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ABSTRACT

An Analytical Study of John Musto’s *Encounters for Tenor and Orchestra*

by

James Hall

John Musto has established himself among the finest living American song composers of the twenty-first century. The son of a jazz guitarist, Musto merges elements of jazz, ragtime, and blues with traditional classical technique, resulting in a highly eclectic and original compositional style. His vocal compositions are dramatic, text-based, and contain copious word painting. Musto also utilizes constant metrical changes, as well as thematic and motivic development to create a solid compositional framework for the songs.

This dissertation examines the compositional style of John Musto’s vocal music through a text based analysis of his cycle, *Encounters for Tenor and Orchestra*. Chapter One provides biographical information about the composer, style characteristics of Musto’s vocal music, and the origins of *Encounters*. Chapters Two through Seven contain detailed analyses of the six songs, including poet information, text setting, and musical structure for each. Chapter Eight offers conclusions regarding the cycle, and confirms Musto’s place among America’s preeminent composers.
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Finally, thank you to Paul Sperry and to John Musto for providing invaluable knowledge and cooperation for this project.

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“Island” from Selected Songs by John Musto
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“Litany” from Selected Songs by John Musto
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PREFACE

My initial exposure to the songs of John Musto occurred in a requisite vocal literature course during my masters degree at the University of Maryland. After hearing a fellow classmate perform "Litany," from Shadow of the Blues, I immediately became attracted to the composer's choice of poet, harmonic language, and overall style. Shortly thereafter, I performed the cycle in recital.

As I prepared program notes for my performance of Shadow of the Blues, I discovered, much to my surprise, that relatively little information about Musto existed. Moreover, few of my recital audience members were acquainted with the cycle, even though it probably stands as Musto's most recognizable work. I decided to investigate Musto's music further, and, after reading through many of his scores, I settled on a topic for my doctoral document: An Analytical Study of John Musto's Encounters for Tenor and Orchestra.

Since I uncovered little extant information during my initial research, I contacted Paul Sperry, the singer for whom Encounters was composed. He agreed to a telephone interview, and during our discussion, Sperry offered all of his knowledge regarding Encounters. He also provided Musto's contact information, so I might speak directly with the composer.

After several e-mail exchanges, Musto and I agreed to meet at his home in New York City. I traveled there and interviewed the composer on December 3, 2005. This document synthesizes my research, musical analysis of Encounters, and interviews with John Musto and Paul Sperry.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

John Musto

John Musto was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1954. He and his three siblings were raised in a middle-class Jewish home and enjoyed an early exposure to music, as their father, Vincent Musto, was a successful jazz guitarist. The Musto home was frequently visited by jazz musicians who often rehearsed there; thus, the composer’s earliest musical influences can be traced to these events. Because jazz musicians earned very little monetary compensation, Musto’s father took a steady job as a typographer in order to support his family.

Musto began studying music at the age of four, when his parents enrolled him in piano lessons. He received traditional training, in addition to the instruction in improvisation that he obtained from his father. Musto attended Jesuit High School in Brooklyn and enrolled in Manhattan School of Music as a piano performance major after graduation.

While a student at Manhattan School, Musto studied piano with Rudolph Serkin. He worked as a piano technician to earn a living and played both the piano and the guitar in popular music bands throughout the city. Musto did not formally study composition at Manhattan School, apart from the standard theory courses required for all music students. Instead, he focused on the piano and earned Bachelors of Music and Masters of Music degrees in piano performance.

After acquiring his degrees from Manhattan School, Musto embarked on a career
as a concert pianist. During this time, he met Paul Jacobs, the staff pianist for the New York Philharmonic, who served as his mentor until Jacob’s death in 1983. In my interview with the composer, Musto noted that Jacobs was best known for his interpretation of Debussy’s *Preludes and Etudes*, although, “...he played everything well. He and (Samuel) Barber were true musicians whose playing was from another time.”

Musto recalled his first meeting with Barber, which took place in Barber’s New York apartment: Musto went there at the suggestion of a friend to inspect a piano that Barber planned to sell. During their exchange, Barber offered to demonstrate the instrument’s capabilities. Musto fondly remembers Barber’s exquisite playing:

> playing like that hardly exists today...pianists are being trained to sound the same...I rarely attend piano concerts anymore because I know what it will sound like before I go. It is becoming very homogenized.\(^1\)

Musto soon grew tired of life as a concert pianist, and he quit playing as a soloist altogether. Fortunately, he was able to support himself by working again as a piano technician. He did not resume concertizing until the mid 1990s, when he performed Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Musto began composing in his mid twenties. His first works were short piano rags and a Concerto for Piano and Orchestra.\(^2\) Since he was never formally trained in composition, he says that he learned through trial and error.

> I am a self-taught composer, assuming the definition is merely that one has had no formal lessons with a teacher of composition. I’m certainly not a self-taught musician...I really learned to write music by playing it. Lots of it.\(^3\)

\(^1\) John Musto, interview by the author, tape recording, New York, 3 December, 2005.
\(^2\) Ibid.
Musto considers several composers to be influential or inspirational to his own compositional style. He regards these composers as those who write “music that lands... music that you need.”\(^5\) During our interview, he cited Mozart, Poulenc, Bernstein, and Bolcom as those composers for him. He finds Bernstein similar to Mozart, as both wrote “tunes that drop out of heaven.”\(^6\) Of Bolcom, Musto said, “...he is the one [composer] of our time...and a wonderful pianist.”\(^7\)

Musto also mentioned that he considers Chopin to be “the greatest bel canto composer...he took the style of Donizetti, Rossini, and Bellini, and he perfected it.” When asked if he dislikes any composers’ music, Musto replied that he “simply can’t listen to Wagner,”\(^8\) and he merely “tolerates Strauss.”\(^9\)

Musto’s first compositions for voice (“Nothing Gold Can Stay” and “The Rose Family”) were written in 1982 and were inspired by the composer’s budding relationship with soprano Amy Burton.\(^10\) Musto and Burton were married in 1984, and have since performed together in concerts across the United States and in Europe.\(^11\)

As a composer, Musto finds it important for him to remain active as a performer. He feels that composers often lose touch with their audience because they have abandoned the concert stage and, in so doing, have abandoned their audience as well. He

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\(^{5}\)John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.

\(^{6}\)Ibid.

\(^{7}\)Ibid.

\(^{8}\)Ibid.

\(^{9}\)Ibid.

\(^{10}\)Amy Burton maintains an active career in opera and in concert. She has performed with the New York City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic. She has received numerous awards, including a prize at the Marian Anderson International Vocal Arts Competition and the George London Award. In 1998, she earned New York City Opera’s Kolosvar Award. Ms. Burton can be heard on numerous recordings, and she is on the voice faculty at Mannes College of Music in New York. She and her husband live in Manhattan with their son, Joshua, and their toy poodle, Cosmo.

\(^{11}\)Molin, 4.
abhors the attitude of the composer as the creative genius and the performer as a subordinate pawn, whose involvement is restricted solely to the stage.

   It must be a partnership. The composer’s job is to take it and make sure that [the composition] feels right to sing or play. The performer’s job is to take it apart, figure out what makes it tick, and put it back together.\textsuperscript{12}

   Since the composer enjoys a vigorous performing schedule (both as a both soloist and as a collaborator with Burton), his professional life is somewhat of a balancing act. Practicing for his performances requires so much time that he often finds it difficult to find time to compose. Musto joked that he should have been a conductor.\textsuperscript{13}

   Although he is probably best known for his numerous songs for voice and piano, Musto’s compositional output spans a wide range of genres. He has written concert overtures for orchestra; piano concertos; a clarinet sextet; a Trio for violin, cello, and piano; a Divertimento for flute, clarinet, viola, cello, piano, and percussion; and piano solos. Additionally, he has composed several film scores for Public Television and for HBO. He received Emmy Awards for his scores to the films Into the Light (1995) and Brick City Lessons (1999), and his most recent film collaboration, George Segal: An American Still Life, aired on PBS in 2001. Musto regards scoring films similar to writing an opera, “people are singing their arias, and you [the composer] have to underscore it.”\textsuperscript{14}

   The composer has enjoyed commissions from the New York Festival of Song, Miller Theatre of Columbia University, Eighth Blackbird, Concert Artists Guild, Song Celebration, the Dallas Symphony, Wolf Trapp Foundation for the Performing Arts, Carnegie Hall Millennial Celebration, Chanticleer, and the Marilyn Horne Foundation, to

\textsuperscript{12} John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
name a few. He has also served as composer in residence for several arts organizations, including the Moab Festival in Moab, Utah, Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, and he is currently composer in residence at Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, where he will premiere a string quartet and a piano concerto this spring. Musto received a Rockefeller Fellowship for travel and study in Italy in 2000 and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for his orchestral song cycle, *Dove Sta Amore*, in 1996.\(^{15}\)

Musto has been a visiting professor at Brooklyn College, where he substituted for Tonia Leon while she was on sabbatical. He has also given lectures at Juilliard and at Manhattan School of Music for the vocal literature courses of Paul Sperry and Robert White. Musto does not desire to teach composition in academia. Regarding composition lessons, he wonders, “what do they do in there? Composing is so amorphous... learning an instrument is much more clear.”\(^{16}\) He does, however, thoroughly enjoy teaching private piano lessons, although his schedule does not allow him to sustain a private studio.\(^{17}\)

**Musto’s Vocal Music and Its Style Characteristics**

As stated previously, Musto’s initial compositions for voice were written in 1982 for soprano Amy Burton. Since then, he has composed over fifty songs. Because Musto did not receive any formal training in singing, he often consulted his wife for guidance in the early stages of his song writing career.\(^{18}\) He has since learned the specific capabilities and limitations of the vocal instrument and how to compose music that is

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Molin, 6.
easily negotiated by trained singers. “When you live with a singer and hear [her
vocalize], you begin to understand what singers’ voices like to do.”  

Musto’s compositional process is “relatively quick,” and he typically focuses on
one piece at a time rather than working on several projects simultaneously. He begins by
selecting an appropriate text, which is often a more tedious, involved process than is
setting the poem to music. The text serves as the foundation of Musto’s songs, and it
informs all of his musical decisions.

The text dictates the music. I am drawn to texts that are theatrical... not
meditations... I think of my character as having something to say on stage
as if [the poem] were happening now... what’s going on on stage? How
does it have to do with the character? Who is the protagonist of the song?
What kind of interlude should accompany a certain dramatic beat?

Thus, the composer’s songs are character-driven and are constructed as individual
dramas, often to the extent that they function as miniature operas, as is the case with the
song, “Ballad,” from his cycle, Encounters.

The overall compositional style of Musto’s vocal music is most accurately
described as eclectic, in that he often infuses classical counterpoint with the popular
elements of jazz, swing, and ragtime that surrounded him during his childhood. He is
also known to incorporate elements associated with American musical theater and tunes
reminiscent of folk song melodies. Thus, his style is unique and modern, but firmly
rooted in the tradition of the American composer. Several recurring characteristics of his
vocal music are discussed below, illustrated by musical examples from separate songs.

Elements of jazz, blues, swing, and ragtime are the most common feature in the

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19 John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
composer's music. In fact, his song cycle, *Shadow of the Blues* (1986) contains four songs that are linked by musical traits commonly associated with jazz and blues.\(^{22}\) Appropriately, the cycle's poet is Langston Hughes, whose writing reflects the state of the African American culture in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Musto's cycle of three songs, *Recuerdo* (1988), also utilizes elements of jazz, specifically in the form of ragtime.\(^{23}\) The second song of the cycle, "Reucero," contains a piano accompaniment that is a piano rag.

Figure 1.1: Musto, *Recuerdo*, "Recuerdo," mm. 1-6.

The second common feature among Musto's vocal music is his use of multi-meter. Although it is not present in all of his songs, it is certainly a defining characteristic, for when he employs it, he does so generously. Multi-meter, also known as mixed meter, refers to relatively frequent changes of meter (notated by time

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\(^{22}\) Blues is a secular genre, primarily associated with jazz, whose origins trace back to folk music of early African Americans.

\(^{23}\) Ragtime refers to secular, primarily American, music characterized by syncopated or "ragged" rhythm. This popular style thrived between 1896 and 1912 and encompassed all types of genres, from piano, to vocal, to instrumental.
signatures) within a particular song. Musto usually applies multi-meter within individual phrases of his songs to create rhythmic and metrical diversity. Because the meter changes repeatedly, a consistent beat pattern is not established, thus creating the effect of irregularity and instability. These metrical changes form additional layers of difficulty in Musto’s music, limiting performance to only sophisticated musicians.

Figure 1.2: Musto: *Shadow of the Blues*, “Island,” mm. 8-12.

Figure 1.2 not only illustrates multi-meter, but it also serves as an example of the third characteristic of Musto’s songs: the complex piano line. As a formally trained classical pianist, Musto composes piano lines that are often quite advanced. Usually in his songs, the piano is an equal counterpart to the voice, as opposed to mere accompanimental support.

Musto also tends to compose songs with thin, exposed textures characterized by perfect intervals and simple harmonies, creating a sound reminiscent of the music of Aaron Copland. The most obvious example of this type of texture exists in the beginning measures of Musto’s most famous song, “Litany” (from *Shadow of the Blues*).24 In “Litany,” Musto establishes a serene mood with phrases that revolve around major

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24 Molin, 9.
harmonies (B major in ms. 1, E major in ms. 3, and A major in ms. 6). The beginning B major chord (ms. 1) sets the tone for the entire song, while the E major (ms. 3) and A major (ms. 6) chords function as brief cadential points. Musto voices the chords in these initial measures in open position, generating a sparse texture comprised of intervals of perfect fifths, perfect fourths, and both major and minor sixths.

Figure 1.3: Musto: *Shadow of the Blues*, “Litany,” mm. 1-8.

In addition to the aforementioned elements, Musto also applies copious text painting, dance rhythms (often a waltz), and musical repetition throughout his songs. In fact, Musto’s music is primarily based on indirect or altered repetition, whereby he constructs entire songs from variations of specific themes and motives that he presents at the onset of the work.

At the time of our interview, Musto had just completed revisions on a two volume collection of his songs to be published soon by Peer-Southern Music Publishing Company, Incorporated. The collection will contain approximately fifty pieces; some of which have not been previously published. Additionally, a voice and piano version (not a reduction) of a few of the songs in *Encounters*, originally scored for tenor and
orchestra, will be included.

Musto’s most recent vocal work, a five-song cycle entitled, *Viva Sweet Love*, was written as a commission for the Marilyn Horne Foundation’s “The Song Continues,” and it was premiered in January 2005. Musto believes that this will be his last song endeavor.

I’ve sworn never to write another song... that’s it [pointing to the manuscript version of his soon to be published two volume collection that was sitting on his piano during our meeting]... I’ve had it; I am done with publishers... it takes three times as long to find rights to a poem than it does to actually set the text.

He went on to cite three incidents in which he had obtained permission from publishers to set particular texts, but in each case, he found out after he had completed the songs that ridiculous stipulations were placed on them. In one instance, the publisher allowed Musto to use the poem, but (after the music had been composed) stipulated that it could not be set to music. “What the hell did they think we were going to do?...It’s always about money, never about art.”

In addition to his songs, Musto has participated in two operatic projects. The first, an unfinished opera entitled *Pope Joan*, was a joint effort between Musto and librettist Denise Lanctot. The opera’s plot is loosely based on the 1886 novella, *Papissa Joanna*, by Greek author Emmanuel Royidis. The novella relates the legend of Pope John VIII or Pope Joan, the woman who supposedly ruled Christianity disguised as a man in the middle of the ninth century. When Musto first read the novella, he found himself laughing out loud and thought that it would be a perfect subject for a comic opera. Several scenes of the work were premiered at New York City Opera in 1999, and a workshop was commissioned by director Leon Major at the Maryland Opera Studio in

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25 John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.
2000. Musto and Lanctot decided to discard their work and start over after seeing the premiere because they found that the opera “wasn’t making sense and wasn’t really funny.”\textsuperscript{26} The two traveled to Bellagio, Italy for the summer with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, and sought to rewrite the entire piece. During their work in Italy, Musto knew that the project would not reach fruition, but they continued to write. Eventually, the opera was abandoned.

Musto’s second attempt at operatic composition, \textit{Volpone}, was a much more successful undertaking. After receiving a commission from the Wolf Trap Foundation (their first opera commission), Musto collaborated with librettist Mark Campbell and began work on an operatic rendition of Ben Johnson’s play of the same name. \textit{Volpone}, a dark comedy, premiered March 10, 2004, at the Barns at Wolf Trap (Wolf Trap Opera), directed by Leon Major and conducted by Michael Barrett. The work received enthusiastic reviews, and Musto remains very excited about the work. “It’s really dark and funny and moves like the wind and [the text] IS public domain. It has a lot of people screaming at each other all at once...it’s fun.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
The Origins of Encounters

Encounters was jointly commissioned by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony and tenor Paul Sperry in 1992.\textsuperscript{28} Every other year, Sperry performs a concert of contemporary music with the Cleveland Chamber Symphony. As he and the chamber symphony’s director, Ed London, were discussing the program for their 1992 fall concert, Sperry suggested that they perform Benjamin Britten’s Nocturne. London, however, desired to commission a new work from an American composer. Having been acquainted with John Musto for several years, Sperry suggested that they contact the composer and propose the project to him.

Initially, the commission involved Sperry, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and two other performing organizations, both of whom reneged for financial reasons.\textsuperscript{29} Sperry and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony made up the monetary difference and carried through with the proposal to Musto. Encounters was premiered on September 21, 1992 by Paul Sperry and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony in Cleveland, Ohio. It was subsequently recorded and released under the Albany Record Label in 1998. To the composer’s knowledge, the premiere is the sole public performance of the work to date.\textsuperscript{30}

Encounters is a cycle of six songs scored for tenor and chamber orchestra. Each of the songs relates a particular event or encounter, ranging from childhood nostalgia in

\textsuperscript{28} Paul Sperry, tenor, enjoys an active performing career that encompasses repertoire ranging from Baroque opera to contemporary song. He is recognized as one of today’s most outstanding interpreters of American music, as he has premiered works by over thirty American composers, including Leonard Bernstein, William Bolcom, Richard Hundley, Stephen Paulus, and John Musto. Sperry teaches courses in American art song at Juilliard and Manhattan School of Music and in song recital construction and preparation at Brooklyn College and Conservatory. He was on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival from 1978-2002, and he is the director of The Joy of Singing, an organization that helps young singers launch a professional singing career.

\textsuperscript{29} In our interview, Mr. Sperry requested that I not print the names of the two organizations who withdrew from the project.

\textsuperscript{30} John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.
the first song, "Piano," to a personal encounter with Christ in the second song, "Witness." The third song, "Encounter," depicts a telephone call as a type of modern day love song, while the fourth song, "Passacaglia," named for the musical form in which it is written, describes an encounter with stone statues of singing children. The fifth song, "Ballad," is a setting of a traditional ballad that recounts a mob murder. The cycle's final song, "Epilogue," is more abstract, as its text does not describe a particular event, but instead offers a nod toward the future and celebrates the unlimited love and potential that a new life experiences upon encountering the world for the first time.

Musto utilizes the text of three poets in *Encounters*: D. H. Lawrence, J. M. Synge, and E. E. Cummings. All of the poems are quite different from one another, both in construction and in subject matter. The poems by Cummings (songs 2, 3, 4, and 5) are relatively unconventional in form and syntax, while D. H. Lawrence's "Piano" (song 1) offers a traditional rhyme scheme in three stanza format. Likewise, J. M. Synge's poem (song 5) is a 10-stanza ballad of rhyming quatrains. The poems of songs 1, 2, 3, and 5 are all character driven narratives that present dramatic accounts of specific encounters. Conversely, the poems of songs 4 and 6 are more meditative and abstract in nature, for they do not depict particularly dramatic scenes. The poetry of *Encounters* spans a wide range of emotion and character: irony, nostalgia, sadness, humor, hope, sympathy, and violence are encompassed.

*Encounters* is a text-based composition, as Musto allows the text of each poem to

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31 For the purpose of this document, E. E. Cummings' name will be spelled with traditional capitalization. In his book, *E.E. Cummings: a biography*, ix, Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno explains that although Cummings utilized his well-known practice of lowercase lettering in his poetry, "in most of his personal correspondence, he signed his name in capitals. To publishers, too, he asked that his name be capitalized on the title page."
dictate the song’s musical construction. The cycle contains copious text painting, primarily syllabic text setting, and prolific use of multi-meter in every song. In general, Musto composes contrapuntally, whereby every voice in the piece contains motivic or thematic elements in counterpoint with each other. Moments of homophony do exist, although these instances are typically ephemeral. The overall harmonic language varies, as the composer interweaves passages of dissonant counterpoint characterized by thin texture and half-step intervallic relationships with moments of consonant major and minor tonalities throughout. The result is effective, offering an aurally eclectic mixture of harmony and texture.

The following analysis of *Encounters* is text-based, in accordance with Musto’s compositional process and the cycle’s nature. It explores the background of each poem and includes information about the poets. Additionally, an examination of the text setting and elements of musical structure directly related to the poetry complete the perulation.
CHAPTER TWO

Analysis of Song 1, "Piano"

_Encounters_ begins with the song, "Piano," a setting of D.H. Lawrence's poem of the same name. Originally published in Lawrence's 1918 collection of verse entitled, _New Poems_, "Piano" depicts a scene of reminiscence, during which the narrator recalls images from his childhood, specifically that of himself sitting underneath a piano while his mother plays and sings.

**Poetic Background**

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;  
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see  
A child sitting under the piano in the boom of the tingling strings  
And pressing the small poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song  
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong  
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with the winter outside  
And hymns in the cozy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour  
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour  
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast  
Down in a flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

While the poetry most definitely elicits a nostalgic aura, it does so without exuding an overly-sentimental tone. The narrator attends a concert of a singer and a pianist and is reminded of his childhood by the music that he hears. Through the speaker's reflective thoughts, Lawrence employs specific images to create a scene of tenderness with which the reader can relate. Through utterances such as "insidious mastery of song" and "betrays me back," however, the poet juxtaposes the present with
the past in a manner that is more thoughtful than emotional or romantic. 32

Although he is most well known as the author of such novels as *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, D.H. Lawrence was also a prolific poet. His poetry spans a wide range of characters and styles and therefore resists categorization. Even his most mature works, which are predominantly Modernist in nature, contain strong elements of Romanticism which prevent easy pigeonholing. Lawrence scholar, Helen Sword, notes Lawrence’s evolution: “from Imagist to confessionalist to nature poet to satirist to death-affirming mystic.”33 “Piano” was written during the early years of his career, and it exhibits traditional qualities of rhyme and meter, coupled with more contemporary elements of sound and image. In “Piano,” Lawrence balances the peaceful scene of childhood with the narrator’s desperate effort to resist the temptation to become possessed by the music and memories from his past.

Musto’s setting of “Piano” encompasses the duality of emotion presented by Lawrence. The composer employs a tuneful waltz, which he transforms throughout the song, as a musical representation of the narrator’s childhood memories. Amy Burton, in a program note for the cycle, explains the composer’s intentions for the waltz:

> In the mind’s ear the power of song works its magic delicately, recalling a sentimental waltz played at first sweetly, then haltingly, then with an aching passionate sadness. Finally the tune fades away altogether, leaving the spare reality of adulthood and innocence lost. 34

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33 Sword, 118.
Text Setting and Musical Structure

Musto’s setting directly duplicates Lawrence’s text without any repetition or deletion. Additionally, the composer follows the three stanza format of the original poem by separating the stanzas with brief interludes. Each interlude functions as a means of connecting the narrator’s incessant thoughts. Likewise, the phrase structure established by Musto emulates the narrator’s psychological state, in that it is sporadic and uneven, renouncing traditional formulas of balance and organization. In so doing, the composer allows the thought process of the narrator of the poem to dictate the musical framework of “Piano.”

Three primary figures exist as musical portrayals of the narrator’s thoughts: the aforementioned waltz, which the narrator remembers upon hearing the concert music; and two distinct figures of thematic counterpoint that imitate the narrator’s stream-of-consciousness.

The waltz is presented as the first material of the song and is the primary theme of the entire piece. It begins in the flute and the violin II at ms. 1, and it is heard shortly thereafter in the viola, violin I, clarinets, and the oboe. Since all of these instruments play simultaneously, the resulting lush, rich texture creates a nostalgic mood reminiscent of nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Figure 2.1: Musto, “Piano,” waltz theme, flute, mm. 1-3.

The general function of the waltz theme is twofold in “Piano.” Not only does it represent an actual tune that the narrator remembers, but it also symbolizes his childhood. Each time Musto employs the theme (either in its entirety or as a truncated motive), it
represents a tangible link to the past in the narrator’s mind. The waltz theme is constructed of several distinct features: the prevailing interval of a sixth (both major and minor); the descending line contour by the interval of a second (both major and minor); an ascending interval of a minor third; and the rhythmic figures, \( \frac{\text{\#}}{\text{\#}} \), \( \text{\#} \). Musto reuses these specific elements throughout the piece to provide musical cohesion in the lengthy song. The overall harmonic sound of the theme is generally consonant, as it encompasses mostly major and minor tonalities (A major, G major, and F# minor) in a homophonic setting. Audible references to the waltz theme occur in the instrumental lines in the following measures: mm. 15-18 (piano, full statement), mm. 16-18 (strings), ms. 18 (clarinet), mm. 38-39 (clarinet), mm. 38-39 (viola), mm. 40-43 (strings, winds, and trumpets), mm. 47-48 (flute), ms. 75 (English horn and horns), mm. 75-76 (oboe and trumpets), ms. 76 (piano, piccolo), mm. 77-79 (clarinets), mm. 78-79 (trumpets), ms. 79 (winds, strings), and mm. 79-81 (piano).

The second theme is presented in the flute in mm. 4-8, immediately following the initial statement of the waltz. Musto also refers to this theme throughout the song; however, it only occurs in its entirety or slightly fragmented.

Figure 2.2: Musto, “Piano,” theme II, flute, mm. 4-7.

Unlike the waltz theme, theme II is neither homophonic nor rich in texture. Neither is it based on consonant harmonies of major and minor chords. Instead, it is a four measure statement of counterpoint containing repeated dissonant intervals of the tritone, minor 2nd, and minor 7th. References to theme II occur instrumentally as follows: mm. 12-15
(oboe), clarinets (mm. 25-28), mm. 49-50 (oboe and English horn), and mm. 63-65 (clarinets).

The third theme is similar to theme II in its contrapuntal construction and dissonant harmonies (primarily the minor 2nd), although it is more prevalent and significant than its predecessor. Theme III always occurs as imitative counterpoint (often as a canon), and its presence is substantial enough that an entire section of the song revolves around its unfolding (mm. 50-65). The initial presentation of theme III is in the English horn at ms. 29.

Figure 2.3: Musto, "Piano," theme III, English horn, mm. 29-33.

Theme III is found subsequently in the orchestra as follows: mm. 29-34 (bassoon), mm. 34-37 (horn and trumpets), mm. 50-59 (clarinet and bassoon, followed by oboe, English horn, strings, trumpets, and horns). Theme III is the musical antithesis to the character of the initial presentation of the waltz, thus symbolizing the narrator's reluctance to indulge in his memories. Through the coexistence of both of these themes (as well as, to a lesser extent, theme II), Musto captures the bittersweetness that is the essence of Lawrence's poem.

Text painting is also utilized as a primary compositional technique in "Piano" to emphasize the images presented in the text. Text painting is applied in one of two ways: directly, whereby the composer relates a specific musical element (such as an interval) to a particular word or phrase in the text; or indirectly, whereby the composer musically portrays a general idea or image that is derived from the text.
Examples of direct text painting are:

- a.) in ms. 8, at the entrance of the voice at a \( p \) dynamic level with a thin texture, corresponding to the word, “softly.”
- b.) in mm. 31-32, at which point Musto notates one of the few melismatic vocal lines in the song, congruent with the text, “mastery of song,” clearly symbolizing the act of singing.
- c.) in ms. 47 and 48, on the word, “tinkling,” Musto calls for a trill in the piano line, clearly imitating a “tinkling” sound.
- d.) in ms. 62, the word, “burst” is scored at a much higher pitch than the text preceding it, generating a “bursting” effect upon performance.
- e.) in mm. 64-65, the piano sounds two full chords marked \textit{sonorous} by the composer, while the singer sings, “great black piano.”
- f.) in mm. 65-66, the voice contains the dramatic interval of a minor 7th and a \textit{fermata} (the only one in the vocal line in the entire song) corresponding to the word, \textit{appassionata}.

Examples of indirect text painting are:

- a.) in mm. 12-13, the repeated material in the violin II and the viola acts as trance-inducing music that corresponds to the text, “taking me back.” Similar material may be found in virtually all of the instruments between mm. 21-24. The musical intent at this moment is comparable.
- b.) in mm. 15-18, the employment of the piano at this moment clearly relates to the text, “a child sitting under the piano.”
- c.) in mm. 44-46, at which point the strings and the brass contain a major tonality with Romantic texture, portraying the line, “hymns in the cozy parlor.”

\textbf{Instrumentation/Orchestration}

All of Encounters’ named instruments are utilized in “Piano,” and the orchestration is generally thick, particularly when compared with the other five songs in the cycle. Although the poetry certainly governs the song’s construction, the instrumental and vocal lines play equal roles, especially since the three primary themes of the song are originally introduced by an instrument other than the voice. The most important function of the orchestra as a unit is definitely that of portraying the tone or mood changes of the narrator throughout the song. Musto adjusts the texture and
orchestration as one way of transforming the thematic material while maintaining its fundamental compositional integrity. Additionally, the use of the piano is essential, as it serves not only as an instrument but as an actual character in the story.

The orchestral interludes also divide the song into distinct sections that, for the most part, adhere to Lawrence’s original poem. The rehearsal boxes, labeled A, B, C, and D indicate the broad divisions of the song. Musto notates an additional separation in the last stanza of the poem, after the text, “with the great black piano appassionato.” The final section, marked D in the score, contains climactic material as well as the moment in which the waltz theme fades out of the narrator’s mind.

**Vocal Melodic Materials**

The range of the vocal line in “Piano” is quite large, as it spans from C# to A, although the tessitura is mostly confined to the middle voice. Generally, the vocal line sits higher than the other songs, most of which lie in the lower middle vocal register. Since the orchestration is fuller in this particular song, the elevation in tessitura is appropriate, as it allows the tenor to sing in a range that is more inherently resonant for his voice type, allowing him to be heard above the full orchestra at any given moment in the piece. The highest note in the vocal line occurs at ms. 79, during which the narrator exclaims the text, “my manhood is cast Down in a flood of remembrance.” Fittingly, this moment also contains the strongest dynamic marking, $f$. The climax occurs only six measures from the end of the song, creating the effect of an outburst and immediate retreat rather than a gradual buildup and slow waning. Such an effect is convincing in that it is consistent with the narrator’s condition at the conclusion of the poem.

Musto’s treatment of the dynamics in “Piano” is also compatible with the poetry.
The majority of the song is marked *mp*, appropriately reflecting the overall mood of inward contemplation. There are no moments of sudden dynamic contrast, although Musto does employ diametric dynamics in ms. 79 to portray the dualistic state of the narrator's emotion. (The singer proclaims his text at a *f* marking, immediately followed by an echo of the waltz theme in the piano, marked *p distant*.)

The character of the vocal line is very lyrical, and the text setting is chiefly syllabic, with only two exceptions: ms. 32 and ms. 36, both of which are motives derived from theme III. In fact, the majority of the vocal line is derived from either the waltz theme or theme III; therefore, motives exclusive to the voice do not really exist. Musto applies the waltz theme and theme II in the voice in one of two rhythmic motives. Figure 1.4 illustrates these motives and lists their location throughout the song.

Figure 2.4: “Piano,” motives in the vocal line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waltz Motive:</th>
<th>Theme III Motive:</th>
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While the vocal line is not constructed exclusively of these motives, all of its material may be traced to one of the three original themes.

**Rhythm, Meter, and Tempo**

Musto uses multimeter (12/8, 9/8, 6/8, 5/8, 7/8, and 8/8) in “Piano,” a technique which is frequent among his compositions. The meter serves as means whereby the composer is able to notate a waltz in a manner that is less conventional than 3/4. The shifting meter also functions as a musical representation of the narrator's thought process, which alternates between the present and memories of the past. The \( \text{average} \) exists
as the constant element of meter, providing a fixed beat among the abundant metrical changes.

Musto provides very specific tempo indications from the onset of the song. The first marking, Moderately (♩= 82), establishes the tempo for the waltz melody. The changes thereafter reflect specific moments of emphasis in the text, or they act as indicators of changes between sections of the piece. Musto returns to Tempo I (♩= 82) at the end of the song, providing adequate closure to the listener.

As is the case with the vocal melodic materials, the rhythmic motives that saturate “Piano” are extracted entirely from the aforementioned themes. The following three figures are motivic in the song:

1. ♩♩♩♩

2. ♩♩♩♩

3. ♩♩♩♩

Each of these corresponds to the motives previously identified in “Vocal Melodic Materials.”

Conclusions

Musto uses three primary themes as the framework for the entire song. From them, he creates motives that permeate every line. These themes serve not only as unification devices in the lengthy piece, but also as representations of the narrator’s state of mind, particularly that of his bittersweet memories. Throughout the song, the themes
are transformed to reflect the different aspects of the narrator's thoughts. All of the elements -- orchestration, vocal melodic materials, and meter, rhythm, and tempo -- revolve around the poetry.
CHAPTER THREE

Analysis of Song 2, “Witness”

The second song in the cycle, “Witness,” is a setting of E.E. Cummings’ poem, “no time ago.” Extracted from Cummings’ 1950 collection of seventy-one poems entitled Xaipe, “no time ago” describes a chance meeting between the narrator of the poem and Jesus Christ. Musto entitles this curious encounter “Witness,” alluding to the practice of “witnessing” that is commonly associated with evangelical Christian churches. When an individual “witnesses” to his congregation, he relates a specific moment in his life during which he claims to have had a life changing encounter with God. “Witnessing” is a public testimonial whose purpose is to verify the existence of God today.

Poetic Background

no time ago
or else a life
walking in the dark
i met christ

jesus)my heart
flopped over
and lay still
while he passed(as

close as i’m to you
yes closer
made of nothing
except loneliness

The poem evokes a peculiar response from the reader, particularly when one takes in to account the last stanza, in which Cummings suddenly changes the tone of the
otherwise lighthearted, satirical poem. By affording Christ the human emotion of loneliness, Cummings suggests a sentiment not often associated with this member of the Christian trinity. Furthermore, the impression of Christ that he offers is not subtle: he declares that loneliness is the sole element of Christ's character as seen by the narrator. Such a statement assuredly complicates an otherwise straightforward poem.

Often misinterpreted as singularly a satirist, Cummings wrote poems that are extremely varied in nature and temperament. Although his most well-known poems favor satire coupled with experimental language and syntax, Cummings was, indeed, a religious individual, and his works often display this element of his disposition. He enjoyed a Unitarian upbringing in Boston, and he often attended Roman Catholic mass with Marion Morehouse, a fashion model with whom he lived as husband and wife (though they were never legally married) for the last thirty years of his life. In his book, *E.E. Cummings Revisited*, Richard S. Kennedy relays Cummings' feelings toward religion as he expressed them in a letter dated winter 1948: "As I grow older, I tend toward piety." Kennedy surmises that Cummings' "concept of God was that of a comprehensive oneness together with a sense of this oneness in nature."

Cummings' feelings toward Christ himself are also a topic of much discussion, especially since a large number of his works allude to or specifically refer to Christ by name. Robert E. Wegner writes the following in his book, *The Poetry and Prose of E.E. Cummings*.

For Cummings, Christ was a supreme individual who, responsible to himself and totally assured of his own dignity, was capable of extending love and granting dignity to other human beings. In fact, all of

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36 Ibid., 129.
Cummings' individuals...all possess and extend dignity.\textsuperscript{37}

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of "no time ago" is that while Cummings seems to show regard for Christ, his view is not categorically that of the traditional Christian, whose religion clearly dictates Christ as the son of God. Instead, Cummings' reverence for him is established in another way -- through Christ's dignity and individuality.

Much of Wegner's writing about Cummings' poetry revolves around the charge from critics that Cummings failed to "treat man's existence as tragic."\textsuperscript{38} Wegner, however, offers an alternate explanation. He argues that while Cummings does not traditionally treat his characters as tragic heroes, he does so in another sense.

Greek tragedy assumes the dignity of man. The tragedy of modern man is that he has lost his dignity. In our time tragedy stems not from man's failure to recognize and accept his limitations but from failure to realize his own unique identity and potentiality... The tragedy today is that people have crammed themselves into conformistic boxes of established mores, convictions, and beliefs about reality and correct behavior. The result is that they are able to relate to each other only as boxes of beliefs and ideas and not as individual human beings -- and this is tragic.\textsuperscript{39}

It is in this vein that Cummings perceives Christ in "no time ago" -- as a truly unique individual whose independent thoughts and deeds alienate him from society, thereby forcing upon him the feeling of loneliness, that Cummings himself experienced as a poet whose ideals did not adhere to mainstream American thought.\textsuperscript{40}

The title of the collection which contains "no time ago," \textit{Xaipe}, is a Greek word meaning "rejoice." Scholars agree, however, that the majority of the poems in the collection do not personify the ebullient mood which the title suggests. Instead, most are

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 75.
of a serious nature, expressing themes of death and the human experience. Perhaps, though, Cummings suggests that one should rejoice in nonconformists such as Christ, whose individuality inherently breeds loneliness.

**Text Setting and Musical Structure**

Musto’s setting of “no time ago” effectively addresses all aspects of the poetry, as he achieves appropriate balance between the different sentiments presented by Cummings. Each element of the brief song supports Cummings’ text, allowing the poetry and music to coalesce convincingly.

Musto’s rendering of Cummings’ poem is entirely syllabic, creating a simple, speech-like effect throughout the song. He strictly adheres to the natural textual accents of American English and reproduces the poem in its entirety, without any repetition of text. Musto does not, however, adhere to the three stanza format established by Cummings; instead, his setting is a through-composed piece bereft of any musical interludes or terminal cadences that divide or suspend the text. If one follows the sense of the poem itself, one notices that Cummings elides or blurs the stanzas; therefore, Musto’s decision to construct a through-composed song is appropriate. In fact, Musto’s vocal line is so continuous that the piece resists traditional divisions of phrase structure, much like the highly experimental writing style associated with many of Cummings’ poems. The effect created is one of a stream-of-consciousness recount in which the narrator’s speech is not halted until the final chord of the song. Even at this juncture, one’s impression is that although the text is complete, the thought process of the narrator continues. Only one place exists in “Witness” where the constant motion of the poem is arrested: in ms. 3, during which the entire ensemble rests. The listener, however, does
not achieve a sensation of reprieve at this moment in the song; instead, he feels a sense of expectation as he anticipates the narrator’s next line.

The overall atmosphere created by the text and melody, supported by the accompaniment, is one of relaxed matter-of-factness. This mood is made manifest through Musto’s use of text painting, which is, perhaps, the most prevalent compositional technique in “Witness.” Text painting is applied in the following three ways during the song:

I. Throughout the piece in the strings, the alternating \( \text{\scalebox{0.5}{\rotatebox{90}{\text{\footnotesize{\leftarrow}}}}} \) clearly represent the footsteps of the narrator who is “walking in the dark.” This is most readily apparent in the first two measures of the song, in which Musto dictates stepwise motion in the contrabass and first violin, thereby blatantly illuminating the narrator’s footsteps. The most compelling employment of this figure, however, occurs at the end of the piece, at which point Musto uses the strings to portray the narrator walking away from the encounter. In these measures, Musto indicates a quarter rest before the last two beats (or footsteps), creating a moment in which the narrator stops briefly to ponder the peculiar occurrence before leaving altogether. This figure also serves as a means through which a light hearted, nonchalant feel is reestablished after the sudden change of tone on the word, “loneliness.” The rest is also reminiscent of ms. 3, in which Musto briefly suspends the music with a measure of rest.
II. In measures 14-15, in which the orchestra rests (or plays nothing) while the singer recites the word, "nothing." One might also perceive the cluster chord on the last beat of ms. 14 as a representation of the state of loneliness designated by the singer in the following measure, especially since this is the only moment of sharp dissonance of its kind in the entire song. It is at this moment that the mood abruptly changes to a more serious, contemplative state, which is enhanced by the fermata notated in the vocal line. See Figure 3.1.

III. In ms. 8, whereby Musto delays the perpetual motion generated thus far in the piece by notating \[\text{marked}\]
sostenuto, corresponding to the text, “still while he passed.” The figure is like a built in retard that defeats the regular rhythmic plan established to that point and reestablished after it. The delay signifies the stillness of the narrator as Christ walks by. The duration of the retard is brief, as a tempo is marked at the onset of ms. 9. The ascending figure found in the clarinets, oboes, and flutes in ms. 10 could indicate an aural reference to Christ’s walking, although that implication might be a bit reaching. It might also represent the awe or surprise of the narrator.

Figure 3.2: Musto, “Witness,” voice, mm.5-8.

Figure 3.3: Musto, “Witness,” wind instruments, ms. 9-11.

Instrumentation/Orchestration

Musto makes use of all of Encounters’ designated instruments in “Witness,” with the exception of the harp and celesta. The orchestration is light, and it yields a sparse, thin texture that is maintained throughout the piece. The orchestra primarily acts as an accompaniment to the vocal line, supporting the solo tenor and echoing the sentiments of the poetry through text painting. No true orchestral interludes or solos exist, save the brief moment in ms. 10 (Figure 3.3), during which the winds portray Christ’s image strolling by.
Vocal Melodic Material

The vocal range of "Witness" is narrow, spanning just over an octave (from E-flat to F-sharp), and the overall tessitura is confined mostly to the middle voice. Likewise, the dynamics of the piece are conservative, as the loudest marking is mf, indicated at measure 14 in the brass, following one of two instances in which Musto calls for a crescendo. While neither instance (ms. 6 and ms. 12) fits the absolute definition of text painting, both undoubtedly relate to specific words in Cummings’ poem. Additionally, each crescendo is notated for only one specific instrument (first for percussion and then for violin) rather than for the entire ensemble, creating a brief emphasis on that particular instrument. The first crescendo, notated between mm. 6 and 7 in the violin I, coincides with the text, “christ jesus.” In Cummings’ poem, these two words are broken up, as “jesus” begins a new stanza. Musto, on the other hand, sets the words consecutively and intensifies their connection by calling for a crescendo. The audible effect created is one of tongue-in-cheek humor, as the word “jesus” is emphasized by the singer, as though he is testifying at an evangelical revival.

The second crescendo is indicated between mm. 12 and 13, at which point Musto emphasizes the word, “yes.” As is the case with the first crescendo, this particular instance technically may not be defined as text painting, although the effect generated certainly is comparable. By calling for a crescendo at this moment, “yes” is treated as an outburst of uncontrollable excitement (as though the narrator has experienced a life changing vision). Musto furthers the implication by scoring “yes” as the highest note for the voice on one of few sustained pitches found in the song. The addition, the snare drum also intensifies the enthusiasm. Both crescendi are in 6/16 measures that lead to 12/16
measures, which reinforces the larger rhythmic plan.

Figure 3.4: Musto, “Witness,” piano reduction, mm. 5-13.

As noted earlier, the composer sets the text primarily in a syllabic, speech-like manner. As a result, the melodic line is not particularly lyrical nor cantabile. Neither, however, is it markedly disjunct. The vocal line is composed predominantly of stepwise motion or very small leaps, most regularly that of the minor 3rd. The largest leap in the entire song is that of a major 6th, occurring only twice (ms. 11 and ms. 15), and in both cases it results from crucial textual moments that have been previously discussed.

The first two measures of the piece reveal the basic melodic/intervalllic make-up of the entire song. In these two measures, three important melodic motives are established:

1. The interval of a descending major 2nd followed by a descending minor 3rd;
2. Three ascending \( \uparrow \) in stepwise motion;
3. The interval of a minor 2nd.

The first motive occurs at the onset of the piece in the vocal line, "no time ago."

Although Musto embellishes the motive with the addition of an escape tone on C, the
basic structure of the motive remains clear, as it is reemphasized simultaneously by the bassoons. The motive is then repeated up a half-step in mm. 4-5 on the text, "walking in the dark." This time, however, the flutes and horn provide the doubling. Immediately thereafter, Musto reuses the motive in an ascending retrograde form at, "i met christ," which is now duplicated by both the oboe and the clarinet. By the end of ms. 6, the motive has been audibly established and appears thereafter in modified fragmentation, most often as repeated minor 3rds (voice, ms. 11 and ms. 13).

The second motive is initially presented in the outer voices of the strings in the first measure of the piece. Previously described as a form of text painting that refers to the narrator's walking, this stepwise motion permeates the orchestra throughout the song. It can be heard in the following instruments: violin 1 at mm. 1-2, 4-5, 13-14; cello at mm. 4-5; bass at mm. 1-2, 4-5, 13-14, 17-18; and trombone, trumpet, bassoon, and clarinet at mm. 13-14. Other representations of this motive (either indirect or fragmented) may be found, as well.

The final melodic motive of the piece (the minor 2nd) is introduced as a countermelody or afterthought to the first motive. It is originally played in ms. 2 by the violin 2, viola, clarinets, and bassoons in both ascending and descending motion concurrent with the text, "or else a life." It appears again during significant moments in the song, most notably at mm. 6-7 in all parts and at ms. 15 in the voice.

Rhythm, Meter, and Tempo

As is the case with most of his songs, Musto uses mixed compound meter in "Witness," shifting between measures of 12/16 and 6/16 four times during the song (mm. 3, 6, 12, and 15). The choice of meter obviously relates to the overall construction of the
song, as it provides an appropriate means whereby Musto is able to notate precisely the
desired "swing" feel. By writing a meter as meticulous as 12/16 (and 6/16), the
composer is able to ensure rhythmic accuracy and cohesiveness within the ensemble.

The nontraditional tempo marking, "Ambling," is indicative of the unpretentious
style of Musto's music. Albeit unpretentious and relaxed, Musto still provides the
musicians with an exact metronome marking of \( \text{\textfrac{12}{16}} = 102 \), ensuring a performance pace
that is acceptable to the composer. The tempo itself is moderate, evoking a nonchalant
feeling of sauntering, which remains consistent throughout the piece, save the three brief
moments of reprieve (rest in ms. 3, \textit{rubato} in ms. 8 and \textit{fermata} in ms. 15). Otherwise,
the casual atmosphere of "ambling" is unvarying.

In conjunction with the tempo and the meter of "Witness," Musto also uses the
primary rhythmic elements as a means to convey the overall atmosphere of the song.
Two perceivable rhythmic motives are present, both of which directly correspond to the
walking of the poem's narrator, and, as is the case with the melodic motives, are revealed
initially in the first two measures of the song:

1. \( \text{\textfrac{12}{16}} \)

2. \( \text{\textfrac{12}{16}} \)

Although not exclusively, the first motive appears most prominently in the
strings. It is directly associated with melodic motive 2, outlined on p. 8, and it is the
means by which Musto paints the text, "walking." Furthermore, this pattern provides the
rhythmical and metrical foundation for the entire piece, as the motive is constructed of
consecutive \( \text{\textfrac{12}{16}} \), the primary unit of time in the song.

Rhythmic motive 2 is present solely in the vocal line, with the exception of its
variation in the percussion in ms. 7 and that in the winds in ms. 10. While the first rhythmic motive provides overall rhythmic structure and text painting, the function of rhythmic motive 2 is to establish and reinforce the semblance of “ambling” as the aggregate of the ensemble throughout. Together with the compound meter, this rhythmic motive constitutes the “swing” that is widely associated with Musto’s music and appropriate to the characterization of Cummings’ text. It may also be identified as means though which the composer musically personalizes the narrator’s swagger.

Conclusions

Musto conveys the overall aura of “Witness” without overlooking the nuances of Cummings’ poem. The song is successful in recounting an incident between the narrator and Christ, which proves to be amusing, peculiar, thought-provoking, and ironic. Musto’s setting encapsulates and achieves the necessary balance between each of these different sentiments of Cummings’ text without overindulging in any particular one.

The musical elements of instrumentation; melody; and meter, rhythm, and tempo prove crucial to the overall framework and interpretation of the song. Not only do they serve as important structural aspects of the composition (in both the melody and accompaniment), but they also advance meaningful moments in the text, thereby establishing the musical drama of “Witness.” Musto relies on simplicity in this particular song, constructing the entire piece from melodic and rhythmic motives originating in the first two measures and by circumscribing components such as dynamics, range, intervallic makeup to a relatively conservative gamut. In so doing, Musto presents a song whose entire constitution is derived from a few conservative elements that appropriately complement the poetry.
CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Song 3, "Encounter"

The third song in Encounters is the piece from which the cycle’s title originates. Like its immediate predecessor, "Encounter" is a setting of a poem by E.E. Cummings entitled, "your little voice Over the wires came leaping.” The poem is taken from Cummings’ 1922 collection, Tulips & Chimneys. “your little voice” is the first poem in the chapter dubbed, “Amores,” the seventh of eleven chapters contained under the collection’s heading, “Tulips.”

Poetic Background

your little voice
Over the wires came leaping
and i felt suddenly
dizzy
    With the jostling and shouting of merry flowers
wee skipping high-heeled flames
courtesied before my eyes
    or twinkling over to my side
Looked up
with impertinently exquisite faces
floating hands were laid upon me
I was whirléd and tossed into delicious dancing
up
Up
with the pale important
    stars and the Humorous
    moon
dear girl
How i was crazy how i cried when i heard
    over time
and tide and death
leaping
Sweetly
    your voice
The most noticeable aspect of “your little voice,” is, undoubtedly, the unconventional type setting of the text, with which Cummings is commonly associated. This poem is considered to be one of his first attempts at experimental verse. Penned in 1916, the summer after Cummings completed his masters degree from Harvard, “your little voice” is one of eight poems that Cummings selected to be included in a upcoming publication project entitled *Eight Harvard Poets*. Realizing that they would no longer have Harvard publications as an outlet for their work, Cummings and some of his classmates decided to band together in attempt to get their poetry printed.41 *Eight Harvard Poets* was the resulting publication.42

Of the eight poems Cummings included in *Eight Harvard Poets*, four of them, including “your little voice” -- which was titled “The Lover Speaks” in this publication -- were of modern experimental nature. Cummings first became intrigued with the modern movement after Foster Damon exposed him to the music of Debussy, Stravinsky, and Satie. He also introduced him to the writings of Gertrude Stein and to Ezra Pound’s free-verse poem, “The Return.”43 Richard Kennedy notes Cummings’ response upon reading Pound’s poem.

He reported that Pound’s treatment of a classical subject in an oblique and allusive way moved him, but that the arrangement on the page, ‘the inaudible poem -- the visual poem, the poem not for ears but eye -- moved me more.’44

Clearly, Pound’s experimental verse made a profound impact on Cummings, as “The Lover Speaks” was written shortly thereafter. *Eight Harvard Poets* was published in

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41 The other poets included in the publication were Stewart Mitchell, S. Foster Damon, John Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, Dudley Poore, Cuthbert Wright, and William Norris.
43 Kennedy, 19.
44 Ibid., 20.
1917, debuting Cummings' first modernist works. "The Lover Speaks" was well-received and reappears in *Tulips and Chimneys* in its original form, minus the title.

Perhaps it is curious that Musto chooses to set one of Cummings' self-described "inaudible, visual poems" to music. The images created in the text, however, are extremely convincing, and they lend themselves to musical setting. Metaphors such as "high-heeled flames that courtesy" evoke fascinating visual pictures which Musto uses as one of the foremost elements in his song. Furthermore, Cummings' idea of the telephone call as the modern day love letter (albeit 1916 upon original conception) provides the composer with a wide spectrum of musical possibilities. In accordance with Cummings' designation, "Amores," Musto's setting of "your little voice," is a contemporary love story, of sorts. Amy Burton notes the following:

This song is the telephone call as a modern love song. In this setting of Cummings' poem, "your little voice," all the sounds familiar to modern telephone communications are employed: dial tones, busy signals, jangling telephones, and most importantly, the telephone number itself, a seven digit touch-tone melody. Over and over again it is "dialed, "the tune transported into dizzying flights of fancy."45

**Text Setting and Musical Structure**

Musto’s setting of the text remains true to Cummings' poetry. The song’s overall form is through-composed, and Musto does not impose any added divisions, sections, or repeats (save the direct repetition of the text, "whirled and tossed," in ms. 40) to the overall structure of the poem. The musical setting of the line is primarily syllabic, with the exception of a few moments in which Musto incorporates a brief melisma for textual emphasis. This is most apparent at the beginning of the song in ms. 4, at which point the

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45 Burton, iii.
composer illuminates the text, “over the wires.”

More than any other song in the cycle, “Encounter” is most definitely dominated by musical references to the poetry. The entire setting, in both the vocal line and the orchestra, contains musical figures and motives derived directly from the poem itself. The composer achieves this in one of two ways: either through musical symbols that represent specific aspects of a telephone call or through distinct text painting that permeates the piece. In so doing, Musto achieves an appropriate atmosphere of peculiarity and randomness within the confines of traditional musical structure.

Four elements of a telephone call are represented conspicuously throughout the song:

I. The interval of the major 3rd represents the dial tone. It is heard in the bassoon line at the onset of the piece in ms. 1 and again at the end of the song in ms. 56. Not only does this interval act as a symbol, but it also serves as a sort of musical bookend that signifies the beginning and ending of both the song and the telephone call. The major 3rd of the bassoon line is embellished by a single chime played on the triangle each time.

Figure 4.1: Musto, “Encounter,” bassoon, ms. 1 and ms. 56.

II. The 7-note figure in ms. 3 in the oboe denotes a 7-digit touch tone telephone number that is repeated furiously during the song. Not only does this “phone number” serve as a musical symbol, but it also provides one of the foremost structural elements of the piece, as it appears exactly or slightly mutated throughout. The most obvious statement is found in the oboe in mm. 3-5 and again at mm. 7-8. It also occurs in the following places: mm. 16-17 in the flute; mm. 18-19 in the strings and bass clarinet; mm. 24-25 in the violins, flute and oboe; ms. 38 in the bassoon and clarinet; ms. 48 in the clarinet and bass clarinet; and in mm. 51-55 in the violins.
Figure 4.2: Musto, “Encounter,” oboe, mm. 1-5.

III. The interval of a major 3rd that is originally used to represent the dialtone occurs again in the bassoon line in mm. 6-8. This time, however, the accented pulses symbolize the telephone’s busy signal.

Figure 4.3: Musto, “Encounter,” bassoon, mm. 6-8.

VI. The climax of the entire song occurs at ms. 47 after a buildup of increasing instrumentation and rhythmic motion, and an ascending glissando in the harp. The downbeat of ms. 47 (emphasized with a fermata and a trill in the strings and wind instruments) symbolizes the ring of the telephone.

Figure 4.4: Musto, “Encounter,” piano reduction, ms. 47.

A fifth, less overt telephone symbol may be found between mm. 36 and 46, in which several independent musical lines converge, creating a dissonance that could represent the crossing of telephone lines prior to the “ring.”

In addition to musical symbolism, Musto also employs copious text painting in “Encounter” to highlight the images presented in Cummings’ text. As is the case in
"Piano," text painting is applied in "Encounter" either directly or indirectly:

Examples of direct text painting are:

a.) in ms. 6, in which a leap occurs following a period of stepwise motion in the vocal line, corresponding to the text, "leaping."

b.) in ms. 21 on the word, "high," at which point the tenor sings one of the highest pitches in the vocal line of the song.

c.) in mm. 39-40, in which the rhythm and ascending tritone of the voice on the word, "tossed" clearly signify the action of tossing.

d.) in mm. 43-44, corresponding to the word, "up," in which the vocal line ascends.

e.) in ms. 54, again on the word, "leaping," at which point the intervals in the voice emulate the text.

Examples of indirect text painting are:

a.) in mm. 11-14, where the music relates to the word, "dizzy," by creating an overall feel of "jostling" and rhythmic instability with a series of whirling eighth notes in the violin I and a syncopated ascending line in the viola.

b.) in ms. 23, one of two homophonic measures of the song, in which the perceived rhythm and A-major tonality represent archaic dance music, like a minuet, corresponding to the text in the following measure, "courtesied."

c.) in ms. 36-37, at which point both the lines of the orchestra and the voice contain music that represents the feeling of "floating," particularly the figure of spinning thirty-second notes in the flute and piccolo and the repeated ascending minor 3rd pattern in the voice.

d.) in ms 42, the second homophonic measure of the song, in which the rhythm of the horns, percussion, and strings; and the unison Eb create an undeniable "dancing" beat in the form of a march.

e.) in ms. 50, where the strings comment on the narrator's confession of feeling "crazy."

The most consequential moment of indirect text painting occurs not as a brief moment, but as an entire section of the song. Between mm. 27-35, Musto inserts a casual soft-shoe dance in 12/16 as extended text painting of the phrase, "twinkling over to my side."

Inclusion of this dance not only emphasizes Cummings' clever text, but it also provides a section of audible form and metric stability in an otherwise metrically ambiguous song.
Instrumentation/ Orchestration

Despite the relative thin texture maintained throughout the song, Musto utilizes all of Encounters’ named instruments except the celesta and the trombone. In this piece, unlike its predecessor, the orchestra serves as an equal partner to the voice, especially since it contains all of the musical symbols for the telephone call. The interplay between the instrumental lines and the voice is definitely of contrapuntal nature, and a musical dialogue is maintained between the independent lines throughout. Telephone symbols and melodic motives are frequently exchanged between instruments, adding a feeling of variety and irregularity. Only during the soft-shoe dance section at mm. 27-35 does the orchestra feel accompanimental. In this instance, however, the perception of the orchestra as accompaniment is an inherent result of the dance-like nature of the music.

Vocal Melodic Materials

As is true in the case of all the songs in the cycle, the tessitura of the melodic line in “Encounter” is relatively conservative. The line spans a wide range, from C to G, but most of the song lies in the tenor’s lower middle register. In fact, this song in particular utilizes a range that would probably be better suited for high baritone rather than a tenor, especially when one considers that the climactic note of the song at ms. 46 (marked ff while the orchestra plays its fullest moment of the song) is only on a G.

The character of the melodic line is extremely syllabic and more disjunct than the other songs in the cycle. While the line certainly contains a great deal of stepwise legato motion, the number of large leaps (particularly those which are consecutive) is greater in comparison with the other songs. Likewise, the dynamic contrast also spans a wider spectrum, ranging from p at ms. 56 to the ff indicated at the climax in ms. 46. Phrase
contour is irregular and often unpredictable, as the unusual poem clearly guides the vocal line.

Apart from the musical telephone symbols, only one true melodic motive exists in the piece. As is the case in many of Musto's songs, it is presented as the first vocal figure of the song.

Figure 4.5: Musto, "Encounter," voice, mm. 1-2.

Comprised of two intervals of a minor 3rd joined by a minor 2nd, this motive permeates the entire piece, in both the orchestral and vocal lines. It is found in mm. 2-5 in the bass clarinet; ms. 4 in the voice; ms. 17 in the bassoon; ms. 21 in the oboe; ms. 38 in the piccolo, bassoon, and violin; ms. 43 in the cello; ms. 48 in the winds; mm. 50-51 in the cello; and ms. 51 in the voice and bass clarinet.

Not only does this motive function as a structural element in the composition, but its intervallic components, the minor 3rd and the minor 2nd, also serve as the two most prevalent intervals. In fact, with the exception of the 7-digit telephone number figure and the elements of direct text painting, virtually all of the song is constructed of manipulation of the minor 3rd and the minor 2nd. Readily apparent examples of this are found in the winds at mm. 31-32 (diminished chord/minor 3rd) and in the viola in mm. 11-15 (minor 2nd). Appropriately, the last interval in the vocal line is that of the minor 3rd. Either one or both of these intervals is in abundance in almost every measure of the song.
Rhythm, Meter, and Tempo

Musto, in typical fashion, employs a wide variety of mixed meter in “Encounter.” Beginning with 7/8 to accommodate the 7-digit phone number, the piece shifts to and from 5/4, 3/4, 2/4, and 12/16 (an obvious choice for notating a soft-shoe à la Musto), 6/8, 9/8, 5/8, and 4/8. The end of the piece returns to the original 7/8, providing a sense of closure to the metrically turbulent song.

Save the soft-shoe dance section, meter is not necessarily used as a perceivable concept in the song; rather, it seems to be used in an antithetical way. Instead of functioning as a means whereby the listener is able to sense form and order in the song, the constantly shifting meter adheres to the structure (or lack thereof) of the original poem. The determining factor for the meter choices is, undoubtedly, the text setting, in that the textual rhythm and emphases govern each of the meter changes.

Likewise, no independent rhythmic motives truly exist apart from another element. The prominent rhythmic patterns repeated in the song do not stand alone, as they correspond directly to other more dominant elements, such as the 7-note phone number and the melodic motive. Furthermore, the rhythm that corresponds to these motives is not consistent, and therefore cannot be cited as an absolute motive. One might perceive as a rhythmic motive, although its existence is merely intrinsic in the compound meter and is not particularly significant to the song’s interpretation.

In comparison with the other songs in the cycle, Musto calls for an increased number of tempi changes. Again, each of these changes reflects specific textual elements in the vocal line in an attempt to boldly portray the words. The composer’s use of the marking, Tempo di Soft Shoe, is, surely, the most curious marking in the cycle, although
it is not an uncommon notation in Musto’s music.

**Conclusions**

Musto’s musical setting of Cummings’ “inaudible poem” is successful because the composer adheres to the atmosphere created by the poem itself. Musto aurally maintains the desultory framework established by the poet through his contrapuntal compositional style, in which no line (voice included) is overtly dominant. In so doing, the listener experiences a feeling of randomness in form, rhythm, and melody.

The composer achieves cohesion by using only one melodic motive, whose intervals saturate the entire song. Furthermore, he repeats elements of musical symbolism, such as the 7-digit phone number and the major 3rd dialtone, which serves as a musical bookend to the song. Most importantly, however, Musto achieves an appropriate balance between delicacy and quirkiness of the unusual love song by allowing the text to dictate the music.
CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of Song 4, “Passacaglia”

The fourth song in the cycle is a setting of E. E. Cummings’ poem, “these children singing in stone.” It is the thirty-seventh poem in his 1940 work entitled 50 Poems. Published in December of that year, 50 Poems contains less experimental and less progressive poetry than Cummings’ previous books. Most of the poems in this collection contain traditional rhyme and stanza structure with attention to meter. In fact, only three poems in the collection are considered to be entirely free versed, although many others remain consistent with Cummings’ exploration of experimental syntax and language.\(^{46}\) Another constant element of the book is most definitely the comprehensive theme of the collection. Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno declares that Cummings’ basic idea in 50 Poems is that of “the individual against ‘most people,’” and that Cummings was reacting against “what he saw as a dangerous trend toward ‘enforced conformity.’”\(^ {47}\) “these children singing in stone” assuredly embodies that notion, as the poem presents images of stone children singing songs that are unable to be heard.

**Poetic Background**

these children singing in stone a
silence of stone these
little children wound with stone
flowers opening for

ever these silently lit
tle children are petals
their song is a flower of
always their flowers

\(^{46}\) Sawyer-Laucanno, 435.
\(^{47}\) Ibid, 435.
of stone are
silently singing
a song more silent
than silence these always

children forever
singing wreathed with singing
blossoms children of
stone with blossoming

eyes
know if a
lit tle
tree listens

forever to always children singing forever
a song made
of silent as stone silence of
song

Musto’s setting of the poem in “Passacaglia” is sympathetic to the mood elicited by
Cummings’ poem. Musto writes the song as a modern version of the traditional keyboard
passacaglia in an attempt to convey the overall spirit of Cummings’ text. Amy Burton
notes the following in her performance notes:

...John Musto found e.e. cummings’ mystical poem these children in stone
eerily evocative of the statuary in Paris’ famous Père Lachaise cemetery. cummings’ images are the unchanging time-stopped statues of singing
children. Like a puzzle that can be put together many different ways, this
poem juxtaposes words in a continually evolving context. The result is
the virtual animation of the stone, a kind of perpetual motion within
unending stillness.48

Text Setting and Musical Structure

Musto provides a through composed statement of Cummings’ poem. The
composer does not, however, adhere to the stanza divisions imposed by Cummings.
Neither does he emulate Cummings’ avant garde phrase structure and unusual syntax.

48 Burton, iii.
Instead, Musto creates his own divisions (in the form of brief musical interludes between the lines of text) and presents phrases in a more traditional, intelligible form. For instance, in the original poem, Cummings positions the words “always their flowers” as the last line in the second stanza. In Musto’s composition, though, the phrase is broken up, and the words “their flowers” are situated with the first line in the following stanza, providing a more understandable rendition for the listener. Since one would assume that the audience may not have access to a written version of the poetry, the choice to alter Cummings’ original certainly seems to be a justified and wise decision. Musto’s setting contains only one additional modification from the original. In ms. 41, the composer replaces the word “with” with the word “in.” The reason for this change is not readily apparent, however.

Except for two places in “Passacaglia” (at ms. 46 and at ms. 50), the text setting is entirely syllabic. The effect created is one of mechanical, robotic recitation of the poetry, which is consistent with the mood of the text. Unlike many of Musto’s other song settings, the dominance of the poetry in “Passacaglia” is not overt. Instead of copious text painting and musical symbolism of specific textual moments, the music draws its inspiration from the overall character evoked from Cummings’ words.

Absolute text painting is rare, as are musical symbols, particularly when compared with those present in the previous song. Only three places exist where Musto utilizes true text painting. Each of these moments occurs in the last few measures of the song. They are as follows:

1. At ms. 50 on the word “singing,” whereby the act of singing is mimicked by the vocal line.
2. At ms. 54 on the word “stone,” at which point the voice sustains a $\text{\textit{c}}$, creating an effect of stone-like stillness in the line.
3. At ms. 55, the last measure of the song, during which the voice
recites the text, “silence of song.” The significance of this moment is twofold because it refers not only to the “silence” created by the sudden reprieve in all instrumental parts, but also to the “stillness of song,” since the song itself concludes at this moment.

Likewise, moments of musical symbols which directly correspond to textual meaning are also few. The following two places in the song contain music which may be audibly perceived as symbolic.

1. The flute passage between mm. 46 and 50 could represent the sound of chirping birds, creating a musical environment that directly relates to the statement the poem at mm. 43-46, which clearly evokes a nature scene.

2. The flute and piccolo lines at mm. 24-27 could be heard as “petals” (ms. 24, voice) scattering delicately. This allusion is not overt, however, and should not be considered to be absolute in its function.

Instead of focusing via word painting and symbolism on the individual nuances of the words that comprise the poem, Musto allows the overall spirit evoked from the text to color the song. The unchanging, perpetual condition of the statues of children who are forever singing in a frozen state of motion suggest a paradox of unchanging movement. Movement, by definition, suggests change; conversely, the inherent nature of statues is one of constancy. Thus, statues of moving children create a paradox. Musto chooses to represent this paradox in the musical form of the passacaglia. The effect is one of continuous counterpoint of Baroque origin with a slight minimalist twist in the style of John Adams or Philip Glass.

Because the entire song is written as a passacaglia, it is necessary to address its distinctive components before further discussing the standard elements of the song. Musto remains relatively faithful to the traditional structure of the seventeenth-century passacaglia. The ground bass pattern is one of serious temperament in triple meter, and it
is four bars in length. His use of alternating three 6/8 measures with one 9/8 measure is
certainly progressive (and most definitely a Musto trademark), as is the use of duple
rhythm in a triple meter (beat 1, ms. 4). Musto introduces this pattern as the first four
measures of the song, establishing it as the foundation of the entire work.

Figure 5.1: Musto, “Passacaglia,” Statement I, bassoon, mm. 1-4.

Statement I presents the ground bass pattern in its purest form, which may be analyzed as
the product of four individual motives that together create a phrase with wavelike contour
in an overall gradual descending motion. The four individual motives that comprise the
statement are:

A.

B.

C.

D.
Immediately after the conclusion of Statement I in the bassoon, the ground bass pattern is reintroduced, beginning this time on C# in the English horn. Simultaneously, the bassoon presents a countersubject that accompanies the pattern.

Figure 5.2: Musto, “Passacaglia,” Statement II, mm. 5-8.

The ground bass pattern is repeated consistently throughout the rest of the song as shown in Figure 5.2, or transposed up the interval of a minor third, as it appears in the clarinet in Statement III.

Figure 5.3: Musto, “Passacaglia,” Statement III, mm. 10-13.

The countersubject (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3) provides a suitable complement to the original ground bass pattern. Its most distinctive characteristics are that of the descending line by half or whole step and the ties that appear across each of the three bar lines in the four-measure pattern. Apart from the initial statement of the ground bass pattern, only one place exists in the song where the ground bass pattern occurs without its corresponding countersubject. Between ms. 42 and ms. 44, the violin 2 and the clarinet contain the entire statement of the pattern. The line begins with both the ground bass pattern and the countersubject, but the countersubject is truncated at ms. 42 (cello, viola, and trombone), leaving the violin 2 and the clarinet to complete the full statement.
The aforementioned statements are the skeletal makeup of the entire song: the other lines (voice included) are subsidiary. This is, indeed, the nature of the passacaglia: the vocal line, as well as the interjections of the instruments that do not contain the ground bass pattern or the countersubject, exist as improvisatory-like embellishments or variations on the ground bass itself. It is in this way -- by choosing to set Cummings' poem as a passacaglia -- that Musto effectively establishes a marriage between text and music in this particular setting. The passacaglia is an appropriate choice, as it provides a means whereby the poetry is well-supported (though not musically overshadowed) in the following ways. First, the constant repetition of the ground bass pattern clearly represents the unchanging state of the stone children. It successfully portrays Cummings’ image of the paradox of unchanging motion. Secondly, the fact that the ground bass pattern is the dominating musical force in the piece (as opposed to the vocal line) might also signify the helplessness of the stone children whose voices are unable to be heard because they are not in control of their inanimate state.

Instrumentation/Orchestration

Musto calls for nearly all of Encounters’ designated instruments in “Passacaglia,” but he uses them very sparingly. The orchestration is quite thin throughout (generally the thinnest of the entire cycle), creating a very ethereal, eerie quality for most of the song. The instrumental and vocal lines are equal and independent, except for those which contain the ground bass pattern and the countersubject at any given moment. The texture is most definitely contrapuntal and polyphonic, in accordance with the style of a traditional passacaglia. Musto never employs more than four independent lines simultaneously, although the use of doubling is plentiful, which often creates the illusion
of a more complex texture than that which actually exists. The thickest texture of the
song, which also serves as the climactic moment, results from said doubling at ms. 41, in
which 8 of the 14 voices (percussion) contain the ground bass pattern, and 3 voices
contain the countersubject. As one would anticipate, the thinnest texture exists both at
the beginning and at the end of the song, forming bookends to the work, a technique of
which Musto is apparently fond.

Vocal Melodic Materials

Due to the extremely syllabic nature of the text setting, the vocal line is not
particularly legato in a traditional sense, although, for the most part, the song should be
performed with as much sensitive attention to a connected line as possible. The range
lies between D and G, and the tessitura is characteristically low for the tenor. Oddly, the
climax at ms. 41 does not contain the highest pitch in the song, even though the largest
leap (a minor 7th) occurs at that moment. While this measure is technically considered to
be the climactic moment because of the sudden increase in texture and heightened
dynamics, the nature of the music and the poetry do not lend themselves to a truly
exciting culmination. Consequently, the audible result is somewhat awkward and forced,
as the measure feels neither climactic nor equal in texture, momentum, and intensity to its
surrounding material.

There are no independent motives in "Passacaglia," as Musto derives all vocal
material from either the ground bass pattern or its countersubject. While these
derivations are not exact melodic reproductions of the original, they certainly serve as
audible connection to them in overall formation and contour. Figure 5.4 illustrates the
primary examples of the moments in the vocal line in "Passacaglia" that relate to the
ground bass pattern. A, B, C, and D refer to the motives outlined previously between Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

Figure 5.4: “Passacaglia,” ground bass motives in voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 23-24</td>
<td>ms. 13 (x2)</td>
<td>mm. 17-18</td>
<td>ms. 13 (x2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 27 (truncation)</td>
<td>ms. 33</td>
<td>ms. 40 (truncation)</td>
<td>ms. 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 27-28</td>
<td>ms. 35-36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 50 (truncation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Allusions to the countersubject in the voice occur either as a descending line or as a half-step intervalllic relationship between notes. The examples are:

Figure 5.5: “Passacaglia,” countersubject motives in voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descending Line</th>
<th>1/2-step Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ms. 15</td>
<td>ms. 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 41-42</td>
<td>ms. 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 24, 34, 43, 44, 45</td>
<td>ms. 51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same comparisons are apparent in lines other than the voice. Note the following examples:

Figure 5.6: “Passacaglia,” ground bass pattern and countersubject motives in orchestra.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground Bass Pattern</th>
<th>Countersubject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 19-22 (flute and oboe)</td>
<td>mm. 24-28 (piccolo and flute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 23-24 (English horn)</td>
<td>mm. 28-31 (piccolo and violin I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 27-28 (clarinet)</td>
<td>mm. 32-36 (trumpet II, horn II, contrabassoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 20 (bassoon)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rhythm, Meter, and Tempo

The meter of “Passacaglia” is more stable and constant than any other song in Encounters, as it is dictated by the repeated ground bass pattern. This four-measure repeated pattern -- constructed of three measures of 6/8 and one measure of 9/8 -- is consistent throughout, with the exception of the 6/8 measure of free counterpoint that follows each time the ground bass pattern appears as it does in Statement II (mm. 9, 18, 27, 36, 45, and 54). Additionally, the last measure of the piece also breaks the pattern; the anticipated 6/8 measure is replaced with one in 9/8.

The tempo, marked andante (♩= 100), is consistent with that of the traditional passacaglia/chaconne. This moderate tempo contributes to the peculiar atmosphere (particularly in the vocal line). Unfortunately, it also contributes to the difficulty of achieving a legato line for the tenor.

As is the case with the melodic material, no true independent rhythmic motives are evident. The rhythm of “Passacaglia” is determined by the rhythmic figures found in the ground bass pattern and its corresponding countersubject. The motives indicated as A, B, C, and D under the heading, “Vocal Melodic Materials,” are also applicable rhythmically. Other rhythmic figures that occur with some frequency but are not motivic are:

1. \( \frac{\text{♩♩♩}}{\text{♩}} \) mm. 43-45 (voice)
2. \( \frac{\text{♩♩♩}}{\text{♩♩♩}} \) mm. 42-44 (cello, bass clarinet)
3. \( \frac{\text{♩♩♩♩♩}}{\text{♩♩♩♩♩}} \) mm. 24-26 (piccolo, flute)
Conclusions

Instead of employing abundant text painting and musical symbols in “Passacaglia,” Musto allows the poetry to determine genre of composition. By writing the song in the form of a passacaglia, the composer achieves the overall feel of unchanging, perpetual motion suggested by the poem. The ground bass pattern is presented at the beginning of the piece, and in typical Musto fashion, every element of the song is drawn from it.

Albeit clever and creative in its construction, “Passacaglia” is not as aurally satisfying as other songs in the cycle. Because the vocal line is derived almost exclusively from the repeated ground bass pattern, it lacks natural textual rhythm and a sense of legato. Additionally, since the poem is more abstract in nature and not as narrative as others in the cycle, nuances of text painting inspired by the drama of the text do not exist. Perhaps this, too, contributes to the feeling of dissatisfaction.
CHAPTER SIX

Analysis of Song 6, “Ballad”

The fifth song in *Encounters* is a setting of John Millington Synge’s poem entitled, “Danny.” Penned in 1907, “Danny” is a narrative poem whose plot is based on actual incidents that took place on the Belmullet-Bangorerris road in Synge’s native Ireland in late 1881. The poem describes the murder of the fictional character, Danny, who is beaten to death by a mob of men “for some minor fighting and sexual immortality.” In the actual incident, a tax collector named O’Malley was killed, and the murderers constructed a mock memorial marker in the shape of a coffin.

Although not nearly as prolific as Lawrence or Cummings, J.M. Synge is regarded as a famous poet in his own right, partly due to the brutal subjects of his most famous poems. In the preface to his 1908 book of poems and translations, Synge offers the following statement.

> Even if we grant that exalted poetry can be kept successful by itself, the strong things of life are needed in poetry also, to show that what is exalted and tender is not made by feeble blood. It may also be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.

“Danny” certainly exhibits human brutality at its core in not only its subject matter, but also in its syntax. Synge’s choice of “savage verbs and body parts” to describe the

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51 McCormack, 227.
attack present a vivid image in the reader's mind. Furthermore, by setting the narrative in simple ballad form with ten quatrains of even rhyming verse, the poet establishes an undeniable irony in tone, as Danny's murder is presented not as devastating, but as natural, perhaps even noble. It is because of this irony that the poem is powerful, for it portrays the human being in his most primitive, uncivilized state.

**Poetic Background**

One night a score of Erris men,
A score I'm told and nine,
Said, "We'll get shut of Danny's noise
Of girls and widows dyin'.

"There's not his like from Binghamstown
To Boyle and Ballycroy,
At playing hell on decent girls,
At beating man and boy.

"He's left two pairs of female twins
Beyond in Killacreest,
And twice in Crossmolina fair
He's struck the parish priest.

"But we'll come round him in the night
A mile beyond the Mullet;
Ten will quench his bloody eyes,
And ten will choke his gullet."

It wasn't long till Danny came,
From Bangor making way,
And he was damning moon and stars
And whistling grand and gay.

Till in a gap of hazel glen--
And not a hare in sight--
Out lepped the nine-and-twenty lads
Along his left and right.
Then Danny smashed the nose on Byrne,  
He split the lips on three,  
And bit across the right hand thumb  
On one Red Shawn Magee.

But seven tripped him up behind,  
And seven kicked before,  
And seven squeezed around his throat  
Till Danny kicked no more.

Then some destroyed him with their heels,  
Some tramped him in the mud,  
Some stole his purse and timber pipe,  
And some washed off the blood.

And when you’re walking out the way  
From Bangor to Belmulet,  
You’ll see a flat cross on a stone  
Where men choked Danny’s gullet.

Musto's setting, appropriately entitled, "Ballad," captures the irony as well as the savage brutality of the poem. The song, which is perhaps the most convincing in Encounters, is more like a melodrama than an art song, not only because of its extreme length (275 measures total), but also because every aspect of the musical setting functions as dramatic illumination of the story. As such, the song is Irish jig-like in musical character, a sound that is unexpected, to be sure, from a composer whose reputation has been secured in overtly American, jazz influenced compositions. Amy Burton notes the following regarding the genesis and inspiration for "Ballad."

The memory of the unrest in South Central Los Angeles was still fresh when "Danny," J.M. Synge's ballad of mob violence, captured the composer's attention. The televised images of these events seemed to mirror the violence of Synge's poem.54

54 Burton, iii.
Text Setting and Musical Structure

The most notable aspect of Musto’s setting is its orderly strophic form, from which the composer hardly deviates. Musto’s strophes are not direct imitations of Synge’s, however, as the composer groups two stanzas of the original text into one musical verse, generating five complete renderings of the established tune (as opposed to Synge’s ten). Hereafter, the discrepancy in stanza between Musto’s setting and Synge’s poem will be addressed with separate terminology: in terms of “verse,” when referring to Musto’s song and “stanza,” when referring to the original poem.

Three modifications exist in the overall strophic form of the song. First, the verse that begins with the text, “Then Danny smashed the nose on Byrne,” (mm. 104-112) contains new melodic material in place of the anticipated fourth verse. This section serves as the musical fight sequence of the song, after which Musto resumes the regular strophic pattern (in ms. 118, at the text, “But seven tripped him up behind”). The second modification occurs immediately after the text, “Till Danny kicked no more” (ms. 132), at which point Musto returns, in the middle of the fourth verse, to the material presented at the genesis of the song. The return is merited, however, as it adds emphasis to Danny’s death which is described in detail in the antecedent text. The verse resumes and is played to its completion at ms. 139. The final verse of the song (mm. 263-272) is the third deviation from Musto’s pattern in that it is not a full musical statement, but rather a truncation of the end of the folk-like tune that serves as the verse melody.

Another unmistakable aspect regarding the overall form of “Ballad” is the instrumental dance that occurs at mm. 153-262, just before the incomplete statement of the final verse. The dance is an upbeat victory tune, during which the instruments
fashion variations from a jubilant fiddle tune. The dance corresponds to the notated break in Synge’s poem, located before the final stanza. Musto’s decision to replace the break with an instrumental dance is ingenious, as it heightens the drama of the story presented by the singer. Thus, the overall form of “Ballad” may be diagrammed as follows:

![Figure 6.1: Form of “Ballad.”](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanzas:</th>
<th>1, 2</th>
<th>3, 4</th>
<th>5, 6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>--</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>--</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verses/Section:</td>
<td>A (x1)</td>
<td>A (x2)</td>
<td>A(x3)</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A (x4) 1st half</td>
<td>interlude</td>
<td>A (x4) 2nd half</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>A (x5) trunc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mm.:</td>
<td>1-41</td>
<td>41-65</td>
<td>66-95</td>
<td>96-116</td>
<td>117-131</td>
<td>132-139</td>
<td>139-152</td>
<td>153-262</td>
<td>263-275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>F - I</td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is with the strophic setting of “Ballad” that Musto achieves the mood and character of Synge’s poem. The simple structure directly relates to the primitive, unsophisticated nature of the mob who attack and kill Danny, and it is compatible with Synge’s original in that the lilting folk-like tune magnifies the ironic intent.

Besides the overall form of the song, Musto also conveys the spirit of the text through musical simplicity. Despite its extensive length, the entire musical makeup (with the exception of the dance) may be traced to one of three musical statements, outlined below.
Figure 6.2: Musto, “Ballad,” fife melody, mm. 1-20 (abbreviated).

Figure 6.2 illustrates the beginning portion of the piccolo tune that is the genesis of the song. It is an erratic Irish jig that establishes the mood and accompanies the narrator throughout his story. The entire jig, in its initial statement, is twenty measures long, although it is only presented in its entirety three times. Otherwise, it appears as motivic fragments extracted from the original.

Figure 6.3: Musto, “Ballad,” vocal line folk-like tune, mm. 20-42 (abbreviated).

Figure 6.3 cites an abbreviated portion of the initial statement of the folk-like tune that serves as the vocal melody of the song. The melody is presented in its entirety only four times (for four verses), in addition to appearing in a truncated form in the last verse. Allusions to the vocal line penetrate the instrumental line, as well, but these references are only segments of the tune.
Figure 6.4: Musto, "Ballad," fight motive, mm. 102-105.

Figure 6.4 represents the motive that is implemented immediately prior to the climactic fight of the B section. Its initial statement occurs at this point, and it lingers through the conclusion of the climax at ms. 126. Until this section, the song consists only of material drawn from either the fife melody or from the vocal line. The following diagram indicates the allusions to the previously discussed material:

Figure 6.5: allusions to melodic material in "Ballad."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fife Melody</th>
<th>Folk-Tune</th>
<th>Fight Motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-20 (piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 20-42 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 102-105 (brass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 21-40 (piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 42-45 (English horn)</td>
<td>mm. 106-107 (winds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 45-50 (strings)</td>
<td>mm. 44-46 (flute)</td>
<td>mm. 107-108 (brass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 46-48 (clarinet)</td>
<td>mm. 43-65 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 117-120 (violin II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 47-49 (flute, oboe)</td>
<td>mm. 48-49 (piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 121-126 (violin II, viola, cello)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 49-50 (bassoon, horn)</td>
<td>mm. 52-55 (oboe, strings)</td>
<td>mm. 124-127 (English horn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 50-52 (clarinet, English horn)</td>
<td>mm. 76-96 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (bassoon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 56-61 (violin I)</td>
<td>mm. 82-83 (clarinet)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (horn, trombone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 61-65 (flute)</td>
<td>mm. 86-89 (violin I, cello)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 66-74 (violin II, viola)</td>
<td>mm. 118-131 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 71-73 (bassoon, clarinet)</td>
<td>mm. 123-126 (trumpet)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 73-80 (winds)</td>
<td>mm. 139-152 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 76-83 (strings)</td>
<td>mm. 263-272 (voice)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 83-85 (oboe, flute, piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 89-92 (piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 93 (horn)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 95-105 (strings)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 100-104 (flute, piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 101 (horn)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 106 (clarinet II)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ms. 107 (horn)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 109-112 (flute, piccolo, oboe)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 112-116 (strings)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 117-120 (viola, cello)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 123-126 (flute, piccolo, oboe)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 131-150 (piccolo)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
<td>mm. 124-227 (percussion)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Musto’s setting of “Ballad” is primarily syllabic, creating the effect of a folk-like narrative rather than of lyrical singing. The syllabic setting is convincing, as it is befitting to the nature of the Irish jig. The text is presented precisely as it is in Synge’s original, with the exception of two moments of repetition designated by the composer: in mm. 40-41 at the text, “Beating man and boy,” and in mm. 64-65 at the text, “Ten will choke his gullet.” Both of these statements serve as the conclusion to a verse. Phrase structure is regular (although length between phrases varies), and is consistent with the rhythm of the poem.

Text painting exists in “Ballad,” although it is not as abundant as it is in other songs of the cycle, nor is it used in an overt way. Musto uses text painting as subtle accentuation of moments in the narrator’s story. It is applied indirectly in the following measures of the song:

1. at ms. 35, in which the the interval of an octave, coupled with the \textit{forte} dynamic level emphasizes the text, “playing hell”
2. at ms. 51, the word “struck” is highlighted by the \textit{staccato} markings of the orchestra, as well as by the sudden high F in the tenor line.
3. at ms. 58, in which the composer sets the text, “Ten will quench his bloody eyes” at a \textit{forte} dynamic level with an ascending melodic figure in the orchestra in the previous measure.
4. in mm. 61-64 the beats of the tenor drum represent Danny’s heartbeats.
5. in mm. 91-92, the tutti rests prior to the \textit{forte} entrance of the tenor, who exclaims, “Out lepped the nine-and-twenty lads,” emphasize the entrance and musically portray the dramatic action.
6. in mm. 126-130, the percussion notes represent Danny’s heart as it ceases to beat.
7. in mm. 146-147, the piccolo, whose music represents the Irish pipe, is in unison with the voice, whose text at that moment is, “timber pipe.”
8. in mm. 1, 8, 13, 14, 19, and 20, the beats of the tenor drum foreshadow the fight that is to come.
Instrumentation/Orchestration

Musto utilizes almost all of Encounters’ instruments in “Ballad,” although the texture of the majority of the song remains relatively thin. The climactic section of the piece displays the thickest texture (the dance portion excluded), during which Musto combines motivic material from the fife melody, folk tune, and fight theme. Otherwise, the song’s counterpoint always involves material from only two of these three thematic lines.

The orchestra accompanies the vocal line, but its role is certainly not subsidiary. In fact, Musto treats the orchestra as would an opera composer in “Ballad,” in that it not only provides musical support, but also character imitation throughout. For example, the piccolo’s lilting fife melody establishes the Irish feel from the onset of the piece, before any text is introduced. Also, moments of text painting, like that of the drumbeats in mm. 60-63 (which represent heartbeats), emphasize the physical action of the story.

Additionally, the orchestra provides variety among the verses, as Musto modifies the instrumentation and counterpoint to appropriately serve the drama. In “Ballad,” the composer’s orchestral writing is so convincing that the listener is able to follow the story line without the text. In other words, the music is able to stand on its own, as would a tone poem or a ballet.

The most obvious use of the orchestra is the 109 measure instrumental dance inserted before the last quatrain of text. The dance is extremely effective, as it provides unexpected variety and definitely heightens the story’s irony in that it is a celebratory dance for a mass killing. Like the rest of the song, the jig is constructed of a simple
fiddle melody which is repeated and varied. Figure 6.6 illustrates the melody of the dance.

Figure 6.6: Musto, “Ballad,” fiddle melody, violin I, mm. 153-160.

The melody begins as a solo fiddle, joined shortly thereafter by the entire violin section. It is presented in canon (mm. 168-175) and is then repeated with added ornamentation as a violin I solo in mm. 177-184.

Figure 6.7: Musto, “Ballad,” strings, mm. 177-184.

Musto continues to add instruments, all of which contain either the melody or a version of the ornamental pattern until ms. 202, at which point the piccolo supplies a third melody.

Figure 6.8: Musto, “Ballad,” piccolo melody, mm. 201-208.

As is the tendency of Musto, the entire dance is composed of these three elements (Figures 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8), in conjunction with the rhythmic pulses provided by the brass and percussion. Additionally, the dance contains a strong harmonic component built around a tritone drone, which makes this section sound different from the rest of the song. The composer continues to add voices, creating a thick texture of mob-like
cacophony at the dance’s conclusion. Without pause (as indicated in the score), the narrator utters the final quatrain in a mood antithetical to the preceding dance.

**Vocal Melodic Materials**

As is the style of a strophic folk-song, the melodic line is relatively controlled in terms of range and phrase length. The range spans just over an octave, from Eb to G, and the syllabic setting of the text suggests the simplicity of a storytelling rather than an art music performance. The dynamics range from \( p \) to \( ff \), as the narrator relates the tale in a histrionic fashion. Although the overall nature of the vocal line is relatively simplistic, the notated pitches are not. Musto adds a modern twist to the folk-song melody, utilizing a wide array of intervals and copious chromaticism. He also employs *sprechstimme* at mm. 111-112 for dramatic stress.

Independent melodic materials do not exist in the vocal line since the entire verse is repeated (with slight variations) throughout. When references to the vocal melody are made in the orchestra, they imitate an entire melodic line, rather than motivic pieces. The repeated motivic fragments in “Ballad” are those derived from the fife melody, noted previously in Figure 6.6.

**Rhythm, Meter, Tempo**

The meter of “Ballad” shifts only between 6/8 and 9/8, although a methodical pattern is not apparent. The entire dance segment is composed in 6/8 to provide the constant beat inherent in an Irish jig. The compound meter is definitely used as a perceivable concept in the song, as it produces the pervading feeling of lilting and accommodates the regular beat pattern that exists in the poem itself.

Rhythmic motives are derived from the fife melody, folk-like tune, fight theme,
and dance music; any motives independent of those are not evident. The rhythmic
motives that are most utilized are cited in the following chart in relation to their origin.

Figure 6.9: Rhythmic Motives of “Ballad.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fife Melody</th>
<th>Folk-like Tune of Voice</th>
<th>Fight Theme</th>
<th>Dance Music</th>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Musto uses tempo in the same manner that he does orchestration in “Ballad:” to
emulate specific moods generated by the text, thus every tempo indication is directly
related to the story. The overall tempo marking is Moderate (♩ = 90), with designated
exceptions as follows:

1. ms. 15, Rubato: highlights the allusion to the vocal line melody.
2. ms. 95, Animato: musically animates the beginning of the fight.
3. ms. 127, Poco a poco rallentando: signifies Danny’s death.
4. ms. 131, Molto moderato: musical return after Danny’s death.
5. ms. 145, Sostenuto, emphasizes the act of stealing Danny’s purse
   and pipe from his corpse
6. ms. 151, Senza tempo, stresses the phrase, “And some washed off
   his blood.”
7. ms. 153, Allegro, establishes tempo for dance
8. ms. 193, Poco a poco accelerando, portrays the building
   excitement toward the end of the dance.
9. ms. 263, Subito adagio, establishes new mood that is the opposite
   of that of the dance.
10. ms. 267, Sostenuto, emphasizes the the mention of the death
    marker.
11. ms. 272, Piu adagio, allows the music to slowly die away.
Conclusions

Every element of the song -- from the dynamics to the tempo to the meter to the dance segment -- directly corresponds with the poem itself, creating a song that is a dramatic narrative and almost operatic in construction. The entire song is constructed of three musical statements and an added dance section. The use of a 109 measure dance is ingenious, as it provides melodic and harmonic variety and emphasizes the overall mood of Synge’s text. The Irish nature of “Ballad” is a deviation from Musto’s typical style and is effective. In fact, the song is, undoubtedly, the most powerful in the entire cycle.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Analysis of Song 6, “Epilogue”

The final song in the cycle is a setting of Cummings’ poem, “love is a place.” It is the fifty-eighth poem in his 1935 collection entitled, No Thanks. Originally called 70 Poems, the collection was renamed No Thanks after the poet received rejections from fourteen major publishers, which forced Cummings to publish the work independently. He did so under the mark Golden Eagle Press, the publishing company of his longtime friend, Samuel Jacobs. The poet’s dedication at the beginning of the book lists the names of the publishers who rejected him in the shape of a funeral urn.55

Although initial publication was an ordeal, the collection contains some of Cummings’ most well-known, creative poetry. “love is a place” is one such poem, as it combines the poet’s unconventional syntax with traditional poetic themes of love and peace.

Poetic Background

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
(with brightness of peace)
all places

yes is a world
& in this world of
yes live
(skillfully curled)
all worlds

55 Sawyer-Laucanno, 384.
The brief poem evokes a tone of optimism, hope, and unification that is not commonly associated with Cummings’ works. Musto’s setting, entitled “Epilogue,” matches that tone; Amy Burton has called it “a celebration of love and limitless possibility when a new life encounters the world.” The song is dedicated to Rebecca Ballhaus, the daughter of one of the composer’s close friends, in celebration of her birth on July 19, 1991.

**Text Setting and Musical Structure**

“Epilogue” contains an exact rendering of Cummings’ original poem without any repetition or modification. Additionally, Musto follows the two-stanza format established by the poet, setting the text in a modified strophic form and separating the stanzas with a brief interlude that is reminiscent of the song’s opening orchestral material. The text setting is, without exception, entirely syllabic, creating a vocal line that is not inherently legato. However, the tenor should perform the line as smoothly as possible, establishing a delicate, connected line.

The song’s overall mood is ethereal and peaceful, consistent with the poetry itself. Musto creates this atmosphere through the song’s overall simplicity in its length, texture, motivic content, and form.

Text painting is not plentiful in “Epilogue,” although two moments of indirect text painting may be perceived.

1. at ms. 24, the climax of the song, the singer exclaims the word, “yes” on the highest pitch in the vocal line.
2. at ms. 28, the voice and harp contain a unison A, symbolizing the oneness or unity of the world in contrast to the preceding text: “... live skillfully curled all worlds.”

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56 Burton, iii.
Instrumentation/Orchestration

Musto employs a small orchestra in “Epilogue,” utilizing only the winds, strings, and harp. By excluding the brass and the percussion, he creates an orchestration that is much lighter than that of the previous songs. Likewise, the compositional texture itself is very thin and contrapuntal in nature, which establishes the ethereal aura of the song. This timbre is set from the beginning of the piece in the delicate introductory material of the violins, whose opening line contains motivic intervals of a descending minor 2nd alternating with a major 6th.

Figure 7.1: Musto, “Epilogue,” motives in orchestra, mm. 1-5.

This pattern is repeated in modified form throughout the song; although, hereafter, the interval of a major sixth becomes a minor 6th. This motive exists in the following places: mm. 8-10 (violin), mm. 17-19 (clarinet), mm. 17-21 (violins).

The other motive found in the orchestra is an allusion to the third song of the cycle, “Encounter.” Figure 1.2 illustrates this motive, which is played at the beginning of the piece by the violin I (ms. 1) and repeated at the end by the oboe (ms. 29). The inclusion of the motive provides cyclical unification, for the reference is audibly conspicuous. Furthermore, Musto’s decision to reuse this particular motive is especially clever in that its corresponding text in “Encounter” is “your little voice.” This phrase is
certainly congruous with the celebration of "a new life encounter[ing] the world," as "your little voice" may be interpreted as the voice of a newborn baby in this setting.

Figure 7.2: Musto, "Epilogue," motive from "Encounter," ms. 1.

Vocal Melodic Materials

The entire vocal line of "Epilogue" is constructed of two basic figures which are established in the first stanza and then repeated in the second stanza. The first figure is the whole tone melody in an overall ascending contour that is the initial statement of the voice in ms. 11.

Figure 7.3: Musto, "Epilogue," ascending whole tone melody, mm. 11-13.

love is a place and through this place of

This figure serves as the primary musical theme of "Epilogue," as the constant ascending motion symbolizes the optimism and hope conveyed in the text. The theme is repeated in mm. 21-24 in the vocal line (although it is slightly altered), as well as in the piccolo, flute, oboe, bassoon, and violin. These measures constitute the richest orchestration of the song (albeit mostly doubling), as well as the climax. The specific climactic moment (ms. 24) is the highest note in the voice (G#), approached by the interval of a perfect 4th, which stands out among a series of stepwise motion.

The second figure is motivic not in its intervalllic content, but through it disjunct nature and general contour. It is presented twice in "Epilogue" and musically

57 Burton, iii.
corresponds to the two parenthetical statements of the poetry. Musto sets the figure apart from the rest of the vocal line in the same manner that Cummings segregates the text with parentheses.

Figure 7.4: Musto, “Epilogue,” voice, mm. 11-16 and mm. 26-27.

Immediately following both occurrences of this figure, the composer returns to stepwise motion in the vocal line (mm. 16-17, mm. 27-28).

The vocal line does not contain a cantabile melody in the traditional sense; instead, it functions as an independent line that is equal in importance to the material of the orchestra. This construction reflects the themes of unity and peace inherent in the poetry, as no musical line is subordinate to another. Phrase length directly corresponds to the two figures outlined above, and range (from D to G#) and tessitura are conservative.

Rhythm, Meter, and Tempo

Musto applies multimeter as heavily in “Epilogue” as he does in the other songs of the cycle. He does not, however, use any of the compound meter that saturates all of the previous songs; rather, he opts to reflect the simplicity of the text with time signatures of 3/4, 2/4, 3/8, and 5/8. Thus, the song maintains a steady forward motion throughout.

Independent rhythmic motives are scarce since the song’s character is one of peaceful, fluid direction. However, the rhythm that corresponds to the descending half-step motive outlined in Figure 7.1 may be considered to be motivic.

The tempo is marked, *Slowly* (\( \frac{3}{4} \) = 40), and it remains constant for the duration of
the song. The only other indication of tempo deviation is found in the final measure of
the song, at which point the composer notates a fermata over the last note in all parts.

**Conclusions**

The construction of “Epilogue” is the simplest in the cycle, appropriately so, as
Cummings’ brief poem portrays basic themes of love, hope, and oneness in the world.
All of the song’s components reflect this simplicity, for the entire piece is constructed of
a few basic elements which are repeated. The use of simple meter is noteworthy because
all of the other songs in the cycle contain copious compound meter. Additionally, the
allusion to the motive from “Encounters” provides unity within the cycle. “Epilogue” is
an appropriate end to the cycle as it presents themes of hope for the future, whereas
“Piano” began the cycle with a nostalgic memory of the past.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions

The fact that Musto believes that “the text dictates the music” in song composition is readily apparent in the musical construction of Encounters. The composer always reflects the mood evoked by the poetry in his settings, and he typically adheres to the original poetic structure, be it through composed, strophic, or experimental.

Musical Considerations

Musto’s songs are primarily motivic or theme oriented, as he constructs entire songs from motives or themes which are typically presented in the initial measures of the piece. The motives or themes (or variations thereof) permeate the songs and provide a solid compositional framework. Musto varies their repetition through truncation, embellishment, transposition, and diminution, or by notating the motives or themes in different lines within the ensemble. Every song in Encounters is constructed in this manner.

Musto also utilizes copious text painting, both directly and indirectly, whereby he emphasizes particular words or ideas in the poetry. Additionally, he incorporates musical symbols, such as the 7-digit telephone number and the minor 3rd diatonic of “Encounter” to represent actual aspects of a telephone call.

All of the songs in Encounters contain primarily syllabic text settings, allowing for a clear rendering of the poetry upon performance. Unfortunately, the syllabic setting also makes it difficult for the singer to achieve a successful legato line; thus, he must

58 John Musto, interview by the author, 3 December, 2005.
overcome the inherent obstacle by paying close attention to phrase shape and connection. The vocal range among all of the songs in Encounters is rather conservative, and the tessitura is particularly low for the tenor voice. The vocal melodic line is usually characterized by mostly stepwise motion, with very few consecutive leaps.

Overall, Encounters’ orchestration yields a moderate to thin texture comprised of alternating sections of dissonant counterpoint with homophonic moments of major and minor tonalities. This is most overt in “Piano,” whose lush homophonic waltz theme is alternated with the dissonant, thin-textured counterpoint of theme II and theme III.

Musto’s prolific use of multimeter creates rhythmic and metric diversity that prevents the establishment of a traditional, regular beat pattern, thereby creating an effect of metric instability. Additionally, Musto typically applies compound meter, which provides the composer with an appropriate means whereby he is able to specifically notate swing rhythms and the like, for which he is commonly known. The use of compound meter is also used to accommodate the performer, as Musto finds the compound notation easier to read since the eighth note functions as a constant, underlying pulse.59

Performance Practice and Response to Encounters

Overall, Encounters is well-written and generally effective. Musto’s choice of text is of the highest level, and he preserves the integrity of the poetry in his musical settings. The most effective or aurally satisfying song in the cycle is “Ballad,” as it is almost operatic in construction, due to the the dramatic nature inherent in the narrative poem. Conversely, “Passacaglia” is the weakest song because the vocal line is, for the most part, derived from the repeated bass pattern. Additionally, the poem itself is more
abstract than narrative; therefore, Musto does not employ the text painting and musical symbolism to the extent that he does in his more dramatic songs. As a result, the final product is somewhat dull in comparison to the other songs. The same is true, to a lesser extent, for the final song in the cycle, “Epilogue.” Because “Epilogue’s” poem is a meditation rather than a dramatic narrative, Musto’s setting is, again, not as effective as songs 1, 2, 3, and 5.

As noted previously, the vocal range utilized in Encounters is relatively conservative, and the overall tessitura is particularly low for the tenor. The fact that the tessitura is confined to the lower middle vocal register may prohibit many singers from performing the songs, as they may not be able to resonate above the orchestra at such a low area in the voice. The highest note in the entire cycle is only an A, which is more suitable as the climactic note for a high baritone rather than for a tenor. Musto’s reason for limiting the cycle’s range is probably because he wrote them for Sperry, whose voice is best suited to music confined to the middle register of the voice.

Because of their eclectic construction (through employment of popular elements such as swing coupled with traditional counterpoint), Musto’s songs are quite accessible. They are not, however, easy to perform. As seen in Encounters, Musto’s songs are consistently difficult with regard to rhythm and meter, and they contain melodies that are saturated with chromaticism. Musto’s songs require a high level of refined musical sophistication in order to perform them successfully.

59 Molin, 20.
Final Conclusions

John Musto should be included in the circle of prominent American song composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As illustrated in *Encounters*, his songs epitomize and expand upon the eclectic American style, incorporating popular elements and traditional classical technique. His selection of poetry is of the highest level, and his vocal writing is generally very elegant, informed, and entertaining.

Although Musto has written over fifty compositions for voice, his songs are unknown by many in the classical music community. He is not included in most song literature texts to date, nor is he recognized in major musical dictionaries or encyclopedias. Musto’s songs should be deemed standard recital repertoire for the classical singer, and they should be studied in the conservatory setting. Through this document, one hopes that Musto’s songs will become more accessible to a wider audience.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Periodicals


Books


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