



SENIOR RECITAL SERIES | SPRING 2025

Sunday, March 30, 2025, 3PM

Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall

Sarah Lekaj '25

Voice

Senior Voice Recital

Accompanied by Sarah Pelletier, piano

Studio of David Kellett

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PROGRAM

**GEORGE
FRIDERIC
HANDEL
(1685-1759)**

Hence, Iris, hence away from *Semele*

**WOLFGANG
AMADEUS
MOZART
(1756-1791)**

Parto, ma tu ben mio (I'm leaving, but you my love) from *La Clemenza di Tito*

**GUSTAV
MAHLER
(1860-1911)**

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Songs of a Wayfarer)

I. Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht

II. Ging heut' morgen über's Feld

III. Ich hab' ein glühend Messer

IV. Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz

INTERMISSION

**JULES
MASSENET
(1842-1912)**

Va! Laisse couler mes larmes (Go! Let my tears flow) from *Werther*

The use of photographic, video, or audio equipment is strictly prohibited. Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.

PROGRAM

ERIK SATIE (1866-1925)

Trois mélodies (Three melodies)

I. La Statue de Bronze, text by Léon-Paul Fargue
(1876-1947)

II. Daphénéo, text by Maria Godebska (1872-1950)

III. Le chapelier, text by René Chalupt (1885-1957)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41

I. A Cradle Song, text by William Blake (1757-1827)

II. A Highland Balou, text by Robert Burns (1759-1796)

III. Sephestia's Lullaby, text by Robert Greene (1558-1592)

IV. A Charm, text by Thomas Randolph (1605-1635)

V. The Nurse's Song, text by John Phillip (fl. 1561)

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PROGRAM NOTES

By Sarah Lekaj

Hence, Iris, hence away by George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) from *Semele*

Handel's *Semele* is an English oratorio based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It tells the story of Jupiter, the king of gods, who falls for a mortal Princess, Semele. Jupiter takes her away to a mountain to be his mistress. However, his wife, Juno, finds out about the affair and enraged, devises a plan of revenge. Juno's revenge ends with Semele's demise, but from Semele's ashes arises Bacchus, god of wine and ecstasy, her unborn child with Jupiter. *Hence, Iris, hence away*, is a famous aria sung by Juno in Act II after learning of Jupiter's affair from Iris, the messenger of the gods. Juno's plan involves disguising herself as Ino, Semele's sister, to gain Semele's trust and deceive her. Juno vows to seek Somnus, the god of slumber, to help put Jupiter into a deep slumber and enchant the dragon that guards Semele's palace. Juno exploits Semele's desire for immortality and her weakness of vanity to convince her that if Jupiter really loves her, he will make her immortal by appearing in his full divine form. This leads Semele to request for Jupiter to reveal his full divine form to her. Due to an oath sworn by the River Styx, Jupiter is forced to comply to the request. He transforms into his divine form which kills Semele instantly. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* channels various themes of love which Handel embodies in, Juno, focusing on themes of jealousy and vengeance involved in divine love. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Juno is portrayed as a vengeful wife who punishes all of Jupiter's lovers mercilessly. In *Semele*, Juno is deceptive, manipulative, and impatient in her need for revenge, reinforcing how jealousy and vengeance fuels her motivation as a character.

Parto, parto, ma tu, ben mio (I'm leaving, but you, my love) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) from *La Clemenza di Tito*

La Clemenza di Tito is an opera composed by Mozart in 1791, during his final year of life. The opera is set in Ancient Rome, where the ambitious Vitellia is seeking revenge against Emperor Tito for ignoring her. Vitellia manipulates Sesto, a loyal friend of the Emperor, into assassinating him. Torn between his immense love for Vitellia and duty towards the Emperor, Sesto reluctantly decides to carry out the attack, however the Emperor survives. Sesto is imprisoned but refuses to inform the Emperor of Vitellia's involvement. Eventually, Vitellia confesses to her role in the assassination plot and in an act of ultimate pardon, Emperor Tito forgives them both, depicting him as a just ruler and a restorer of peace to Rome. *Parto, parto, ma tu, ben mio* is an aria sung by Sesto in Act 1 during an emotionally intense moment for the character as he decides what decision to make. Sesto pleads for reassurance that Vitellia will love him and that she will be happy once he's completed the assassination. The beautiful clarinet solo

intertwines with the vocal line to aid in the depiction of Sesto's emotional turbulence in the dramatic coloratura passages. The aria continuously shifts from urgency to tenderness emphasizing Sesto's conflicting emotions and expressing themes of desperation, manipulation, and moral struggle in the face of love.

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Songs of a Wayfarer) by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen is a four-song cycle with music and text both written by Mahler. The cycle tells a story of a heartbroken wayfarer who wanders through nature, struggling with grief over a lost love. It is thought that the cycle is semi-autobiographical, as Mahler wrote it after his own failed relationship and rejection by Johanna Richter, a soprano he met while conducting in Kassel. The cycle opens with *Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht* (When my love has her wedding-day), which depicts the Wayfarer mourning for his love on her wedding day, stating that this day will be the worst day of his life. His pain is depicted through nature – spring is over, the blue flower withers, and the birds no longer sing. The second song, *Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld* (I went this morning over the field), shifts in tone. A much more joyful song takes over the Wayfarer as he is amongst nature, admiring the birds, flowers, and sparkling sun. The Wayfarer is optimistic as he exclaims how lovely the world is. However, the joy is fleeting as he is reminded that he has lost his love and this happiness he sees in the world will never belong to him. The third song, *Ich hab' ein glühend Messer* (I have a gleaming knife), is the most dramatic song of the cycle. The song describes the intense pain and anguish the Wayfarer feels, like a knife has been stabbed into his heart. This music is more violent and intense, reflecting an aggressive suffering and torment faced by the Wayfarer. The cycle ends with *Die zwei blauen Augen* (The two blue eyes of my love), which is a resigned farewell to love. In the song, the Wayfarer lies under a linden tree, exhausted by sorrow, where he finally rests in peace and sleeps. The song is deeply melancholic and has a calm atmosphere that contrasts the previous song. It marks the end of the Wayfarer's journey as he accepts his fate in grief and sorrow and finds peace again in his rest.

Va! Laisse couler mes larmes (Go! Let my tears flow) by Jules Massenet (1842-1912) from Werther

Werther by Jules Massenet premiered in 1892 in Vienna, with a libretto by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Set in late 18th century Germany, the opera follows the poet, Werther, who falls deeply in love with a young woman, Charlotte. Despite Charlotte's feelings for Werther, she is promised to Albert, a stable

and respectable man. Utterly heartbroken, Werther sends letters to Charlotte and Albert requesting Albert's pistols to end his suffering. Through these letters, Charlotte realizes her love for Werther and rushes to him, but she is too late as she finds him already dead. *Va! Laisse couler mes larmes* is an aria sung by Charlotte in Act 3 after she has read Werther's heart-wrenching letters. Overwhelmed, she breaks down in tears. Her sister Sophie attempts to cheer her up, however, Charlotte dismisses her so she can cry in solitude. The aria is a turning point for Charlotte as she abandons her usual composure, finally allowing herself to release her emotions and admit to herself her true love for Werther. The music is gentle as she intimately expresses her sorrow for Werther's suffering, and her own sorrow from her struggle between the duty of remaining faithful to her husband and her true love for Werther. Her responsibilities and duties to others play an important role in preventing her from following her heart. The aria and the character represent the complications between inner desire and external duty, capturing the themes of repressed love and the consequences of heartbreak.

Trois mélodies (Three songs) by Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Trois mélodies by Erik Satie is a three-song cycle written in 1916 consisting of poetry and verses of three contemporary French authors. The cycle is a testament to Satie's appreciation for the absurd, witty, and irony of contemporary French poetry. The cycle opens with *La statue de bronze* (The Bronze Statue), text written by Léon-Paul Fargue. The poem tells the story of a bronze frog statue who wishes to be a real frog in the pond "blowing bubbles of music from the soap of the moon," and wishes to be able to eat the insects that fly into her mouth at night. The second song in the cycle, *Daphénéo*, features text written by, Maria Godebska, the 17-year-old niece of one of Satie's biggest patrons of the period, Misia Sert. Godebska's poem depicts a frivolous dialogue between two characters, Daphénéo and Chrysaline, as they discuss the trees. The poem and song utilize a play on words. The two girls discuss the bird-trees (un oisetier) and the hazel-nut tree (un noisetier). When sung, the final n of 'un' elides into 'oisetier' making it sound like un noisetier. This adds a comical and nonsensical effect to the conversation that is reflected in the music. The final song, *Le chapelier* (The Hatter), sets to music a poem by René Chalupt. The poem is based on Lewis Carroll's the Mad Hatter character, and Chalupt drew his lyrics from the tea-party scene where the Mad Hatter frets over his pocket watch which is three days behind. As a solution he lubricates the watch in butter and dunks it into his tea. The cycle is a nice reflection of Satie's exploration of simplicity and ironic lyricism in his work.

A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41 by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

This five-song cycle written by Britten in 1947 depicts different styles of lullabies. The cycle begins with *A Cradle Song* – a gentle, lyrical poem by William Blake. The poem appears in his collection, *Songs of Innocence*, from 1789. It tells of a gentle and caring mother watching over her sleeping child. The mother is loving, protective, and deeply affectionate as she admires the child's innocence and peacefulness while wishing to shield them from the sorrows and hardships of the world. The music too reflects the soft and soothing quality of a lullaby. The second song of the cycle, *A Highland Balou*, written by Robert Burns is a Scottish lullaby written in the Scots dialect. The poem reflects the struggles and traditions of a Scottish highland life under the guise of a soothing lullaby. The mother refers to the child as a thief and that he must bring home a Carlisle cow, depicting the tradition of cattle raiding from the English, and returning home to the Highlands. The poem conveys rebellion and political conflicts through the sweet maternal lullaby.

The third song of the cycle, *Sephestia's Lullaby*, a Robert Greene poem from *Menaphon*, conveys juxtaposing tones of the soothing lullaby and a harsh and detached affection. The mother, Sephestia, attempts to quiet her child with little affection. The portion of the text selected by Britten out of its original context depicts Sephestia as cold and unaffectionate towards her child. However, in the context of *Menaphon*, Sephestia has lost her husband, the father of her son, to a shipwreck. Sephestia becomes a widow and single mother as she mourns her husband and is abandoned with her baby. The music reflects her grief as it deviates from a normative soothing or gentle lullaby.

The fourth song in the cycle, *A Charm*, by Thomas Randolph twists the concept of a lullaby into a spell-like lullaby to charm a child into sleep. Britten's music brings out a darker quality of the charm that creates an unsettling and tense atmosphere. Sleep is a harsh command, not a soothing affectionate phrase. The narrator warns the child of the horrors of mythological beasts and dangers they may face if the child wakes. It's reminiscent of a parent scaring a child into obedience. The music further reflects the tense and fear-drive environment as it is sonically the antithesis of a lullaby. The final song of the cycle, *The Nurse's Song*, features a poem by John Phillip that returns the cycle to a more classic lullaby. In the song a caretaker sings a gentle lullaby to put the child to sleep. The song emphasizes themes of protection – protecting the child's innocence and serenity, shielding them from harm. The nurturing tone of the poem is matched by a gentle beautiful lullaby-like melody written by Britten.

ABOUT

Sarah Lekaj is a Molecular Biology major at Princeton with minors in Global Health and Public Policy, and Vocal Performance. Originally from Kingston, NY, she enjoys filling her time with science and music. As an undergraduate research assistant in the Donia Lab, Sarah is conducting her senior thesis research on drug metabolism by the human gut microbiome. She also sings with the Princeton Glee Club and is actively involved in opera projects. She performed as the Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* (Spring 2024), appeared in the ensemble of *Dido and Aeneas* (Spring 2022), and has served as a student director for the Glee Club Opera Scenes Program since her sophomore year. Sarah is also thrilled to perform Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with the Princeton University Orchestra at the Reunions Concert. Lastly, Sarah is deeply grateful to the Princeton faculty who have supported her musical growth, especially Gabriel Crouch, Ruth Ochs, and David Kellett. She is also endlessly thankful to her parents and brothers for their unwavering support and encouragement of her musical aspirations. After graduation, Sarah will work as a Dermatology Medical and Research Assistant for a year before attending medical school.

Sarah Pelletier is a Lecturer in Voice at Princeton University, having held a faculty position since 2001. She has taught at Brevard Music Center, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Emerson College, The Walnut Hill School, The Peddie School, The American Boychoir School, and at Princeton High School. Her students have participated in summer programs such as AIMS in Graz, Liederkrantz, Amherst Early Music Festival, Early Music Vancouver, the Franco-American Vocal Academy, and the Summer Institute of the Arts at Black Hills. Her students have furthered their pursuit of music and theater at the Royal College of Music, The Juilliard School, New England Conservatory, San Francisco Conservatory, Columbia University, Yale University, and the Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University. Ms. Pelletier actively performs as both a singer and pianist.
