AN EXPLORATION OF SELECTED WORKS FOR HORN, VOICE, AND PIANO: PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE HORN PLAYER

Why Horn with Voice?
- Versatile
- Wide tonal spectrum, many overtones
- Dramatic, heroic, lively, delicate
- Extensive range and color

Performance considerations
- Text, structure, and the use of the horn

Franz Schubert’s *Auf Dem Strom*
- High Voice (Tenor or Soprano)

Benjamin Britten’s *Canticle III - Still Falls the Rain*
- Tenor (High Voice)

Donald Grantham’s *La Noche de la Isla*
- Baritone (Low voice)
Selecting Works for Study and Performance

- Schubert’s *Auf Dem Strom*
  - Emergence of valved horn
  - Cusp of Classical and Romantic periods
  - Schubert’s final year
- Britten’s *Still Falls the Rain*
  - Huge contributor to the genre
  - Historical/emotional significance
- Grantham’s *La Noche En La Isla*
  - 1979 IHS contest winner
Auf dem Strom

- Scored for tenor, horn, piano
- Also performed with Soprano
- Changes interval relationships!
- Modified strophic with 3 strophes.
- Each begins with horn/piano intro
Opening melody
Horn has lyrical melody (mm. 1-17) never heard in voice
intro/interlude before Strophe 1
Strophe 1 (mm. 16 – 27)
- Horn plays fragments in echo of voice
- Spirals into parallel duet (m. 28, “Schon…”)
- Later independent countermelodies with the voice
Nimm die letzten Abschiede,
küss se, und die wehenden, die Grüsse,
die ich noch ans Ufer sende, ehr dein Fuss sich scheidend weende!
“Schon wird von des Stromes Wogen” (Already is by the currents waves)

“rasch der Nachen fortgezogen” (Quickly the sloop carried off)

“rasch”
- brighter vowel formation, more weight
- Closes quickly to consonance

“Schon”
- Darker vowel, stays on vowel (doesn’t go to consonance)
- Less attack then “rasch”, but more sustain through note (horn)

“doch den thranendunklen Blick” (but my tear-dimmed gaze)
- Horn imitates, match character of text
- Legato, Drawn out
Excerpt #3

Scheiden wird aus dem Streben, Wegen,

nach der Nache, fort geht so gen,

durch den gnaden, den heiligen Blick, nicht die Streb' sucht stets zu

rück, zieht, nicht die Streb' sucht stets zu

rück!
Excerpt #4, mm. 49-54

- Crescendo into m. 51
- Momentum for singer’s entrance and B section
- Horn echoes voice, join and end in parallel 3rds (m. 53)
“doch des Stromes Wellen eilen” (but the current’s waves rush)

“weiter ohne Rast und Ruh” (onward without rest or peace)
Know when to weave in and out of texture
Role changes between solo and accompaniment
Sensitivity to the text
Do what isn’t written for dramatic effect
For tenor, horn and piano
Alternates instrumental theme-and-variations w/ 6 verses
Edith Sitwell's poem "Still Falls the Rain"
  published in 1941, after raids on London in 1940
  disillusions of World War II
  Britten set in entirety
  Compares bombing raids to crucifixion of Christ
  victims become sacrificed body of Christ.
Overall Structure

- Theme + 6 verses (each with refrain "Still falls the rain."
- Each verse is separated by a variation (horn and piano)
  - time to digest Sitwell's wrought imagery
- Emotional climax in last verses
- Releasing in final variation
  - horn and voice join = voice of Christ.
B-flat?

Constant assertion.

End of almost every variation

each verse prepared for (and most dominated) by final B-flat open-fifth chord of theme
16 bars
introduced in horn,
piano articulating closely spaced chords rumbling in low range
3 phrases of uneven length
second and third inverting and extending the first
Canticle III, Theme

Words by
EDITH SITWELL

Music by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN
Op. 58

THEME

Tenor
Slow and distant (\( \text{d} \text{4} \))

Horn
(Actual notes)

Piano
pp heavily cresc.

Horn
cresc.

Horn
mf pp
dim.
Excerpt #1: Stanza "Still falls the rain"

- Recurring = rain of bombs over London
- Binding element for whole work
Variation I and Verse II

- Piano foreshadows Verse II
- Irregularly placed 6 dry pulses alternating in hands become "heart pulse" and "hammer beats" in Verse II
- Horn should play smooth/lyrical in contrast
- let "hammer-beats" stand out
Highly chromatic horn line sneaks underneath "tomb."

Echoed in Verse III by tenor, articulating "blood," "breed," and "worm."

Descending chromatics

Emphasize word painting of the text

Slight accent at beginnings of chromatics

Tenor part has accents marked
Variation III

Aggressive despite “pp”

match piano articulation

special attention to tenuto syncopated notes.
Variation IV

- "brassed" (stopped horn) and "tremolo" (flutter-tongue)
- series of strongly articulated/stopped quintuplets
- tenor imitates in Verse V,
  - harshness of the text (ie “He bears in his heart all wounds”)
- Cresc. fortissimo to a sforzando creates intense climax
  - original recording (Britten-Pears Library), Dennis Brain starts the "tremolo" note (flutter tongue) at a mezzo forte, softer than marked, emphasising of crescendo
  - Brain also inserts a small pause before the sforzando resolution in measure 6,
    - emphasis to climax
Excerpt #3: Variation IV and Verse V

VARIATION IV
Quick and agitated (d. 112)

VERSE V
Free recitative (Horn Tacet)

Still falls the rain—

Agitated (imitate Var. IV)

He bore in His Heart all wounds,— those of the light that died.
Excerpt #4: Verse VI

"I’ll leape up to my God: who pulles me doune - See, see where Christ's blood streames in the firmament."

antiquated text, Britten employs sprechstimme (vocal technique between singing and speaking)

effective device for setting the highly dramatic text
Excerpt #5: Variation VI

- Horn and voice join
- Finally a Key signature (B-flat major)
- Voice sings a perfect inversion of the horn line.
- Horn, voice resolve on B-flat ("Still do I love", measure 8)
Balance/blend
- muted horn, careful articulation
- Syllabic text
  - lightly articulate to match movement of words.
"Then sounds the voice of One."
- voice of Jesus
- octave (most consonant/pure interval)
- reconciliation
- Christ will continue to love despite man's tendency for war
Overview of *Canticle III*

- Process of reconciliation and fusion of variation and verse
  - Loosening tonality in verses,
  - Variations more tonal character.
- Unity only at the very end
  - Release/reconciliation in Variation VI.
- Britten shapes movements and overall structure similarly
  - High point three quarters through
infrequently uses the horn and tenor at the same time
avoids competition between the two main melodic lines
dialogue between equal voices
clarity in the texture
word painting in horn line
Be aware of text, influences the horn line
know how relates to the text following
horn lines rarely drawn-out melodies (Romantic period)
sparing, but never conservative
“economy of means”
Donald Grantham (b. 1947)

Butler School of Music, UT Austin

1979 IHS Composition Contest winner – La Noche en la Isla

Horn, Baritone and Piano
Pablo Neruda (1904–1973)

- Chilean poet, diplomat and politician.
- Poetry:
  - Surrealist
  - Historical epics, E
  - Erotically charged love poems
    - *La Noche En La Isla* from erotic collection *Los versos del Capitan*
La Noche En La Isla (1979)

- Single long arch
- Begins softly, mysterious
- Climaxes, high registers/dynamics
- Ends quietly, slow, dissappearing
Effects and Demands

Effects (Horn):
- Quarter tones
- Stopped horn
- Flutter tongue
- Multiphonics

Challenges (Baritone and Horn)
- Long phrases
- Tempo Changes
- Irregular rhythms
- Dynamic extremes
- Balance with Baritone
- Sustained high tessitura
Excerpt #1: Opening

- Opening mm. 1-24
- Night Mood
  - Mysterious, atmospheric, and improvisatory high piano
  - Haunting, descending quarter tones spanning min. 3rd in horn
  - Draw out, exaggerate
- Deep, rich Baritone evokes night mood
- Multiphonic sustained under Baritone
  - Breath control and dynamics
Climax, mm. 80 – 96
- Rhythmic interaction
  - Irregular rhythms 5:4, 7:6, meter changes
- Aligning parts
  - Clear diction
  - Horn softer than written for clarity
  - Face vocalist during performance
- Balance
  - Horn/Voice highest register at ff

Challenges
- Atonal, Dissonant intervals
- Range demands
- Baritone remains in high register mm. 90-102
piu mosso (d=56)

Cuando a un no existía así, suena sin

diversión maravilla por tu lado,

y tus ojos buscan huir lo que a-

molto rit. meno mosso (d=40)

hor-
Excerpt #3: mm. 138 – END

Gentle counterpoint over pedal-drone in piano
Inspire interest in this genre (Horn, Voice and Piano)

Performance considerations unique to playing with voice

Emphasis on Text painting and vocal formant

Highlight 3 contrasting works

Schubert, Britten and Grantham

Period

Style/Structure

Voice Types