



# An Afternoon of Song

Janice Edwards, Mezzo-Soprano

Jeffrey Brody, Piano

Meegan Gagnon, Soprano

Sunday, February 22, 2009

3:00 pm

If music be the food of love (First Version)	Henry Purcell (1659-1695)
Ombra mai fu From <i>Xerxes</i>	George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Malinconia	Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)
Van gli effluvi	Francesco Tosti (1846-1916)
Stornello	Giuseppi Verdi (1813-1901)
Sea Slumber-Song From <i>Sea Pictures</i>	Edward Elgar (1857-1934)
Let Beauty Awake From <i>Songs of Travel</i>	Ralph Vaughn-Williams (1872-1958)
King David	Herbert Howells (1892-1983)
Intermission	
Secrets of the Old, Op. 13, No. 2	Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
Sleep Now, Op. 10, No. 2	
Sure on this shining night, Op. 13, No. 3	
The Call	Jeffrey Brody (b. 1950)
Liebst du um Schönheit Ich atmet' einen Linden duft Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder From <i>Rückert Lieder</i>	Gustav Mahler (1869-1911)
Má písen zas Kdyz mne stára matka From <i>Cigánské melodie (Gypsy Songs)</i> , Op. 55	Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)
Hospodin jest můj pastič From <i>Biblické písně (Biblical Songs)</i> , Op. 99	
Skromna Prsten From <i>Moravské dvojzpěvy (Moravian Duets)</i> , Op. 32	
Měsíčku na nebi hluboken (Song to the Moon, from <i>Rusalka</i> ) Meegan Gagnon, Soprano	

Join us for a reception following the concert to meet the musicians.

This concert is part of the PACC Concert Series for the benefit of the PACC Music Program

## Dedication

My Aunt Jeanette was called “Sis,” since that is what her sisters (my mother Laura Mildred and my aunt Margaret) called her. Until I was about 12, I thought that her name was “Sis.” Sis and Ross, her husband, were serious amateur singers, occasionally getting paid engagements with local churches, synagogues and small opera productions in Nashville, where they lived. They were a profound influence on my early life, for they led me at a very young age to a path which I eventually would have found on my own, but which was made more exciting and vivid with their guidance. I cherish the memory of being taken by Sis and Ross to my very first opera, Tosca, at the age of 13 at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. The magic of that night is with me still, and to this day Tosca is my favorite opera. How many adolescents get opera scores and subscriptions to Opera News as birthday and Christmas gifts? Is it any wonder that I became a singer?

I have always wanted to imitate Sis’s sense of style and glamour, for she was the most glamorous and beautiful person in my life when I was growing up. How thrilled I was when she gave me her old gowns in which to play dress up.

When I moved to New York in the 1970s, it was with the same sense of expectation that I am sure Sis and Ross experienced on their musical visits there. I remember many tales of hearing Verdi and Puccini operas at the Old Met. When I would spend evenings with my musical friends in New York singing, playing recordings, partying and “talking music,” I always remembered those same kinds of evenings at their Seymour Avenue house in Nashville when I was a little girl, only back then I was packed off to bed before the real fun began.

In the spring of 2006, Jeanette passed away at the age of 86 after a long decline in health. I will always remember her lovely mezzo voice, her sense of humor and her generosity of spirit. I dedicate this concert to her.

## Program Notes

**Henry Purcell** (1659-1695) was an English Baroque composer who incorporated Italian and French stylistic elements, but devised a peculiarly English style of Baroque music. He is best known for his hundreds of songs. I am beginning my program with the appropriately titled “If music be the food of love,” of which there are two versions. This is the simpler one.

**George Frideric Handel** (1685-1759) hardly needs an introduction. His lifespan is almost identical to that of J.S. Bach (1685-1750), but unlike Bach, who spent all of his professional life in Germany, the German born Handel moved to England and wrote most of his oratorios in English, while his operas followed the Italian style of the day. “Ombra mai fu” from his opera Xerxes may be a “warhorse,” but it is certainly one of his most beautiful and lyrical arias.

Next come three Italian songs of varying styles. Sicilian born **Vincenzo Bellini** (1801-1835) is best known as the composer of Norma, the model of bel canto, or beautiful singing, style. His 20 or so songs were a favorite of Pavarotti, as were the songs of **Francesco Paolo Tosti** (1846-1916), who moved from Italy to London in 1870 where he became a much sought-after singer and voice teacher. In 1880, Tosti was appointed Singing Master to the Royal Family and

eventually knighted. Another composer needing little or no introduction is **Giuseppe Verdi** (1813-1901), composer of some of the world's most popular operas. Like Bellini, who is best known for his operas, Verdi "dabbled" in songs as well, many of which are operatic in nature and even incorporate familiar Verdian operatic melodies.

This next section is comprised of music that is near and dear to my heart, the music of **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904), so this section of notes will be a bit lengthy. From 1993 to 1996, I lived in Prague and fell in love with that magical city. I have also performed many times, both in recital and with orchestra, at Nelahozeves, the castle owned by the Lobkowitz family that is just across the road from the humble hospoda (a sort of hostel/inn) owned by Dvořák's family and where he was born. Dvořák's song cycles have become increasingly popular in recent years, and of course, his opera *Rusalka*, with the lovely "Song to the Moon," is always a crowd pleaser. I am very happy that my colleague Meegan Gagnon will be singing that aria for you today. I will be singing two songs from his cycle *Cigánské melodie* (*Gypsy Melodies*, Op. 55). The texts of these songs have an interesting history. Though the original texts (by Heyduk) were in Czech, the songs were written for the German tenor Gustav Walter who commissioned a German translation that kept strictly to the meter of the original poems. A year after they were premiered by Walter, Simrock published a new edition in the original Czech. The piano accompaniment of the first one, "Má píseň zas mi láskou zní" ("My song again rings to me with love") has an evocative trilling theme in thirds and sets a lively mood. The fourth song, "Když mne stará matka spívá učivala" (sometimes referred to as "Songs my mother taught me," but directly translates "When my old mother taught me to sing"), is known throughout the world, and is a very important part of the Czech culture. Dvořák's *Biblické písně* (*Biblical Songs*, Op. 99) are all based on scripture. They were written when the composer was living in New York City (1892-1895). The month before he wrote these songs, Dvořák received the news that his close friend, conductor Hans von Bülow, had died. He then received word from Bohemia that his father was dying. His father did, in fact, die two days after Dvořák completed the last Biblical Song. Dvořák orchestrated numbers one through five, including the one I am singing today, "Hospodin jest můj pastýř," based on Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my Shepherd").

The Moravian Duets (*Moravské dvojzpěvy*) celebrate the composer's ethnic heritage and illuminate the daily joys and sorrows of small-town life in Czechoslovakia in a time of peace. The duets were an enormous and immediate success, helping to launch Dvořák's international career and making him a hero in the eyes of his countrymen. The cycle was a favorite of musical soirees and concerts for many decades. Their publication solidified the lifelong professional relationship between Dvořák and Johannes Brahms, who was an important mentor and champion of Dvořák's works. Opus 38 consists of 10 duets and Opus 32 four. There are also several duets without opus numbers. I would like to thank my good friend David Beveridge, Dvořák scholar living in Prague, for the translation of these duets from the Moravian dialect into understandable English.

The songs of **Samuel Barber** (1910-1981) are staples of beginning and advanced singers alike. I find his songs both simple and endearing ("The Daisies," for instance), yet complex and challenging (some of the Hermit Songs). With a background deeply rooted in singing (having studied with Emilio de Gogorza), Barber's love of poetry and his intimate knowledge and appreciation of the human voice inspired his vocal writing. "Sleep Now," composed in 1935, has

a text by James Joyce, and "Secrets of the Old" (1938) is based on a poem by W.B. Yeats. James Agee wrote the text for "Sure on this shining night" (1938), one of Barber's most beautiful and enduring songs. Jeffrey Brody (b. 1950) composed "The Call" in 1988 in memory of his friend and student Erik Bolgen, who died of AIDS. This version also has a viola obligato, but stands alone with voice and piano. The text, by George Herbert, will also be familiar from the Vaughan Williams setting.

Here is a little story about Jeffrey and me. We met at a Boston Singers Resource audition in 2003, and quite by accident began talking about our love for the music of Erich Wolfgang Korngold (I would actually describe it as a passion). This passion includes music of other composers of fin de siècle Vienna such as **Gustav Mahler** (1869-1911), Franz Schreker and Richard Strauss, and has led to many collaborations with Jeffrey, including today's. I will sing three of the five Rückert-Lieder. Both the Rückert-Lieder and the Kindertotenlieder are based on poems by Rückert. The first four Rückert-Lieder were premiered on 29 January 1905 in Vienna, with Mahler conducting. "Liebst du um Schönheit" was not orchestrated by Mahler himself but by Max Puttmann, an employee of the publisher C.F.Kahnt of Leipzig, in 1910. Mahler wrote it as a love song to Alma shortly after their marriage in 1902. "Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder" explores an unusual theme. It warns the listener not to be too inquisitive about the process of creation and suggests that the poet does not trust himself to inquire too much: only the finished work counts, not how it was achieved. The analogy made with the work of bees in the second stanza (indicated by the busy 8th note figure in the left hand) provides Mahler with the basis for his musical imagery. "Ich atmet einen linden Duft" is perhaps unique in musically evoking a fragrance, the delicate fragrance of the lime tree with which the poet associates his love.

I have had the privilege of singing three of Mahler's works with orchestra: the Kindertotenlieder (in New York and Košice, Slovakia); Das Lied von der Erde with the Prague Radio Orchestra at the Rudolfinum in Prague; and the Symphony No. 2 with the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra. I can't describe the thrill of singing these pieces with full orchestra, so you will have to trust me that they were, well, purely spiritual and artistically fulfilling experiences.

I will end my program with three gems of the British Isles by Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells. "Sea Slumber-Song" is the first song in **Edward Elgar's** (1857-1934) song cycle Sea Pictures. It consists of five songs written by various poets and was set for contralto and orchestra. Much of the vocal line of "Sea Slumber-Song" is heard again in other parts of the cycle. **Ralph Vaughan Williams'** (1872-1958) Songs of Travel is a song cycle of nine songs written for baritone voice, with poems selected from the Robert Louis Stevenson collection of the same name. Originally written for voice and piano, Vaughan Williams orchestrated the first, third, and eighth movements while his assistant, Roy Douglas, later orchestrated the remaining songs using the same instrumentation. The orchestral version has often been recorded. **Herbert Howells** (1892-1983) is particularly known for his large output of Anglican church music, including a complete Service for King's College, Cambridge and settings of the "Magnificat" and "Nunc dimittis" for the choirs of St John's College, Cambridge, Westminster Abbey, Worcester, and St Paul's, among others. These settings are often tailored for the buildings after which they are named. I first heard "King David" last year at David Daniels' recital in Jordan Hall and immediately fell in love with the harmonies and structure of the song. I hope you will enjoy listening to this unique song as much as I enjoy singing it.

## **The Artists**

### **Janice Edwards**

Janice Edwards, Mezzo-Soprano, has appeared frequently with opera companies and orchestras throughout New England since moving to New Hampshire in 1999. Granite State Opera appearances have included Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* and The Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Her repertoire includes the principal Wagner and Verdi heroines as well as the major concert works of Mahler, Bach, Beethoven and Handel with organizations both in the U.S. and in Europe (Arizona Opera, Kentucky Opera, New Hampshire Music Festival, New Hampshire Symphony, Pioneer Valley Symphony, Portland Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dvořák Summer Music Festival, Karlsbad Symphony Orchestra, Janáček Philharmonic, and the Danish Sinfonietta, among others). Opernwelt magazine found her portrayal of Fricka in the Arizona Opera *Ring* cycle "an excellent combination of vocal power and dramatic skill." Recent engagements have included *Farewell, Vienna*, a play with music about the life and music of Erich Wolfgang Korngold in Portland, Oregon and the role of Lady Mountchessington in the premiere of Eric Sawyer's opera *Our American Cousin* in Northampton, MA.

Upcoming 2009 engagements include the alto soloist in Michael Tippett's "A Child for our Time" with Manchester Choral Society in April, and Baba in Menotti's "The Medium" with Longwood Opera in June.

In addition to her performing engagements, Ms. Edwards has an active voice studio in Manchester, NH. Please visit [www.JaniceEdwards.com](http://www.JaniceEdwards.com) for information on upcoming engagements and events sponsored by the Janice Edwards Workshops.

### **Jeffrey Brody**

Currently Music Director of Longwood Opera and Principal Accompanist of the Paul Madore Chorale, Jeffrey Brody is active as composer, conductor, vocal coach, collaborative pianist and organist. Appointed to the musical staff of Seattle Opera in 1986, he has done the musical preparation of Wagner's "Ring" cycle, serving as Assistant Conductor and Prompter. He has also done musical preparation for Sarah Caldwell's Opera Company of Boston, Boston Lyric Opera, Opera New England, MIT Chamber Opera and the Princeton June Opera Festival.

His compositions include two operas as well as works for orchestra, chorus, chamber music and organ. He is the recipient of a most generous grant from the Brannen-Cooper Fund to compose a 25-minute Concerto for Flute and Orchestra to be premiered by the Salem Philharmonic in January of 2009. Several of his commissioned choral and organ works have been released on compact disc on the AFKA and SPC labels. In honor of the many years of his artistic affiliation with the late Boston Symphony organist, Berj Zamkochian, the Gomidas Organ Fund presented Mr. Brody with the baton used by Dr. Charles Munch, Music Director and Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1949-1962.

## **Meegan Gagnon**

Soprano Meegan Gagnon has appeared on stage as Papagena in *The Magic Flute*, Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance*, Lily in *The Secret Garden*, Cinderella in *Into the Woods*, Johanna in *Sweeney Todd*, Hope in *Anything Goes*, Sister Robert Anne in *Nunsense* and Petra in *A Little Night Music*. In the 2007-2008 season, Meegan served as Music Director for *Peter Pan* (Actor's Circle Theatre), *Company* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Acting Loft) and *Hello Again* (Best Foot Forward). In March, 2009, Meegan will sing the role of Anna in Riverside Theatre Works' production of *The King and I*. She has appeared as the soprano soloist with The Hillyer Festival Orchestra and at Russell Sage College in Handel's *Messiah* and Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Meegan has been a student of Janice Edwards for three years, and also has an active voice studio of her own, specializing in working with young singers interested in musical theatre techniques.

## **The Skinner Organ**

The E. M. Skinner Organ was built for St. Mark's School in Southboro in the 1920s and moved to PACC in 1961. Skinner was a gifted, innovative and often controversial builder whose work was of the highest quality. In recent years, the musical and historic qualities of these organs have engendered increasing esteem and appreciation from a growing number of organists.

Of this particular instrument, Peter Sykes, organist of the First Church in Cambridge, has written, "It's a grand, beautiful resource; value it, and take care of it. You will never regret it, I can assure you."

## **The Concert Series**

In 1991 the Music Committee of the Park Avenue Congregational Church undertook the task of restoring our historic Skinner organ. At that time, a price of \$60,000 was quoted for the restoration work. The Committee resolved to raise the necessary funds by holding a series of concerts. This was the start of the PACC Concert Series.

In addition to our annual Christmas concert, we have invited a number of soloists and groups, all professionals, to perform in the acoustically vibrant Sanctuary as well as more informally in the Parish Hall. Concerts have ranged from classical, to choral, to folk coffeehouses. Thus far, your contributions have paid for the restoration of the Choir, Swell and Great, the three keyboard divisions of the organ.

## **Become a Friend of the PACC Concert Series**

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