# The Feminine Voice / Self Titled

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Abigail (Teddy) McKrell

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2020

My senior project consisted of two concerts, one in classical voice and one in electronic composition. Throughout my time at Bard, I have participated in both departments, and found that breakthroughs in one often led to advancement in the other. In my sophomore year my confidence in classical voice was waning, as my perception of where I could be and where I was did not match up. I decided to take Intro to Electronic Music to get another perspective on music, and the music I made in that class invigorated my passion for music and motivated me to continue on my journey with classical voice. I have also noticed that my classical repertoire often inspires me to try new things in electronic music. A major focus of my classical concert was lullabies, and this gave me some interesting ideas as to how I could change up the medium. Thus, in the interest of a balanced senior project that would show off my strengths in both fields, I decided to do a concert in each.

I titled my first recital "The Feminine Voice" and performed on November 11th, 2019 at 7:15 in Bito CPS alongside pianists Erika Switzer and Lindsey Williams. The first half of the program was oriented around selections from Robert Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben*, bookended by Orfeo's aria "Che faro senza Euridice" from Cristoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Lady Jane's aria from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. The second half was broken into two sets and a finale. The first set was lullabies, including a Meredith Monk cover, art songs from Gladys Rich, Benjamin Britten, and Gabriel Faure, and an aria by Gian Carlo Menotti. The second set was female composers and poets, with a piece by Cecile Chaminade, a Dominick Argento setting of Virginia Woolf, and a piece by Bard Faculty member Kyle Gann featuring poetry by Karen Schoener. To complement the Orfeo aria at the opening, I decided to end the concert on a high note (literally) with "Que fais-tu blanche tourterelle" from

Charles Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*. The aim of this recital was to explore some of the overall narratives offered to the classical mezzo voice, as well as examine the agency of the performer in interpreting possibly problematic works.

I had originally intended to have another recital for the second half of my project, but with COVID-19 my plans had to change. Instead, I pivoted to a recorded project. This meant scrapping the few songs from Craigslistlieder by Gabriel Kahane and more complicated rhythm and guitar parts that were written for other people. For my recordings, I would have to perform everything myself, so I focused my efforts on what I am capable of as a performer and what I can edit and assemble in a recorded song.

The songs in my second semester project include covers of "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy" by Kenny Chesney and "Nobody" by Mitski along with a setting of "The Moths" by Mary Oliver and two songs with original lyrics and music. Both covers are mellowed out, with the Kenny Chesney cover taking a much more melodramatic and hurt tone, implying that the object of the speaker's affection is only sticking around for the tractor. The Mitski cover is much less drastic in its changes, if a bit more obvious in its anguish. "The Moths" attempts to keep moving in the face of despair, occasionally getting caught up in anxiety but taking care not to dwell too long. The first completely original song is "Werewolf Teeth," in which the speaker grapples with their recent transformation into a werewolf. The second is "Sweet Baby," a lullaby sung by a robot to its next iteration, loosely based around John von Neumann's theory of self-replicating spacecraft. The most prominent unifying theme among these pieces is pain and its management. Though disparate in terms of subject matter, each piece has a certain outlook on its own pain, and every piece takes to song as a form of release.

MONDAY, 11/11 7:15 PM BITO CPS

# The Ferninine Voice



TEDDY MCKRELL, MEZZO ERIKA SWITZER & LINDSEY WILLIAMS, PIANO Program Orden

"Che farò senza Euridice?" Cristoph Willibald Gluck From Orfeo ed Euridice (1762) (1714 - 1787)Frauenliebe und Leben (1840) Robert Schumann I. Seit ich ihn gesehen (1810 - 1856)II. Er der herrlichste von allen IV. Du Ring an meinem Finger VII. An meinem Herzen VIII. Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan "Sad is that woman's lot" Arthur Sullivan from Patience (1881) (1842 - 1900)Intermission Meredith Monk Lullaby #4 (1979) (b. 1942) "Lullaby" Gian Carlo Menotti from The Consul (1950) (1911 - 2007)American Lullaby (1932) Gladys Rich (1892 - 1972)A Charm of Lullabies (1947) Benjamin Britten 3. Sephestia's Lullaby (1913 - 1976)Les Berceaux (1881) Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)Aupres de ma mie (1888) Cécile Chaminade (1857 - 1944)From the Diary of Virginia Woolf (1974) **Dominick Argento** 5. Fancy (1927-2019)Your Staccato Ways (2013) Kyle Gann Takeoff (b. 1955) "Que fais-tu blanche tourterelle" Charles Gounod from Romeo et Juliette (1867)

(1818 - 1893)





Teddy McKrell is a senior music major at Bard College, originally from North Carolina. Within the music program they study classical voice and electronic music. When not completely swamped with preparing for recitals, they also sing in Bard Opera Workshop & Chamber Singers, and do yearly productions with White Iris Light Opera.



Lindsey Williams is a senior music major at Bard who studies piano with Erika Switzer and harpsichord with Jeffrey Grossman. This semester, Lindsey is a member of the Bard Baroque Ensemble and the Trooper Trio. After Bard, Lindsey plans to pursue harpsichord in graduate school.



# Penformers



Erika Switzer is an internationally active pianist, teacher, and arts administrator. Heard on the stages of New York's Weill Hall (Carnegie) and Geffen Hall, at the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC, and the Bard Music Festival, she has also appeared across Canada at festivals including Vancouver's Music on Main and Ottawa's ChamberFest. During her seven-year sojourn to Germany, she performed at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and for the Munich Winners & Masters series, and won numerous awards, including best pianist prizes at the Robert Schumann, Hugo Wolf, and Wigmore Hall International Song Competitions. Devoted to the performance of new music, Erika has recorded works by Jocelyn Morlock and Andrew Staniland for Centrediscs. An upcoming release, "English Songs à la française" features her long-standing duo-partnership with baritone Tyler Duncan. Erika Switzer is on the music faculty at Bard College and the Vocal Arts Program of the Bard Conservatory of Music. As co-founder of Sparks & Wiry Cries (sparksandwirycries.org), she contributes to the future of art song performance through publication of The Art Song Magazine, presentation of the songSLAM Festival in NYC, and the commission of new works. www.erikaswitzer.com



# Texts & Program Motes

In putting together a program, a primary thing on my mind was the mezzo voice repertoire and the narratives it offers. There are female roles, many of whom are mothers, sometimes royal, sometimes lowly. The mezzo woman is often in a supportive role, or she has rejected such things in favor of becoming an antagonist. Then there are trouser roles, which are usually either a young boy or a heroic role that was originally sung by a castrato. Finally there is art song, which is available to all voice types and often unspecified in terms of gender.

Within this trichotomy, the "feminine voice" is revealed to be arbitrary - the mezzo voice a vehicle for a multitude of gendered and non gendered experience.

# "Che farò senza Euridice?" Libretto - Ranieri de'Calzabigi

Che farò senza Euridice Dove andrò senza il mio ben. Euridice, o Dio, rispondi lo son pure il tuo fedele. Euridice! Ah, non m'avvanza più socorso, più speranza ne dal mondo, ne dal cel.

What will I do without Euridice?
Where will I go without my wonderful one.
Euridice, oh God, answer
I am entirely your loyal one.
Euridice! Ah, it doesn't give me
any help, any hope
neither this world, neither heaven.



Orpheus and Eurydice (1999), Arthur Boyd, Etching

Robert Schumann's "A Woman's Life and Love" provides a very particular kind of narrative of womanhood. The song cycle is from the perspective of a woman, and her emotions are at the forefront of the piece. However, her narrative begins with her as a young woman seeing the object of her affections, and ends with her as a widow grieving his death. Her songs are all about her love for others: her sister, her husband, her child. I find "At My Heart" towards the end of the cycle peculiar. The emotion I've witnessed in new mothers has almost always been quiet awe, but in this song the woman's emotions at the birth of her child are energetic, joyful, and declaratory - perhaps more the emotions of a new father. This is the point at which "A Woman's Life and Love" most shows that it was written by men. That being said, performance is a vital part of music, and I believe that the performer is capable of imbuing a song with new meaning.

#### Frauenliebe und -leben

Text - Adelbert von Chamisso Translation - Daniel Platt

1. Seit ich ihn gesehen, Glaub' ich blind zu sein; Wo ich hin nur blicke, Seh' ich ihn allein;

Wie im wachen Traume Schwebt sein Bild mir vor, Taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel, Heller nur empor.

Sonst ist licht- und farblos Alles um mich her, Nach der Schwestern Spiele Nicht begehr' ich mehr,

Möchte lieber weinen, Still im Kämmerlein; Seit ich ihn gesehen, Glaub' ich blind zu sein. 1. Since I saw him I believe myself to be blind, where I but cast my gaze, I see him alone.

As in waking dreams his image floats before me, dipped from deepest darkness, brighter in ascent.

> All else dark and colorless everywhere around me, for the games of my sisters I no longer yearn,

I would rather weep, silently in my little chamber, since I saw him, I believe myself to be blind.

Er, der Herrlichste von allen,
 Wie so milde, wie so gut!
 Holde Lippen, klares Auge,
 Heller Sinn und fester Muth.

He, the most glorious of all,
 O how mild, so good!
 lovely lips, clear eyes,
 bright mind and steadfast courage.

So wie dort in blauer Tiefe, Hell und herrlich, jener Stern, Also er an meinem Himmel, Hell und herrlich, herr und fern.

Wandle, wandle deine Bahnen; Nur betrachten deinen Schein, Nur in Demuth ihn betrachten, Selig nur und traurig sein!

Höre nicht mein stilles Beten, Deinem Glücke nur geweiht; Darfst mich niedre Magd nicht kennen, Hoher Stern der Herrlichkeit!

Nur die Würdigste von allen Darfst beglücken deine Wahl, Und ich will die Hohe segnen, Viele tausend Mal.

Will mich freuen dann und weinen, Selig, selig bin ich dann, Sollte mir das Herz auch brechen, Brich, o Herz, was liegt daran.

4. Du Ring an meinem Finger, Mein goldnes Ringelein, Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen, Dich fromm an das Herze mein.

Ich hatt' ihn ausgeträumet, Der Kindheit friedlich schönen Traum, Ich fand allein mich, verloren Im öden, unendlichen Raum.

Du Ring an meinem Finger,
Da hast du mich erst belehrt,
Hast meinem Blick erschlossen
Des Lebens unendlichen, tiefen Werth.

Just as yonder in the blue depths, bright and glorious, that star, so he is in my heavens, bright and glorious, lofty and distant.

> Meander, meander thy paths, but to observe thy gleam, but to observe in meekness, but to be blissful and sad!

Hear not my silent prayer, consecrated only to thy happiness, thou mays't not know me, lowly maid, lofty star of glory!

Only the worthiest of all may make happy thy choice, and I will bless her, the lofty one, many thousand times.

I will rejoice then and weep, blissful, blissful I'll be then; if my heart should also break, break, O heart, what of it?

4. Thou ring on my finger, my little golden ring, I press thee piously upon my lips piously upon my heart.

I had dreamt it, the tranquil, lovely dream of childhood, I found myself alone and lost in barren, infinite space.

Thou ring on my finger, thou hast taught me for the first time, hast opened my gaze unto the endless, deep value of life.



Ich will ihm dienen, ihm leben, Ihm angehören ganz, Hin selber mich geben und finden Verklärt mich in seinem Glanz.

7. An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust, Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust! Das Glück ist die Liebe, die Lieb' ist das Glück, Ich hab' es gesagt und nehm's nicht zurück.

Hab' überglücklich mich geschätzt Bin überglücklich aber jetzt. Nur die da säugt, nur die da liebt Das Kind, dem sie die Nahrung giebt;

Nur eine Mutter weiß allein, Was lieben heißt und glücklich sein. O, wie bedaur' ich doch den Mann, Der Mutterglück nicht fühlen kann!

Du lieber, lieber Engel, du! Du schauest mich an und lächelst dazu, An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust, Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust!

8. Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz gethan,Der aber traf.Du schläfst, du harter, unbarmherz'ger Mann,Den Todesschlaf.

Es blicket die Verlass'ne vor sich hin, Die Welt ist leer. Geliebet hab' ich und gelebt, ich bin Nicht lebend mehr.

Ich zieh' mich in mein Inn'res still zurück, Der Schleier fällt, Da hab' ich dich und mein verlornes Glück, Du meine Welt! I want to serve him, live for him, belong to him entirely, Give myself and find myself transfigured in his radiance.

7. At my heart, at my breast, thou my rapture, my happiness! The joy is the love, the love is the joy, I have said it, and won't take it back.

I've thought myself rapturous, but now I'm happy beyond that. Only she that suckles, only she that loves the child, to whom she gives nourishment;

Only a mother knows alone what it is to love and be happy.

O how I pity then the man who cannot feel a mother's joy!

Thou dear, dear angel thou Thou lookst at me and smiles, At my heart, at my breast, thou my rapture, my happiness!

8. Now thou hast given me, for the first time, pain, how it struck me. Thou sleepst, thou hard, merciless man, the sleep of death.

The abandoned one gazes straight ahead, the world is void. I have loved and lived, I am no longer living.

I withdraw silently into myself, the veil falls, there I have thee and my lost happiness, O thou my world! I grew up surrounded by Gilbert & Sullivan, seeing my mother play almost all of the battleaxe roles throughout my childhood. Now it's my turn to take up the mantle, and for this particular concert I decided on Lady Jane from Patience. The show is a satire on the Aesthetic movement, and the women's chorus consists of "20 lovesick maidens" who are obsessed with whichever poet appears the most aesthetic. Lady Jane is among the oldest of the maidens, and in her aria she laments the passing of time and its effects on her visage. Lady Jane could be interpreted as a caricature, simply comic relief at the expense of any woman she resembles. But I believe her plight is something that seriously affects women everywhere - Western beauty standards idolize youth, and fool women into thinking that any sign of age is a sign of ugliness. Lady Jane's struggle is something very raw, and something personal to me. This is yet another situation in which performance can redefine a character, and reclaim that which is meant to mock.

#### "Sad is that woman's lot"

from *Patience*Libretto - William S. Gilbert

Sad is that woman's lot who, year by year,
Sees, one by one, her beauties disappear,
When Time, grown weary
of her heart-drawn sighs,
Impatiently begins to dim her eyes!
Compelled, at last,
in life's uncertain gloamings,
To wreathe her wrinkled brow
with well-saved "combings,"
Reduced, with rouge, lip-shade, and pearly grey,
To "make up" for lost time as best she may!

Silvered is the raven hair,
Spreading is the parting straight,
Mottled the complexion fair,
Halting is the youthful gait,
Hollow is the laughter free,
Spectacled the limpid eye,
Little will be left of me
In the coming bye and bye!
Little will be left of me
In the coming bye and bye!

Fading is the taper waist,
Shapeless grows the shapely limb,
And although severely laced,
Spreading is the figure trim!
Stouter than I used to be,
Still more corpulent grow I —
There will be too much of me
In the coming by and bye!
There will be too much of me
In the coming by and bye!



Alice Barnett as Lady Jane (1888)

Lullabies are an important site of connection between parent and child. In this collection there are a number of approaches to the lullaby, with varying emotions just below the surface. The Meredith Monk lullaby is without words, simply a tune that carries intent. The lullaby from The Consul is sung by a grandmother whose grandchild is sick while its father is in a dangerous political situation. Her song her desire to shield the child from the grief of adult life. American Lullaby is much more lighthearted, but there is still a feeling of absence as the nursemaid sings about the parents who cannot be there. Sephestia's Lullaby comes across as a tantrum, barely cooled by a mother at her wit's end and an absent father. Les Berceaux also deals with absent fathers, describing the great ships and the day of parting that must come. In all of these, we see that the lullaby is also a site of catharsis. Otherwise concealed emotions can be expressed in the form of a lullaby.

## "Lullaby" from The Consul

I shall find for you shells and stars
I shall swim for you river and sea
Sleep my love, sleep for me
My sleep is old
I shall feed for you lamb and dove
I shall buy for you sugar and bread
Sleep my love, sleep for me
My sleep is dead

Rain will fall but baby won't know, He laughs alone in orchards of gold Tears will fall but baby won't know His laughter is blind Sleep my love, for sleep is kind Sleep is kind while sleep is young Sleep for me, sleep for me

I shall build for you planes and boats I shall catch for you cricket and bee Let the old ones watch your sleep Only death will watch the old Sleep, sleep...



Meredith Monk - Songs from the Hill/Tablet

#### **American Lullaby**

Hush-a-bye you sweet little baby and don't you cry any more.
Daddy has gone to his stockbroker's office a keepin' the wolf from the door.
Nursie will raise the window shade high,
So you can see the cars whizzing by.
Home in a hurry each daddy must fly
To a baby like you.

Hush-a-bye you sweet little baby and close those pretty blue eyes.

Mother has gone to her weekly bridge party to get her wee baby the prize.

Nursie will turn the radio on

So you can hear a sleepy-time song,

Sung by a lady whose poor heart must long

For a baby like you.

#### Sephestia's Lullaby

Text - Robert Greene

Weep not, my wanton,
smile upon my knee;
When thou art old
there's grief enough for thee.
Mother's wag, pretty boy,
Father's sorrow, father's joy;
When thy father first did see
Such a boy by him and me,
He was glad, I was woe;
Fortune changèd made him so,
When he left his pretty boy,
Last his sorrow, first his joy.

The wanton smiled, father wept, Mother cried, baby leapt; More he crow'd, more we cried, Nature could not sorrow hide: He must go, he must kiss Child and mother, baby bliss, For he left his pretty boy, Father's sorrow, father's joy.

#### Les Berceaux

Text - Sully Prudhomme Translation - Richard Stokes

Le long du quai les grands vaisseaux, Que la houle incline en silence, Ne prennent pas garde aux berceaux Que la main des femmes balance.

Mais viendra le jour des adieux, Car il faut que les femmes pleurent, Et que les hommes curieux Tentent les horizons qui leur rent.

Et ce jour-là les grands vaisseaux, Fuyant le port qui diminue, Sentent leur masse retenue Par l'âme des lointains berceaux. Along the quay the great ships,
Listing silently with the surge,

But the day of parting will come, For it is decreed that women shall weep, And that men with questing spirits Shall seek enticing horizons.

Pay no heed to the cradles

Rocked by women's hands.

And on that day the great ships, Leaving the dwindling harbour behind, Shall feel their hulls held back By the soul of the distant cradles. Feminine voices are essential to classical vocal repertoire, but they are not particularly common on the composition side of things. In this set there is one female composer and two female poets. The first is Cecile Chaminade, the first female composer to receive the Legion of Honor. Her song "Beside My Darling" features musings as to what the speaker would do if they were a bird, but concludes that they would rather stay with their beloved than give in to such foolish fancies. The next features Virginia Woolf, one of the pioneers of stream of consciousness writing. The text for the song is not from any of her published work, but rather some thoughts from her diary. The final song is composed by our very own Kyle Gann, and the text is by Hudson Valley poet Karen Schoener. Her abstract text, in combination with Gann's "gently rocking" music, harkens back to lullabies, with parent-child relationships at the forefront.

## **Aupres de ma mie** Text - Octave Pradels

Si j'étais l'oiseau léger
des forêts sauvages,
Ah! je voudrais voyager
sur tous les rivages.

J'irais sous le ciel heureux,
où Golconde est reine
Tremper mon aile aux flots bleus
de la mer sereine.

Ivre de ciel azuré et de poésie,
Par les airs j'irais au gré
de ma fantaisie.
Mais non, je n'ai pas souci
de lointaine grève,
Je veux vivre près d'ici
mon fol et doux rêve,
Car je n'ai qu'un seul désir
et ma seule envie
C'est d'écouter à loisir
le chant de ma mie.

If I were a lightweight bird in savage forests,
Ah! I should wish to travel every shore.
I'd go under the happy sky,
where Golconde reigns.
Soak my wings in the blue waves of serene seas.

The drunk, azure sky and poetry
By the air I would go
wherever I fancy.
But, I do not care
for distant shores.
I want to live here,
with my sweet, foolish dreams.
I have but one desire:
To listen at leisure
to the song of my beloved.

#### **Fancy**

Text - Virginia Woolf

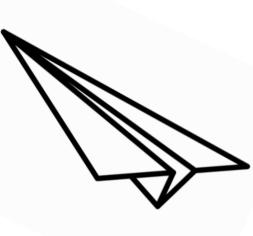
Why not invent a new kind of play? As for instance, woman thinks, he does. Organ plays, she writes. They say she sings. Night speaks, they miss.

#### **Takeoff**

Text - Karen Schoener

On the left heads turn left
We wait for that lift
that brings optimism
and forgetting
Outside the window
trees break into a run
A boy says "Daddy
we're going fast"
A blast from a nozzle
the smell of plaid
the strain and pitch
of metal and wire

The strangeness of strangers accelerates into me the almost-touching and I remember that calculated word you used to lift me the plaything I imbued with ever-absent you What is stationery animates what is heavy lightens what is level upends love is in the air



Both "Che faro" and "Que fais-tu" are considered trouser roles, though the former was originally a castrato role. Meanwhile, "Que fais-tu" was written for a female voice, and it certainly takes advantage of the upper range. The actual role is that of Romeo's page, Stephano, who after searching in vain for Romeo comes to see if he has been captured by the rival Capulets.

**"Que fais-tu"** from Romeo et Juliette Libretto - Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

Depuis hier je chercheen vain mon maître! Est-il encore chez vous? Mes seigneurs Capulet? Voyons un peu si vos dignes valets A ma voix ce matin Oseront reparaître. Since yesterday I have sought
In vain my master.
Is he still in your home,
My lords, Capulet?
Let us see a bit if your worthy servants
At the sound of my voice this morning
Shall dare to appear!

Que fais-tu blanche tourterelle, Dans ce nid de vautours? Quelque jour, déployant ton aile, Tu suivras les amours!

Aux vautours, il faut la bataille, Pour frapper d'estoc et de taille Leurs becs sont aiguisés!

Laisse-là ces oiseaux de proie, Tourterelle qui fais ta joie Des amoureux baisers!

Gardez bien la belle! Qui vivra verra! Votre tourterelle vous échappera,

Un ramier, loin du vert bocage, Par l'amour attire, A l'entour de ce nid sauvage A, je crois, soupire!

Les vautours sont à la curee, Leurs chansons, que fuit Cytheree, Résonne a grand bruit!

Cependant en leur douce ivresse Les amants content leurs tendresses Aux astres de la nuit! What are you doing, white turtledove, In this nest of vultures? Some day, unfolding your wing You will follow love!

To the vultures, a battle is necessary, To hit with a cut and a thrust Their beaks are sharpened!

> Leave them, these birds of prey! Turtledove, who gets your joy From amorous kisses!

Guard well the fair one! Whoever lives will see! Your turtledove will escape from you.

A ring-dove, far from his green grove Drawn by love, All around this wild nest Has, I believe, sighed.

The vultures are at the quarry, Their songs, from which Cytheria flees, Resound with a big noise!

Meanwhile, in their sweet intoxication
The lovers tell of their tenderness
To the stars of the night!

Guard well the fair one!.



# Acknowledgements

# I would like to thank:

The Bard music program, especially Teresa Buchholz and Erika Switzer, as well as Rufus Mueller, Ilka Lomanaco, Matt Sargent, and of course, Kyle Gann. It has been such a joy to work with all of you.

My colleagues in the undergraduate vocal program, especially Alexandria Gilman (whose concert is up next!) We're all in this together.

Micah Gleason, for the beautiful headshots.

My friends and family, especially Malcolm Gilbert. Thank you for being with me every step of the way.



Colored W. Sales and





