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## Marlaina Owens' Senior Recital

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**George Frideric Handel**, a German composer, spent the bulk of his career in London. As a composer during the Baroque era, his compositions contain a level of elegance that is characteristic of the period. He was well known for his operas and he did not disappoint with the premiere of *Giulio Cesare*. At the time of composition in 1723, Handel was the Lord Chamberlain at the Royal Academy of Music in London. The librettist for this opera, Nicola Haym, was a cellist on staff during the time of Handel's appointment as Lord Chamberlain. The plot of the opera is taken from Roman history of Julius Caesar in 47-48 BC. In this scene, Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, disguises herself as a maid and attempts to seduce the general, Caesar. Whether it is because she truly loves him or because she wants to use his power to take the throne or both is up to the performer's interpretation. *Giulio Cesare* is considered one of Handel's most well known operas.

The aria *V'adoro pupille* is a love song from the second act in the opera *Giulio Cesare*. *V'adoro pupille* is considered a da capo aria, a characteristic of the Baroque musical form of arias. The aria is in ABA form, with a repeat and ornamentation of the A section.

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, who left behind over 20 operas in his short 35 years, is one the greatest Classical composers. In terms of operatic output, Mozart started from the ripe age of 12. By the time he composed *Le Nozze di Figaro* ("The Marriage of Figaro") and *Così fan tutte* ("Women are like that") he helped the particular genre, *opera buffa*, reach its peak. *Opera buffa* was a comic opera that could relate to the everyday man more than its serious counterpoint, *opera seria*. Both of the operas' librettos came from a popular Venetian opera librettist, poet and Roman Catholic priest, Lorenzo Da Ponte. Another thing these operas share is the strong presence of female leads while still staying in the bounds of being comical characters.

*Le Nozze di Figaro*, based on a French play *La folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*, tells the story of how Susanna and Figaro, servants in the Almaviva House, get married while defeating the efforts of their unfaithful employer, Count Almaviva, who tries to get *jus primae noctis*, or the right to spend the first night after marriage with the bride. In Susanna's Act IV aria *Deh vieni, non tardar*, she is disguised as the Count's wife, Countess Almaviva while the Countess is dressed as Susanna as a ploy to catch the Count in his infidelity. Within the gliding cadences and the luscious melody, this aria represents pure flirtation as she senses Figaro's presence and tries to lure him out. This can be seen with the use of "viene" which translates to come.

Following the success of *Le Nozze Di Figaro* in 1786, *Così fan tutte* was commissioned in 1789. An original work about Viennese scandal and the supposed "fickleness" of women, two officers are called to war and decide to test their fiancées' fidelity when they come back by disguising themselves and switching fiancées. Despina, the maid to the fiancées, fuels the idea of infidelity by telling the women to take lovers while their significant others are away. In her 2<sup>nd</sup> act aria *Una donna a quindici anni*, Despina attempts to convince her employers that there is no harm in flirtation.

**Francis Poulenc** was a French composer and pianist during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a member of a group of six French composers that became known as *Les Six*. These composers often shared concert programs and collaborated on two works. Poulenc's experience with art songs grew as he started accompanying for a baritone, Pierre Bernac. This partnership strengthened and lasted until his death in 1963. Bernac became the best interpreter of Poulenc's songs and eventually wrote a book on the subject. *Fiançailles pour rire* ("Whimsical Betrothal") was composed during

a period of seriousness and re-establishment of Poulenc's religious beliefs. He stumbled upon Louise de Vilmorin's first book of poetry *Aux Officiers de la Garde Blanche*, and ended up asking her more poems, which ended up in a set of six songs. Poulenc considered these texts to be truly feminine and therefore set the songs for women.

The themes of Vilmorin's poetry include reflection and nostalgia, which Poulenc executes with rich harmony and melody. "La Dame d'Andre" contemplates the actions of a newly wed bride on her wedding night while "Dans l'herbe," the most dramatic of the set, recalls a woman's memory of watching a man die, as she could not do anything for him. In the brilliant "Il vole," which Poulenc calls one of his most difficult songs, a frustrated woman complains to her inconstant lover. In "Mon cadavre est doux comme un gant," the performer settles into a heavier topic as she describes her body as it transitions into death while "Violon" explores the subtle seductiveness of a smoke-filled bar. Last but not least, "Fleurs" explores the idea of heartbreak.

**Felix Mendelssohn** is a 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic German composer who revived the oratorio, which is based on sacred text, with the composition of *Elijah* (1846). The popularity amongst the public at the premiere was so great that established itself as second only to Handel's *Messiah*. While on vacation, He was asked by the Saxon monarch to resume his former position in Leipzig and received from Birmingham a commission to compose a new oratorio for the music festival of 1846. Completed a year before his death, *Elijah* is based on the chief events in the prophet's life in the Old Testament. The two parts to the oratorio were composed separately as Mendelssohn juggled his professional duties in Leipzig. The oratorio's libretto came from protestant minister Julius Schubring, who did the libretto for Mendelssohn's first oratorio *St. Paul*.

The aria, *Hear Ye, Israel*, starts Part II of the oratorio with an Israelite persuading her people to heed the Ten Commandments. The pleading persuasion can be heard in elegant and soft accompaniment as the performer makes her case for the commandments. This accompaniment becomes more vibrant and cheerful as she is excitedly intones the voice of God to soothe the people of their worries.

**Richard Strauss**, another Romantic composer, focused his composing abilities on operas and lieder. Specifically, his lieder reflect the changes that were happening in the genre at the time with the influence of opera. The strophic ballad and simple piano accompaniment were replaced with a more descriptive and complex genre of music. Most of his lieder composition for women was based on his wife, Pauline von Ahna, who he met because of his first opera *Guntram*. Soon after, they fell in love as she often performed recitals along with Strauss.

At the time of composition of *Heimliche Aufforderung* and *Morgen* in Op. 27 set, he had taken a break from his duties and turned the experience into a time for reflection. This reflection was important for his musical style because he developed less conservative ideas about the music of the future. The combination of these new ideas and his marriage to Pauline broke a lull in Strauss' composition of lieder. He started to seek out texts that had striking ideas and images. Strauss used the passionate lyrical poetry (for *Aufforderung* and *Morgen*) of John Mackay, who gained notoriety for his anarchistic writings and support of homosexuals. While *Heimliche Aufforderung* paints a alluring picture of two lovers meeting at a party to sneak out to the rose garden, *Morgen* addresses the calm aspects of loving another forever.

*Ständchen* was composed when Strauss was emerging into his musical maturity but still had conservative ideas about the future of music. It is joined in a separate set of six songs called *Das Geheimnis* (“The Secret”) in 1887. The text is taken from the German poet Adolf Friedrich von Schack. The text depicts a love serenade with the image of two youthful lovers in a rose garden at night, which seems to be a common place for lovers to go.

**Rosephayne Powell** serves as a music professor at Auburn University, Philander Smith College and Georgia State University. *Miss Wheatley’s Garden* is in honor of America’s first African-American poet Phillis Wheatley. She was brought to America and became the slave of a couple in Boston around 1765. Although it was uncommon for children of slaves to be educated at all, Phillis published her first poem by age twelve. Her gift of poetry and popularity in the US eventually bought her her freedom. In memory of this great woman, the songs within the set are poems by African-American women.

Georgia Douglas Johnson was the first black woman since E.W. Harper to receive national acclaim in literature during the Harlem Renaissance. Her gift to express emotion through her words is reflected in “I want to die while you love me,” which depicts a carefree day in which two lovers experience passion together. Angelina Weld Grimké’s poems are full of imagery that reflect nature and restrained love. The combination of those two elements is seen in the writing of “A Winter’s Twilight.” This piece describes both the longing and peace of the poet who is haunted by memories of a loved one. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was born free and raised by an uncle who had a school for free blacks in Baltimore, Maryland. As she grew older, she was disturbed by slave laws and became a lecturer for the abolition of slavery. For a period of time, she helped at the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia and that was where she heard the stories of runaway slaves. This background became an important facet of her poetry.