



PROGRAM NOTES

A BOUQUET OF SONG

Celebrating the Opening of the Nasher Sculpture Garden

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2003 7:00 PM

CROW COLLECTION OF ASIAN ART

What would be a good way to welcome a new neighbor? In the old days, the lady of the house would walk over with a fresh-baked apple pie or a two-layer chocolate cake. The man of the house would offer to help build his new neighbor's barn. Tonight we wish to share some good old fashioned hospitality.

We bring a bouquet — a bouquet of song — and we enlist the support of some old friends and neighbors, the Crow Collection of Asian Art and the Arts District Friends, to welcome the opening of the Nasher Sculpture Center. We deliver from the heart a fresh arrangement of both unusual and familiar song — a basket full of good wishes, presented by neighbors to welcome our newest neighbor in the Arts District.

I

Sing Me to Heaven, with words by Jane Griner and music by **Daniel E. Gawthrop**, presents this theme in all its broadness with the words “my soul finds primal eloquence and wraps me in song.” Composed in 1991, this piece has sold over 100,000 copies. Choirs of all types and sizes have found that the text and the music of this piece speaks very directly to them and their audiences.

In my heart's sequestered chambers lie truths stripped of poet's gloss.

Words alone are vain and vacant and my heart is mute.

In response to aching silence memory summons half-heard voices,
And my soul finds primal eloquence and wraps me in song.

If you would comfort me, sing me a lullaby.

If you would win my heart, sing me a love song.

If you would mourn me and bring me to God, sing me a requiem,
sing me to heaven.

Touch in me all love and passion, pain and pleasure,

Touch in me grief and comfort; love and passion, pain and pleasure.

Sing me a lullaby, a love song, a requiem.

Love me, comfort me, bring me to God:

Sing me a love song, Sing me to heaven.

The *chanson* bloomed in the 16th century, at a time when French was overtaking Latin as the predominant language of Europe. Thanks also to the invention of the printing press, thousands of chansons were made available to the public and became the most popular type of secular music sung or played by musicians — professional and amateur alike — in courts, theaters, homes, schools, and in the streets. During the reign of King Francis I (r. 1515-1547) Paris was an important musical center of Europe. “Parisian chansons” — settings of poems that followed no fixed rhyme schemes, with patterned repetitions, sometimes narrative and often humorous, witty and/or titillating — flourished.

ARTS DISTRICT CHORALE

Three centuries later, **Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) was born near Paris. Considered an impressionist because of his identity with the Art Nouveau movement, he set out to be in the center of contemporary aesthetics. The *Trois chansons* connect the styles of the past with the harmonic techniques of the time. Moreover, the texts of these chansons are poems written by Charles d'Orléans, grandfather of Francis I under whose reign French chansons bloomed in Paris three hundred years earlier.

The pieces are not thematically related. *Dieu! Qu'il la fait bon regarder!* is a shimmering love song; the lazy tune of *Quant j'ai ouy le tabourin* wanders above quick percussive-like vocal accompaniment; and *Yver, vous n'etes qu'un villain* scolds winter for its cruelty.

II

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) is acknowledged to be one of the greatest of French composers, a master of the song-cycle, a poet of the keyboard., and a profound composer of chamber music. His delicate and elegant — but by no means harmonically unadventurous style — has an unsuspected strength and emotional appeal.

III

The beauty of American folk song can seem sentimental to us now. Perhaps we have forgotten how austere our forbearers' daily lives were. The matter-of-fact harshness of early America, shadowed by wars, slavery, poverty, and untimely death, cast even mundane comforts — song and story among them — into comparably bright relief.

Oh, Shenandoah is among the loveliest songs in all American folk music. The text reveals a relationship between the spirit of adventure in moving to uncharted territory and the longing for the comforts of a life recently left behind.

Black is the Color is a song of romantic longing expressing heartfelt awe over the singer's "true love." Its roots go back to 18th century England and the sad tale of Barton Fink, an outcast who adored a raven-haired girl in the village. After her brother killed Barton for his affection, the girl found a scrap of paper from her admirer on which he had penned the words "black is the color." Deeply touched, she set the words to music and passed it on in Barton's memory.

IV

Originally a Scottish ballad, O Waly, Waly, *The Water Is Wide* is a beautiful song that celebrates love's initial challenge and promise but wisely reminds us that love's trust is defenseless against the heart's eternal fickleness.

The Appalachian song *Pretty Saro* expresses a poor man's unrequited love for a woman who has more genteel expectations of marriage: "My love, she won't have me so I understand/She wants a freeholder and I have no land..."

The song *Single Girl* challenges the myth that sacrifices made by American men for their country surpassed those of their wives and daughters. Sung by the mother of two hungry children, *Single Girl* recalls a time, in the not-so-distant-past, when poor women had little choice but to marry, and had few rights once they did.

V

Nelly Bly, written in 1849, paints the picture of its beloved title character: a fun-loving woman with "a heart as warm as a cup of tea." Stephen Foster wrote the song for performance in the minstrel shows he helped popularize during his lifetime.

Another minstrel song, *Ching-a-ring-chaw!* has been immortalized by Aaron Copland in his Old American Songs.

The gentle African-American lullaby, *Black Sheep*, has roots which go back to the southern practice of black "mammies" caring for the white children of slave-owners. The song's black lamb represents one of the "mammy's" own babies, entrusted to the care of an older sibling. This beautiful lullaby helped to soothe the longing of mothers as gently as it eased little children to sleep.

Dirait-on is the last of a set of five songs entitled *Les Chansons des Roses* by Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943) set to poems on roses by Rainer Maria Rilke. This final piece is composed as a tuneful "Chansopn populaire", or folksong. In the style of earlier chansons, the music is wed closely to the text, capturing the delicate beauty and sensuousness of the words.