Katherine was originally crowned the royal consort to Henry's older brother, Arthur in 1501, but when he died, it was revealed that their marriage was never consummated, thus she was made to marry Henry to protect the Anglo-Spanish alliance. Henry was seventeen and Katherine was twenty-six. At first their marriage was blissful, but as the years passed without Katherine providing a male heir to the throne, Henry started to grow restless. On top of this, he had started to chase after the beautiful new lady of the court, Anne Boleyn. By May of 1526, Henry was in search of an annulment, with which Katherine refused to comply. Instead, Henry had Katherine sent away to another castle where she lived out the rest of her years, while he fooled around with Anne Boleyn. By the time Katherine was on her deathbed, she had not seen her husband since he went on a "hunting trip" with Anne Boleyn five years earlier. She had never stopped loving her king, though she was angry with him. On the day of her death, she dictated a final letter to the king, both reasserting her belief that their marriage was always valid, despite what King Henry claimed, and expressing her continued love for him. Katherine of Aragon died on January 7, 1536, having officially reigned as Queen from June 1509 to January 1533.

Katherine of Aragon's song begins with a repeating eighth-note figure on "F". There are no measures, metric accent, nor provided meter, creating a sense of unease and disorientation

and immediately propelling the listener into the tension and agony of Katherine's final hours. This unrelenting ostinato represents death's unstoppable advance. Hinting at her coming death, Larsen includes a minor sixth figure four beats before the melody begins and in each break between vocal statements, representing the tolling of the bells that will eventually signal Katherine's death. Larsen also quotes John Dowland's lute song, "In Darkness Let Me Dwell," in the vocal melody which expresses such a deep sorrow that only death can cure, giving a deeper meaning and insight into Katherine's words. As the song moves forward, there is a kind of struggle between the tonality of C-sharp and C-natural. C-sharp represents her longing, appearing on such key words as "Lord," "King," "Father," and "Mary"-- all of the people she will never see again. Her despair is represented by the C-naturals on such words as "calamities" and "troubles." This conflict between the two tonalities displays her struggles between feelings of anger and loving memory. When Katherine finally utters God's name, the bell tolls return, signaling death's close proximity, and as the song comes to an end, the bell tolls become more faint as C-sharp and C-natural are emphasized again. The final repetitions of the Fs that were once so startling in the beginning of the song become quite peaceful, signifying Katherine of Aragon's passing.

Anne Boleyn

In sharp contrast to the peaceful end of Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn's song begins in a whirlwind of anger and tumult. Anne Boleyn (1502-1536) was King Henry VIII's second wife. The text in this song comes from various sources, including a letter from Anne Boleyn to King Henry written on May 6, 1536, excerpts from two undated love letters Henry had written to Anne, and quotes from Anne's execution speech, given on May 19, 1536. Anne had only reigned as Queen for three years, from January 1533 to May 1536 due to her wit and temper and because she had not provided a male heir to the throne. On the afternoon of Queen Katherine's death, Anne Boleyn, already pregnant with the King's child, walked in on the king with one of her ladies on his lap. This lady was Jane Seymour, who would become his third wife. In a fit of rage, Anne Boleyn attacked her king, perhaps initiating her miscarriage. Henry blamed her for the miscarriage and, with his new desire for Jane Seymour, accused Anne Boleyn of having used witchcraft to ensnare him into making her queen. On top of this, King Henry's minister, Thomas Cromwell, accused Anne of adultery and plotting the king's death. Anne was made a spectacle in

public court, and despite her composed demeanor and denial of the accusations, she was unanimously condemned to death. King Henry quickly had a platform raised for her execution and on May 19, 1536, Anne Boleyn was beheaded.

Anne Boleyn's music begins with an a cappella cry of "try me, good king," throwing the listener directly into the tense action of the court room. As the piano accompaniment moves downward with a half-step ostinato in measures 3-10, the vocal line rises higher and higher as Anne's natural inclination for stress becomes unbearable. This increased distress is also emphasized by the sudden dynamic shifts and increasing tempo. Larsen uses the chords from John Dowland's lute song, "If My Complaints Could Passions Move" in the accompaniment as commentary on the action of the courtroom in measures 28-31. While Anne pleads for Henry to remember his love for her in measure 33, Dowland's music is quoted at the moment when the lyrics state, "love is my judge, and I am condemned," sub-textually suggesting that Anne has been rejected and her fate has already been decided. She begins to cry out, "try me," each time higher and more angular than the last, portraying her quickly changing emotions in her most desperate moment. Her final cry in measure 42 is followed by a double slash in the music, creating a break that shifts the action from the courtroom to the scaffold. This coda-like end to the song begins with a single-note melodic line in the piano, creating a feeling of desolation and portraying Anne's walk to the scaffold. Anne was known as the high-strung and overly proud wife of Henry VIII, which shows in her haunting final line, "I hear the executioner's good, and my neck is so little." Larsen truly portrays Anne's attempt to suppress her fear with a "half-voice" marking in the music and a monotone utterance of this final line.

Jane Seymour

Beyond the beginnings of Jane Seymour (1506-1537)'s relationship with King Henry VIII, there is little scandal involved with her marriage to the King and no scandal included in her character song. During Anne Boleyn's accusations and trials, King Henry had moved Jane Seymour out to a smaller castle called the Strand. On the same day that Anne had been executed, the king headed out to the Strand to betroth Jane and, just eleven days after the execution, they were married. A year after their marriage, Queen Jane gave birth to a male heir to the throne--Prince Edward. Her character song takes place just after her long, three-day labor. In stark contrast to the first two character songs, this one is triumphant, peaceful, and more tonal. Larsen

quotes the anonymous lute song, "Tudor Rose," in the lullaby section from measure 17 to the end to reflect Jane's calm personality and to reference the Tudor house crest. She also quotes the melody of Michael Praetorius's well-known song, "Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming" in the vocal line in measures 4-6 again, for the same effect. In contrast to the first two songs, Larsen uses the same musical device of the tolling bells, but rather than signaling something ominous, it signals joy, just as the bells would have sounded for the birth of the King's son. Though this song is full of joy, the joy is interrupted by quiet tritones in measure 13, hinting at the tragedy to come. Just twelve days after Edward's birth, Jane Seymour died of puerperal fever. Jane had only been queen from May 1536 to October 1537.

Anne of Cleves

King Henry VIII's short marriage to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves (1515-1557), serves as a kind of comic relief in his history and in this song cycle. Though he may have actually been fond of Jane Seymour, King Henry began searching for a new wife immediately after her death, perhaps to make an ally during a rather unstable time in England. He decided on Anne of Cleves, though he had never actually seen her. He had a court artist view her first to report on her looks and create a portrait for Henry to check as well. In the portrait she had seemed fair, so Henry consented and the wedding contract was finalized on January 6, 1540. When Henry finally looked upon Anne of Cleves for the first time, he found her to be hideous, and secretly she felt the same about him. Because of their mutual lack of attraction, Henry found himself constantly impotent and their marriage was never consummated. Thankfully, this made for an easy annulment, though Anne, knowing of Henry's history with his previous wives, took special care ensure that the king was not insulted. Their marriage was annulled on July 11, 1540, ending Anne's six-month reign as queen. In order to keep peace between the families, Anne was offered a substantial monetary reward and named King Henry's "good sister." Her letter of assent to the annulment provides the text for her character song.

Anne of Cleve's song is comical, making light of the mutual dislike and lack of attraction between herself and King Henry. The vocal line is accompanied by an energetic chordal figure built on tritones, reflecting Anne's delight at her sudden freedom and newfound wealth. Larsen quotes Thomas Campion's lute song, "I Care Not for Those Ladies," along with jarring tritones as a comic reminder of the ridiculousness of the king and queen's situation and perhaps a

reminder of the danger Anne may have barely avoided. As Campion's song suggests, King Henry truly did not care for Anne of Cleves at all, so much so, that he could not consummate the marriage. The witty music juxtaposed with Anne's monotonous, almost bored, vocal line creates more of a humorous effect as Anne recounts his inability to consummate their marriage and the fortunate outcome of her new wealth. This song is almost bubbling over with Anne's giddiness. As the song concludes, the bouncing tritones resolve to perfect fourths and fifths as she signs her name to the letter of assent.

Katherine Howard

The humor of Anne of Cleve's song sets the listener up for a shock at the grave final song of the *Try Me, Good King* cycle. This character portrayal of Katherine Howard (1521-1542) is perhaps the most tragic and haunting of the five songs in the set. Soon after Anne of Cleve's annulment, King Henry pursued Katherine Howard, the newest, youngest, and most beautiful addition to the royal court. His main attraction was to her look of innocence, which was quite deceptive considering her heightened sexual nature. Katherine was far from innocent, having had many intimate relationships, some publicly known, some not. While King Henry pursued her, Katherine was promised to another man, which she conveniently "forgot." Oblivious to this information, King Henry married Katherine Howard on July 28, 1541. Being the impulsive, flirtatious, and politically naive girl she was, Katherine Howard began a love affair with a man of the king's own privy chambers, Thomas Culpeper, in the spring following her marriage. Soon the news of this affair reached the Archbishop Cranmer, who had to notify the king. In his humiliation and rage, King Henry left Katherine to the court, wanting no part in the spectacle. At the trial she had denied doing any wrong to the king, pleading for mercy, but as her confidence broke, she committed high treason by admitting that she loved Thomas Culpepper. On February 13, 1542, Katherine Howard was executed at the same scaffold King Henry had set up for her cousin, Anne Boleyn just six years before. The text for Katherine's song comes from a potentially inauthentic source, cited as "an unknown Spaniard" who supposedly recorded Katherine's final words. Whether she actually said these things is questionable, but it makes for an interesting and dramatic conclusion.

Katherine's song is not only the most haunting of the five songs in the cycle, it also acts as the book-end to the story of King Henry VIII's wives. Larsen creates this book-end feeling

through her repetition of musical devices from the opening Katherine of Aragon song in the final Katherine Howard song. Larsen reuses John Dowland's "In Darkness Let Me Dwell," again, to show the agony of the situation and to suggest that the only peace comes in death. The song opens with a single melodic line in the piano part, winding around the tonal center "A," depicting Katherine's delirious walk to the scaffold. Anticipation builds until there is a sudden explosion of ominous bell tolls in measure 2 that announce her coming execution, using the same minor sixth motive from the first song in the cycle. This circling around the tonal center "A" also depicts Katherine as the young girl she was, alone and lost in the world. Similar to the first song of the cycle, Katherine Howard's song also has a continuous, repeating note pattern, though not on the same pitch. As the song progresses, the continuous motion accelerates, rushing Katherine to her death as she pleads and grows more desperate. There are only four breaks in the eighth-note motion each time to accentuate the gravity of what Katherine has said at that moment, for example, the first break happens in measure 10 when she declares, "I have not wronged the king!" At first, Katherine tries to appeal to the public, asking for prayers and forgiveness, but as she realizes her fate is already sealed, she admits the truth that she loved Thomas Culpepper, committing treason in her youthful defiance. The song concludes with a single line melody from Dowland's song in sharp contrast to Katherine's panic and cries. Originally Larsen had written the end of this song with more vocally demanding ascending wails to portray the severity and danger of these women's situation. As the singer's voice physically strains to reach those notes after such a long and intense cycle, the true sense of their fear and tragedy would be revealed. These runs were meant to emphasize Katherine Howard's vulnerability, which is retained in her revised version of the music. These wails are not just a conclusion to Katherine Howard's life, but a conclusion to the whole cycle, summing up the tragedy that each wife of King Henry VIII experienced.

CHAPTER 5 - Ah! Je veux vivre

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

Charles Gounod was a man who never quite fit into his time or space. As a composer, he was too classical for the Romantic period he lived in, too French to be considered German, but too German to be considered French. He had very few successes in his lifetime and suffered from many illnesses and toxic relationships. Charles Gounod was certainly an unfortunate soul, however he is remembered today as a great composer of French opera and revivalist of French religious music.

Gounod had a troubled childhood, but the tragedy he experienced propelled him into the musical world in which he knew he was meant to live. Charles Gounod was born in Paris on June 17, 1818. At the young age of four his father died, leaving his mother to take care of him and his fifteen-year-old brother on the tight wages of a piano teacher. To ensure that her sons had what they needed, Gounod's mother gave extra piano lessons and art lessons through all hours of the day and night. She was physically and mentally exhausted and often fell ill during this time. To add to her stress, Gounod was a troubled child often suffering from bouts of psychosomatic illness. He was such a trouble for his ill mother that she sent him to boarding school so that she could continue to work and support her sons. While at the boarding school Gounod started to experiment with music and began taking lessons. Though his mother did not want him to have the life of a musician, he was a willful child and eventually got his way.

Once Gounod decided to pursue music he struggled to find his place in the musical world. In 1835 he enrolled in the Paris Conservatory. While there, he was encouraged to compose for the Prix de Rome which he attempted in three consecutive years. In 1839 on his third attempt, he won the grand prix for one of his sacred works. That year he travelled to Rome where he studied the works of Donizetti, Bellini, and Mercadante, though he was uninspired by them. He was more interested in sixteenth-century polyphony and the works of Palestrina and the eighteenth-century counterpoint of Johann Sebastian Bach, but for these passions he found no outlet in Rome. Perhaps because of his disinterest in his formal studies or perhaps due to his natural inclination for obsession, Gounod started to focus more on religion and became a disciple of the liberal theologian, Dominican Père Henri Lacordaire. For two years he gave up his

musical aspirations and began studying for the priesthood, though he was miserable and realized that music was always his true passion.

It was a challenge for Gounod to establish himself as the kind of musician he wanted to be, but the connections he made helped him to rise to the top of the operatic scene for a time. Upon returning to France, Gounod's mother arranged for him to take the post as musical director of l'Église des Missions Étrangères. He planned to use this post to revive the work of Palestrina and Bach, but the choristers were uninterested in the old style of music. Eventually he swayed his choir and the public with his own work which incorporated some of the older styles, although their favor that he worked so hard to win was soon lost. When the empire of Louis-Philippe collapsed, Gounod had to hide from the dangerous streets of Paris. When he resurfaced he was all but forgotten, his post lost. Fortunately around this time Gounod made his first important connection with Pauline Viardot. Already an established composer herself, Viardot helped Gounod to attain his first operatic commission in 1851. Though it was not much of a success, it showed promise and brought Gounod's work into the forefront of the public eye. His next important connection was made when he married the daughter of Pierre Zimmermann, the retired piano professor at the Paris Conservatory. Though he may have had a love affair with Viardot, he married into the Zimmermann family for the musical connections and influence. After his marriage in 1852 Gounod was able to attain more opera commissions for such great works as *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*. After these great successes, however, Gounod's career steadily declined.

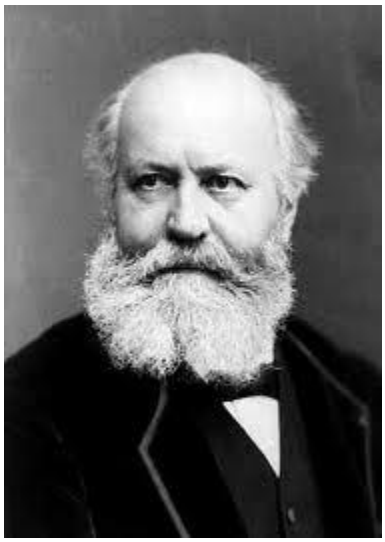
Though Gounod had established himself as a respectable operatic composer, his success was short-lived as political instability and personal conflicts took their toll on his career. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, most of the opera houses were converted into hospitals, putting many opera composers out of work. Gounod decided to move his family to England to wait in safety, and while there, he made his last important connection. Gounod immediately fell in love with Mrs. Georgina Weldon, a woman who was obsessed with his music. Recognizing her husband's signs of an affair, Gounod's wife left him in England and returned to France with their daughter. Mrs. Weldon was incredibly influential and helped Gounod with his music, but she was also very controlling. While he suffered from his usual bouts of mental illness she took care of him and he developed a strong emotional and financial tie to her. Eventually she would not allow him to leave London. After the war subsided Gounod

was offered a directorship at the Paris Conservatory, but he did not accept because of his dependence on Mrs. Weldon. When Gounod fell seriously ill in 1874, he was rescued from the Weldon home and returned to Paris, though he had left one of his best scores behind. Mrs. Weldon attempted to use this as leverage to bring Gounod back to London, but he would not go. Because of her obsession, she had a warrant set out for his arrest and he was unable to return to England. After his long hiatus, Gounod returned to France in 1874 where he was completely forgotten in the musical world.

Gounod's work and health steadily declined in his final years. His work was considered too repetitive and old fashioned and though he was not German, his German-inspired pieces were also not French enough for the public. He spent the remainder of his life trying to find what success he had before, but to no avail. He had one final commission at the Opéra-Comique for which he tried to revive an old work, but failed. After that embarrassment, Gounod lost all desire to write for the theatre and returned to his other love-- old sacred music. He surrounded himself with religion and rediscovered his passion for Bach and Palestrina. His psychosomatic disorder and overall health worsened as he got older. While at the piano one day in 1893 Gounod fell unconscious and three days later, on October 18, 1893, he passed away.

Though the majority of Charles Gounod's oeuvre is not remembered or performed today, his greatest successes, *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette,* remain permanent staples in the standard operatic repertoire. Because of these successes, he is remembered as a great French opera composer. Though his life was a battle of mental illness, toxic relationships, war, and failure, he always tried to persevere and returned to his music.

Figure 5.1 A photograph of Charles Gounod in his sixties



Stylistic Characteristics of Charles Gounod's Music

Charles Gounod's musical style is a mixture of German and French influence, pre-classical techniques inspired by Palestrina and Bach, and Romantic melodic devices from his time. He is considered one of the most prolific composers of sacred music in nineteenth-century France with twenty-one masses, three oratorios, and various cantatas, motets, prayers, and canticles. He also wrote a total of seven operas, though only three of them received any serious recognition, and over one hundred French mélodies. Gounod's main goal was to rekindle sacred music in France and to bring back the traditions of the Renaissance and Baroque styles.

Gounod's style presented a wide mixture of musical techniques. His melodies were different from the usual French melodic style of his time. While his French contemporaries relied on poetry for their textual inspiration, Gounod attempted to abandon poetry as the textual base, and move toward the truth of prose. Though he was interested in the older musical styles, his music evolved from the equal rhythms and from expected in tonal cadential formulas of antiquity to the current Romantic practice of extended tension and release. He preferred melodies that were closer to speech patterns, more fluid and unpredictable, using many different meters and tempi. His harmonies were not as innovative as his melodies, staying mostly within the realm of Romantic harmonies, though compared to those of his German contemporaries, his harmonies

were more classical, but compared to his French contemporaries, he was considered more modern in his approach to harmony.

Gounod felt that the artist's responsibility was to represent the truth of text in a beautiful way. He felt the audience should not have any kind of strong influence on the decisions an artist makes when composing music, so his music was less spectacle and humor based, and more lyrical and tender, going against much of what the French public wanted at the time. His reputation began to falter as he continued to write serious pieces in an older style while the public wanted witty, frivolous operas. People wanted easily sung and memorable melodies to listen to, and Gounod's music was more thought-provoking and less predictable. Still, many of his melodies adhered to the French Romantic tradition. He left a major mark on the course of French music, but also quickly fell from favor.

As his life continued to move forward and his music continued to mature, his style transformed from the German-inspired style of his youth, to a more French style, and finally became more Italianate. Toward the end of his life, particularly after the Franco-Prussian War, his music became increasingly repetitive and seemed to have reached a plateau. His old pieces continued in their popularity, but much of his newer work was forgotten. Gounod was always looking for a success and would fall back on old habits that he knew would work, which strengthened the reputation that his work was too repetitive. It is clear that, although Gounod experienced major successes with his operas *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*, his strengths were in his sacred music, particularly in his masses and cantatas.

Gounod's Work and Style in Roméo et Juliette

Roméo et Juliette was the last of Charles Gounod's seven operas and was considered his most spectacular immediate success and perhaps the highlight of his entire career in the opera. The story, made popular by William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliette*, had been adapted for the opera stage by many composers before Gounod, such as Nicola Vaccai in 1825, Vincenzo Bellini in 1830, and Héctor Berlioz in 1839, to name a few. At a young age, Gounod had seen a production of Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliet*, which moved him tremendously and had a lingering effect. When he was given the opportunity to write his own version, he was thrilled. Just three months after receiving the commission from impresario Léon Carvalho in 1865, he had already completed sketches of most of the score. Barbier and Carré had also written the entire libretto in

just three months, adhering closely to Shakespeare's play. Much of this speed is due to the fact that Shakespeare's play already provided divisions that could be easily transitioned into a musical setting. The play fits the operatic form perfectly with spectacle in the masque and the nurse's comedic role. Despite his quick progress in the beginning of his compositional process, progress quickly slowed due to his nervous disorder. It took him over a year to orchestrate what he had sketched in just three months. He was so preoccupied with the score that he gave up other job opportunities to devote himself entirely to it. As often happened, his creative burst was followed by a bout of illness and fatigue and he struggled to complete it.

By August 1866, Gounod had the score for *Roméo et Juliette* completely ready to start production. Historically, when the impresario of the Théâtre-Lyrique, Carvalho, got his hands on a new score, he almost always imposed changes. *Roméo et Juliette* was no different. There was continuous discord between impresario and composer as to who would sing what roles, whether there should be recitatives or spoken dialogue, and what songs the main soprano (Carvalho's wife) would be able to sing. Gounod had intended for the opera to be performed with spoken dialogue, but during the rehearsal period, he decided that recitatives would be better. During the rehearsal period, Caroline Carvalho struggled to sing the Juliette aria from the fourth act. It was incredibly dramatic and difficult, so Gounod was forced to write an aria more in her light, coloratura style. "Je veux vivre" would be sung in the first act instead.

When taking on this opera, Gounod was drawn to the theme of forbidden love due to his inclination for affairs, which became the main theme throughout the entire opera. Many critics described this opera as a love duet in five acts. The opening orchestral writing immediately establishes the mood and hints at the tragedy to come using themes that appear throughout the opera to present different feelings or ideas, much like Wagner's leitmotives. Though Shakespeare's play touches on many more themes than forbidden love, Gounod chose to focus mainly on this one to fit the standards of a good nineteenth-century French opera. With just the basics of this one theme, the opera was about three-and-a-half hours long. Gounod had to make many cuts to the score to accommodate for public comfort, yet he left in all four love duets between Romeo and Juliet despite their repetitive nature. This number of tenor-soprano duets in one opera was unprecedented and unusual in contemporary French and Italian opera.

After its premier on April 27, 1867, *Roméo et Juliette* secured Gounod's reputation as a legitimate composer of operas. He was only fourty-eight years old and was suddenly considered

a cultural icon and became internationally famous. Its premier was followed by over one hundred consecutive performances at the Théâtre-Lyrique. Since it premiered at the International Exposition of 1867 where many influential foreign visitors attended, it immediately became an international success as well. The following year, the Théâtre-Lyrique closed due to bankruptcy. *Romeo et Juliette* was soon taken up by the renowned Opéra-Comique, where it appeared more than twice a week. *Roméo et Juliette* continued to be globally popular until World War I, when Gounod's melodies started to appear too old-fashioned. In Paris, however, this opera never completely disappeared from the opera repertoire and continues to be a cultural staple in the French opera.

Plot Synopsis of Roméo et Juliette

Roméo et Juliette is an opera in five acts with a libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré based on William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Though Gounod focuses mainly on the love between Romeo and Juliette, Shakespeare's play is also about civil disorder, limits of authority, and baseless hatred. Gounod's opera opens with a prologue, much like Shakespeare's play, where the soloists summarize the tragedy that is about to ensue. The first act begins at a masked ball at the Capulet home. While everyone is singing and dancing, Romeo and his friends have snuck into their enemy's party. Romeo catches sight of Juliette as she is singing her first aria, "Ah! Je veux vivre," and immediately falls in love with her. He hides and watches her from afar, then steps out to profess his love. They both immediately feel the draw toward one another, but soon after, Romeo's identity is revealed and he runs away. Act two takes place in the Capulet garden near Juliette's balcony. As she wonders about, Romeo sneaks into her garden and reveals himself to declare his love for her. This act ends with Juliette's promise to marry Romeo whenever she can.

The second half of the opera begins with the third act in Friar Lawrence's cell. Romeo comes to the friar to ask for help in marrying Juliette, who soon enters as well. He is convinced of their love and marries them. In another scene, Romeo's friends are in a fight with Juliette's family members. Eventually Mercutio and Tybalt duel, resulting in a fatal wound to Mercutio. Romeo enters as Mercutio dies and avenges his death by mortally wounding Tybalt, Juliette's cousin, which results in the Duke of Verona exiling Romeo. In stark contrast to this act, the fourth act begins at daybreak just after the newlywed's wedding night. Juliette has forgiven

Romeo for killing her cousin and, again, the couple professes their love for one another before Romeo leaves for exile. Juliette is soon informed that she must marry Paris on that same day, and in despair, she seeks out the friar who gives her a sleeping potion to appear dead until Romeo can come to her. This act ends with Juliette being led to the wedding altar when she drops to the floor. The fifth and final act of the opera begins in the Capulet crypt where Juliette is lying on a tomb. Romeo has not received word that Juliette is only asleep and believes she is actually dead. He enters the tomb and takes poison to join her in death, but soon after she awakens to see what he has done. She reveals a sword and immediately stabs herself. The two sing one last love duet as they die together.

On Being Juliette: Performing Je veux vivre

It is interesting to consider that one of Juliette's most famous arias, "Ah! Je veux vivre," was actually an afterthought on Gounod's part written during the rehearsal period of the opera. This aria was a replacement for the original melodramatic aria in the fourth act just before Juliette was to take the sleeping potion, but because Madame Caroline Carvalho struggled with it, Gounod had to write a more fitting aria within her style. She was best at showy waltz songs in a lighter coloratura style, preferring catchier tunes to dramatic ones. For the premier, Gounod had cut the melodramatic aria, which has become common practice to this day. This aria shows a strong ebb and flow of passions. Even within the singular focus of Juliette's opening aria, there is a deeper layer that is brought to the listener's attention by the chromatic movement of her melody, particularly in her whimsical "ah's" in measures 101-104 which could be a very subtle hint at her untimely demise. Gounod's setting of the text is responsive to every emotional nuance within the text, but also allows the singer to show off, showing his desire to portray the truth of the text while also staying close to the desires of the nineteenth-century French public. Juliette's role is a popular choice for young sopranos to debut themselves on the operatic stage. With arias such as Juliette's "Ah! Je veux vivre," sopranos are able to show off their grace and vocal beauty in a seemingly simple way.

Text Translation

Je veux vivre	I want to live
Dans le rêve qui m'enivre	In this dream that intoxicates me
Ce jour encor!	This day again!

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.

Sweet flame,
I guard you in my soul
Like a treasure!
This intoxication of youth
Does not last, alas! but a day,
Then comes the hour
When one cries,
The heart surrenders to love,
And the happiness flees without returning!
Far from a morose winter,
Let me slumber,
And breathe in the rose,
Before it dies.

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