

Notes and Translations

“Dans un bois solitaire”

W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

“Dans un bois solitaire” is one of Mozart’s few French-language compositions. This is especially noticeable due to the piece’s text setting, which is relatively clunky and stressed compared to the settings of native French speaking composers of the same time. Despite this, the piece focuses on the mystical and often supernatural qualities of the woods, a common theme across French art song.

The song, better described as an arietta, takes listeners on an auditory adventure as the protagonist faces a harrowing encounter with Cupid. Varying musical textures and tempi enhance the drama. The return of the A section material at the end of the piece signifies a thematic return to reality as the protagonist’s fate is sealed.

Dans un bois solitaire et sombre
Je me promenais l’autr’ jour,
Un enfant e dormait à l’ombre
C’était le redoutable Amour.

In a lonely and somber forest
I walked the other day;
A child slept in the shade,
It was a veritable Cupid.

J’approche, sa beauté me flatte,
Mais j’aurais dû m’en défier
J’y vis tous les traits d’une
ingrate
Que j’avais juré d’oublier

I approach; his beauty fascinates me.
But I must be careful:
He has the traits of the faithless maiden
Whom I had sworn to forget.

Il avait la bouche vermeille,
Le teint aussi beau que le sien,

He had lips of ruby,
His complexion was also beautiful like hers.

Un soupir m’échappe, il s’éveille;
L’Amour se reveille de rien.

A sigh escapes me and he awakes;
Cupid wakes at nothing.

Aussitôt déployant ses ailes et saisissant
son arc vengeur,
L’une de ses flèches cruelles
En partant,
Il me blesse au cœur

Immediately opening his wings and seizing
His vengeful bow
And one of his cruel arrows as he parts,
He wounds me to the heart.

Va! Va, dit-il, aux pieds de Sylvie,
De nouveau languir et brûler!
Tu l’aimeras toute la vie,
Pour avoir osé m’éveiller.

“Go!” he says, “Go! At Sylvie’s feet
Will you languish anew!
You shall love her all your life,
For having dared awaken me.”

Translation by Emily Ezust

“Quando incise su quel marmo”

Vicenzo Bellini (1801-1835)

“Quando incise su quel marmo” is the perfect blend between art song and aria; sometimes the piece is referred to as an “arietta”. The piece tells the story of a lover who has been betrayed by his dearest Gilda. He remarks on how Gilda has perjured herself by promising to love him forever. Her carved signature remains, but her love does not. “Quando incise...” takes listeners through three main sections in addition to a small recitative: an A, B, and coda. Each section introduces us to a new dramatic moment.

Bellini most likely wrote his collection of ariettas for people to perform as at-home entertainment. The pieces can stand alone but still tell complete stories. In addition, they satisfy a fix for drama, as opera houses were historically closed during the season of Lent in Bellini’s lifetime.

Questa è la valle, il sasso è questo
In cui di Gilda al nome unito
Il mio nome è scolpito,
E in queste guise,
Se tradirmi volea, perché l’incise?

Quando incise su quel marmo
L’infedele il nome mio,
Invocando il cieco Dio,
Fede eterna a me giurò.

Sperguira! E questa pietra
Il mio nome addita ancora,
Ma l’idea di chi t’adora,
Nel tuo sen si cancellò.

This is the valley, the stone on which
Gilda’s name together
With my name is carved
But [why] in this manner
If she would [eventually] betray me, why
engrave it?

When she carved on this marble
Faithless, my name,
Calling on the blind God.
She swore eternal faith to me.

Perjurer! And this stone
Still bears my name,
But the idea of one who adores you,
[has been] erased from your bosom.

Translation by Laura Stanfield Prichard

“Priva son d’ogni conforto” from Giulio Cesare

G.F. Handel (1685-1714)

Handel’s *Giulio Cesare* is a thrilling three-act opera seria about Caesar’s relationship with the famed Cleopatra of Egypt during the conflict between Caesar’s, Pompeo, and the Ptolemaic army (of Egypt). Caesar, after arriving in Egypt, falls in love with Cleopatra. Cleopatra and her brother, Tolomeo, are fighting over who should rule Egypt. Caesar joins the fight and restores the kingdom to Cleopatra.

“Priva son...” is Cornelia’s act one aria. Caesar had come to Egypt to track down his enemy, Pompeo— Cornelia’s husband. Caesar was willing to offer mercy to him, but Tolomeo’s army had already beheaded him. When Cornelia

discovers that her husband was killed before even having the chance to repent, she is struck down with grief. She is offered a chance at revenge but simply says that another death will not comfort her. Only her husband can.

Priva son d'ogni conforto,
E pur speme di morire
Per me misera non v'è.

I am deprived of all consolation,
And also hope of dying
Is not miserable for me.

Il mio cor da pene assort
È già stanco di soffrire,
E morir si neiga a me.

My heart, absorbed by grief,
Is indeed weary of suffering,
And dying is denied to me.

“Che farò senza Euridice” from *Orfeo ed Euridice*

Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787)

In this heart-wrenching opera, Gluck retells the mythical story of Orfeo and Euridice, lovers destined for tragedy. Like the original myth, Orfeo loses his young wife after she dies prematurely from a snake bite. Orfeo, stricken with grief, is given an opportunity by, in this version, Cupid, to go to the underworld and retrieve Euridice. But there is a catch. Orfeo cannot look at Euridice or tell her that he is forbidden to do so. If he can bring her back successfully, they can live happily ever after.

Orfeo undergoes multiple challenges as he ventures through the terrifying underworld. At last he finds Euridice, but she mistakes his silence and refusal to look at her for infidelity. She tells Orfeo that being dead would be preferable. Grief stricken and exhausted, Orfeo turns to correct her, only to look at her. She dies again. Orfeo believes that he has failed and caused his only love to die. He mournfully sings about his loss in “Che farò”. Luckily, in a change of fate (and of plot), Cupid returns and commends Orfeo for his strength and love and allows him and Euridice to reunite in the realm of the living.

Ahimè! Dove trascorsi? Dove mi spinse un
delirio d'amor?
Spoza! Euridice! Consorte!
Ah, più non vive! La chiamo invan.
Misero me, la perdo e di nuovo e per sempre!
Oh legge! Oh morte! Oh ricordo crudel.
Non ho soccorse, non m'avanza Consiglio.
Io veggo solo (oh fiera vista!) il luttuoso
aspetto dell' orido mio stato!
Saziati, sorte rea: son disperato!

Alas! What have I done? Where has love's
frenzy driven me?
My wife! Euridice! Beloved!
Ah! She lives no longer, I call her in vain!
Woe is me! I have lost her again, and forever!
Cruel decree! O death! O bitter reminder!
There is no help, no counsel for me!
I see only (o cruel sight!) the mournful signs
of my terrible plight.
Be satisfied, malevolent fate! I am in despair!

Che farò senza Euridice?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?
Che farò? Dove andrò?

What shall I do without Euridice?
Where shall I go without my love?

Che farò senza il mio ben?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?

Euridice! Euridice!
O Dio! Rispondi!

Io son pure il tuo fedele.

Euridice! Euridice!
Ah! Non m'avanza più soccorso, più
Speranza
Nè dal mondo, nè dal ciel!

Euridice!
O heavens! Answer!

I am still true to you!

Euridice!
Ah, there is no help, no hope for me either on
earth nor in heaven!

Translation from opera-arias.com

Selections from *Harmonische Freude Musicalischer Freunde*

P.H. Erlebach (1657-1714)

Harmonische Freude Musicalischer Freunde is a large collection of art song, arietta, overtures, and chamber music. It is one of the few remaining works that survived the library fire that destroyed the other 90% of Erlebach's compositions. The collection encompasses three volumes of music in the Early Baroque/High Renaissance style.

Uniquely, Erlebach was living in a time where instrumental capabilities were changing. Specifically, strung instruments like the lute and viol da gamba were still common and popular, but new strung instruments, like the cello, were being introduced. Situated right between consorts and early chamber music, one can clearly hear a mixture of early baroque and renaissance styles.

Interestingly, many modern editions of this collection have rescored for modern instrumentation, but early music ensembles such as Capricornus Consort Basel, perform the music with the same instruments Erlebach would have had, including the beloved lute and sets of viols.

Erlebach lived in an area known as East Frisia (Lower Saxony), the area, although now considered part of Germany. Erlebach would have spoken an interesting dialect language, known as Eastern Frisian, during his lifetime. The language is now almost entirely extinct, having been replaced with Low Saxon, and then Dutch. The text of the following selections has been edited to read similarly to modern German, but will be sung with the pronunciation and dialect that Erlebach originally wrote and spoke in. To modern listeners, the language will sound like German being spoken with Dutch influences.

“Meine Seufzer, meine Klagen”

In the first verse of this beautiful and somber aria, the narrator cries that their prayers and laments are all in vain. They worry that their prayers go unheard and that God has intentionally closed them off from heaven, leaving them alone to face a difficult life.

The piece follows a traditional ABA format and is strophic, with each verse following the exact same structure as the one before it.

Meine Seufzer, meine Klagen
schicke ich nur vergebens über mich!

My sighs, my lamentations
I send up only in vain!

Ich muß leben, doch in lauter Furcht
und Zagen, Himmel, und du kannst es
geben!
Ach, warum verschließt du dich?

I must live, yet in sheer fear and trembling,
Heaven, and you [could] grant it.
Why do you close yourself off?

“Trocknet euch ihr heißen Zähren/Wer sich dem Himmel... erleben”

This second selection from *Harmonische Freude...* offers a gentle and lighter contrast to the previous piece. Instead of the heartbreak of being locked out of heaven, the narrator enjoys the sweet relief of their suffering ending. Stepping into the light of a new day, they find the courage to continue onward.

Trocknet euch ihr heißen Zähren,
Augen sucht euch aufzuklären,
Seufzer steigt nicht mehr empor!
Denn die Sonne bricht hervor.

Dry your hot tears,
Seek clear eyes,
Sighs rise no more!
For the sun breaks forth.

Was mich bis hierher gedrückt,
Furcht und Pein wird nun überwunden sein,
alles ist vorbei gerückt.

What has oppressed me until now,
Fear and pain will now be overcome,
Everything is over.

“La nuit”

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)

Reynaldo Hahn, a Venezuelan-born French composer, delights his audiences with this gentle nocturne. The beautiful and lullaby-like piece lulls audiences into a deep and peaceful sensation.

Despite the straightforward nighttime mood, the poetry leads us to a place that is much deeper than just a casual evening. The narrator praises the nighttime for its ability to free us into a world of shimmering starlight. But could the sweet kiss of night be more than just the sunset? Could night's kiss rather be a soft kiss of death, bringing us to the realm of gods? I think so.

Nous bénissons la douce Nuit,
Dont le frais baiser nous délivre.
Sous ses voiles on se sont vivre
Sans inquiétude et sans bruit.

We bless the sweet night,
Whose fresh kiss frees us.
Under its veils we live
Without unrest or noise.

Le souci dévorant s'enfuit,
Le parfum de l'air nous enivre;
Nous bénissons la douce Nuit,
Dont le frais baiser nous délivre.

Devouring care flees,
The fragrance of the air intoxicates us;
We bless the sweet night
Whose fresh kiss frees us.

Pâle songeur qu'un Dieu poursuit,
Repose-toi, ferme ton livre.
Dans le cieus blancs comme du givre
Un flor d'astres frissonne et luit,
Nous bénissons la douce Nuit.

Pale dreamer pursued by a god,
Rest and close your book.
In the frost-white heavens
A stream of stars shivers and gleams.
We bless the sweet night.

Translation by Emily Ezust

“Séraphine”

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)

In another dream-like piece, Reynaldo Hahn explores a the supernatural aspects of the woods, a very common French poetic theme. In addition, he uses two time signatures at the same time, creating a very dreamy atmosphere. The narrator takes us on an evening stroll through the forest. He wants to be with his long-lost lover, Seraphine. She appears to him draped in white. Although he is happy to see her, the narrator's eyes fill with tears. Is he there to visit, or to join her in death?

Quand je chemine, le soir,
Dans la forêt rêveuse,
Toujours chemine à mon côté
Ta tendre image.

When I walk in the evening
Through the dreaming forest,
Always beside me
Your loving image walks as well.

N'est-ce pas là ton voile blanc?
N'est-ce pas ton doux visage?
Ou bien, ne serait-ce que le clair de lune?
Qui brille à travers le sombres sapins?

Is that not your white veil there?
Is that not your sweet face?
Or could it be just moonlight
Glinting through the gloomy pine trees?

Est-ce mes propres larmes
Que j'entends couler doucement?
Ou se peut-il, réellement,
Que tu viennes, pleurant à mes côtés?

Are these my own tears
That I hear flowing quietly?
Or could it actually be you,
Coming to weep beside me?

Translation by Emily Ezust

“Carte Postale,” movement 2 from *Quarte Poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire*

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

This fun and short art song comes from Poulenc's larger work, *Four Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire*. It is quick, bouncy, and very colorful. In this little piece, the poetry invokes the image of a woman playing the piano in the shadows, almost reminiscent of the famous art piece, *Woman at the Piano* by painter Renoir. Despite the creepy description of the woman, the reality is much more amusing and innocent. The text of the poem is an acrostic of the name "Linda". Linda Molina da Silva was the original recipient of the postcard in 1901.

"Carte Postale"

L'ombre de la très douce est évoquée ici,
 Indolent, et jouant un air dolent aussi:
 Nocturne ou lied mineur qui fait pâmer son
 âme
 Dans l'ombre où ses longs doights font
 mourir une gamme
 Au piano qui geint comme une pauvre
 femme.

"Postcard"

The shade of her who is very sweet is evoked
 here, Indolent, and playing an air which is
 also doleful, Nocturne or Lied in a minor key
 which makes one's soul swoon,
 In the shadow where her long fingers bring
 death to a phrase
 On the piano which moans like a poor
 woman.

"Es ist Vollbracht" from St. Johns Passion

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

St. John's Passion is an oratorio about the Passion of Christ based on the text in the Gospel of John. The Passion of Christ refers to the final days of Jesus' life, spanning from his suffering in Gethsemane to his death on the cross. This aria comes from the second half of the oratorio and elaborates on the complex emotions surrounding the crucifixion. The narrator mourns the suffering of Christ, elaborating on the pain that He suffered. Then, the narrator celebrates the end of suffering; both the end of Christ's suffering on the cross and the end of humanity's eternal suffering (Christian belief of the defeat of Satan after the crucifixion).

Bach uses a cry motif throughout this piece to emphasize the pain Christ suffered. Then in a melismatic explosion, the mood turns to joy.

Es ist Vollbracht!
 O Trost vor die gekränkten Seelen, O Trost!

It is finished!
 What comfort for all suffering souls!

Die Trauernacht
 Läßt mich die letzte Stunde zählen.

The night of sorrow
 Now reached its final hours.

Der Held aus Juda seigt mit Macht
 Und schließt den Kampf.

The hero from Juda triumphs in his might
 And brings the strife to an end.

Es ist Vollbracht!

It is finished!

“O Thou That Tellest” from *Messiah*

G.F. Handel (1685-1759)

Messiah is one of Handel's most well-known and popular works, and is performed around the world every single year. The three-part oratorio generally discusses the prophesized birth of Christ, his death and resurrection, and lastly the theme of overall judgement and resurrection of humankind.

Traditionally, the work is performed during Easter and Christmas.

“O Thou That Tellest” is a prophetic piece announcing the coming of Christ through the Virgin Mary. The piece is bubbly, melismatic, and exciting, reflecting the mood of an angel announcing to the shepherds, “Be not afraid!”.

Behold! A virgin shall conceive,
And bear a son,
And shall call his name Emmanuel:
God with us.

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion,
Get thee up into the high mountain!

O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem,
Lift up thy voice with strength!
Lift it up, be not afraid!
Say unto the cities of Judah,
Behold your God!

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion,
Arise, shine, for thy light is come.
And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

“O Rest in the Lord” from *Elijah*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

“O Rest in the Lord” is a beautiful romantic and pastoral aria that comes from the oratorio *Elijah*. In this aria, the prophet Elijah finds himself exhausted, starving, and utterly lost in the desert. He has lost faith in God, so an angel comes down with a message for him.

The aria itself is very gentle and sweeping but features a fun deceptive cadence.

O rest in the Lord,
Wait patiently for Him,
And He shall give thee thy heart's desires.

Commit thy way unto Him, and trust in Him,
And fret not thyself because of evil doers.

“I Dug a Grave Under an Oak Tree,” movement 2 from *Dreams in War Time*

Juliana Hall (1958-Present)

Juliana Hall's *Dreams in War Time* is a song cycle featuring the poetry of Amy Lowell. Movement two, “I Dug a Grave...” is an eerie piece, both dissonant and colorful. The piece is rife with text painting, including droplet and water-like motifs. Hall creates auditory imagery of the world that Lowell created.

The narrator tells us of a harrowing night, yet beautifully moonlit. As she concludes her tale, it becomes apparent that she is not all she seems to be.

I dug a grave under an oak tree.
With infinite care, I stamped my spade
Into the heavy grass.
The sod sucked it,
And I drew it out with effort,
Watching the steel run liquid in the moonlight
As it came clear.
I stooped, and dug, and never turned,
For behind me,
On the dried leaves,
My own face lay like a white pebble,
Waiting.

“Silent Noon” from *The House of Life*

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1953)

In perhaps Vaughan William's best known song cycle, *The House of Life* explores themes of love and self-growth. “Silent Noon” is the second piece in the cycle. It paints the beautiful image of a pasture in the afternoon. It is pastoral, gentle, and creates the refreshing sensation of being in the quiet countryside, the air sweet and still with the scent of grass and hay. The piece brings us back from the dealings of ghosts and spirits, back to the grounded-yet-peaceful present.

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,
The finger points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace.

The pasture gleams and glooms
Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.

All round our nest far as the eye can pass
Are golden king-cup fields with silver edge,
Where the cowparsley skirts the hawthorn hedge.
'Tis visible silence,

Still as the hourglass.

Deep in the sun-search'd growths the dragonfly hangs
Like a blue thread loosen'd from the sky:
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.

Oh! Clasp we to our hearts,
For deathless dower,
This close companion'd in articulate hour,
When two-fold silence was the song,
The song of love.

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