

**Iron Sharpens Iron:
Duets for Two Women in the Teaching/Instruction of Undergraduate Women**

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Purpose

Composers have written vocal duets in the genres of oratorio, opera, and art song throughout the history of the Western art tradition. Hungarian composer and educator Zoltán Kodály unequivocally stated his opinion on the value of adding a second voice when he wrote "...singing alone isn't worth much. How much nicer when two are singing together..."¹ The diversity of available material, in conjunction with the opportunity to collaborate with another singer, makes duet literature relevant to the aspiring singer and useful to the teacher of voice.

This wealth of literature remains largely untapped as a pedagogical tool in the undergraduate voice studio. This project will demonstrate how selected duets for two women, although not written with pedagogical goals, may be used to teach four main areas of voice technique: intonation, vocal agility, legato singing, and dramatic skills. Because this project focuses on undergraduate vocal study, I have chosen duets mainly from the standard repertoire. I will propose that each duet may be used to focus on one of the vocal techniques listed above, through the rhythm, intervals, tempi, and text of the vocal lines. This project will also demonstrate how the experience of singing duets will help students develop ensemble singing as they listen and respond to each other, as well as offering voice teachers an additional pedagogical tool to help each student improve select skills to result in a more confident performer.

¹ Miklós Forrai, Forward to *Duets for Two Female Voices with Piano Accompaniment* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1959).

Significance and State of Research

In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, composers living primarily in German-speaking areas often wrote vocal and instrumental duets called *bicinia* (singular *bicinium*) for pedagogical purposes, usually to teach the rules of counterpoint.² Swiss humanist and music theorist Heinrich Loris, known as Glareanus (1488-1563), included vocal and instrumental *bicinia* by composers such as Gregor Meyer, Jakob Obrecht, and Josquin Desprez in his *Dodecachordon* (1519-1539). In the preface to a modern edition of this source, Walter Frei asserts *bicinia*'s "prominent role in the humanist school".³ Soon after, Georg Rhau (Rhaw) compiled French, Latin, and German *bicinia* in his two-volume *Bicinia gallica, lattina et germanica* (1545) in Wittenberg. Bernard Thomas, editor of a modern edition, points out the high quality of Rhau's *bicinia*.⁴ Furthermore, in a *NATS Bulletin* article, vocal pedagogue and academic Corre Berry (Brusse) affirms that the original prefaces to these collections encouraged the use of *bicinia* in homes and schools for instructional purposes.⁵

In the Classical and Romantic periods, duets with pedagogical vocal objectives include those by Giovanni Carlo Maria Clari (1677-1754) which were sung by many contemporaneous students.⁶ Giambattista Mancini (1716-1800) offers support for duet singing in his treatise *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing* (1774):

2 Bruce A. Bellingham, "Bicinium," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03041> (accessed January 9, 2013).

3 Walter Frei, Preface to *Bicinia from Glareanus's Dodecachordon*, Glareanus (Basel: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1965), 3.

4 Bernard Thomas, Notes to *Bicinia Germanica*, Georg Rhaw (London: Pro Musica Edition, 1979), back cover notes.

5 Corre Berry, "Duets for Pedagogical Use," *The NATS Bulletin* 34, no. 2 (December 1977): 8.

6 Berry, 9.

The study of duets is also necessary to accustom the ear to rule intonation with perfection, and to possess oneself of the voice, so that it is perfectly united to that of his colleague. Of these madrigals and duets written by worthy masters, solely to the end of producing this good effect, there is an endless number, known to the whole profession. The only difficulty is that they should be esteemed by the masters of our day; and so it is to be hoped that they be permitted and exercised upon with the just rules.⁷

Schubert and Bizet wrote duets without text in the style of a vocalise, allowing students to use a single vowel or solfege syllables to improve vocal technique.⁸ More often during this time period, however, composers wrote duets for singers to perform on the stage (e.g. bel canto composers Rossini and Donizetti) or in a salon (e.g. Brahms and Robert Schumann). In discussing the quality and technical level of Mendelssohn's art song duets, vocal pedagogue Serdar Ilban encourages teachers to utilize this literature for undergraduate recitals. He adds that these duets provide young singers a form of healthy competition as they work together to make music.⁹

Berry's dissertation *A Study of the Vocal Chamber Duet through the Nineteenth Century* (1974) provides the basis for subsequent articles on the history of duets published in *The NATS Bulletin* and *Music Review*.¹⁰ Additionally, her resource books pertaining to specific genres of duet literature, including *Sacred Vocal Duets: An Annotated Bibliography* and *Vocal Chamber*

7 Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, trans. and ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign, IL: Pro Musica Press, 1967), 79.

8 Berry, 8.

9 Serdar Ilban, "Art songs oubliées: Duets I: Vocal chamber duets by Felix Mendelssohn," *Journal of Singing* 69, no. 2 (Nov-Dec, 2012): 221.

10 Refer to "The Italian Vocal Chamber Duets of the Baroque Period," "The Relationship Between Poetic Structure and Musical Structure in Selected Vocal Duets," "Airs from the British Isles and Airs from Moravia/Duets Incorporating Diverse Folk Materials," and "Chamber Duets by Schumann, Cornelius and Brahms" in *The NATS Bulletin*, and "Vocal Duets by Nineteenth-Century Russian Composers" and "The Secular Dialogue Duet: 1600-1900" in *The Music Review*. Joan Frey Boytim's article "Why Neglect the Sacred Solo Duet?" illuminates yet another realm of duet literature.

Duets: An Annotated Bibliography lists anthologies, single composer collections, and individual duets by numerous composers. She also provides an index to various voice combinations.

Richard Boldrey's *Guide to Operatic Duets* enables singers and teachers to search for appropriate operatic duets by voice combination, role, or composer. Shirlee Emmons and Stanley Sonntag encourage greater use of duets in their book *The Art of the Song Recital*:

Doubtless there will come a time in your singing career when the pleasures of collaboration with another singer will entice you. Our advice is: succumb immediately! Using your voice with another voice or two is truly enjoyable; ensemble between voices, as compared to voice with instruments, presents new skills to be explored.¹¹

They add, "Most especially, a young singer will find duets and trios...an admirable way of trying his wings before an audience with somewhat less personal responsibility."¹² Emmons and Sonntag also provide practical advice for singers and teachers on what to consider when programming duets or small ensembles.

Marilyn Newman's *The Comprehensive Catalogue of Duet Literature for Female Voices: Vocal Chamber Duets with Keyboard Accompaniment Composed between 1820-1995* (2000) lists 8,800 duets by over two thousand composers. These duets fall into two categories: a cappella or accompanied by piano or organ. Most of the duets would fall under the genre of the "art song," however sacred duets suitable for worship are also listed. Opera and oratorio duets are notably absent. In addition to the catalogue proper, Newman devotes a chapter to the pedagogical benefits of studying duets. She begins by discussing the history of duet singing, including those written for instructional purposes. She then focuses on previous research devoted to class voice settings as opposed to individual instruction, which help students develop their ears as they listen

¹¹ Shirlee Emmons and Stanley Sonntag, *The Art of the Song Recital*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979), 256.

¹² *Ibid.*

to various tone colors. The chapter then considers the research of Green and Gallwey in their book *The Inner Game of Music* (1986) who state "As a member of a larger group, we may feel freer to express our musicianship without self-consciousness than we would if our individual playing was spotlighted."¹³ Finally, Newman references psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who wrote "when what they [participants in an ensemble] do becomes worth doing for its own sake -- it's so enjoyable that you get caught up in it, you want to keep doing it. I call this state of mind 'Flow Experience.'"¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi supports ensemble music (specifically choral) to produce nine components of the Flow Experience, including clear goals, immediate feedback, and the disappearance of self-consciousness. While Newman's book offers performers and teachers valuable resources for programming duets in a recital or religious setting, as well as giving support to the general pedagogical advantages of duet literature, she does not discuss how duets enable students to improve specific vocal techniques.

Steven Robert Rainbolt's dissertation *Vocal Chamber Duets, Trios, and Quartets: An Examination of the Genre* (2005) provides useful information on the programming of chamber duets for varying voice types in several languages. Other dissertations on the pedagogical aspects of duet playing outside of the vocal realm include Jonathan Bosarge's *An Overview of the Pedagogical Benefits of Trumpet Ensemble Playing* (2010), Pierson Wetzel's *The Pedagogical Benefits of Duet Playing: A Vammetelbosch Companion* (2007), and Hooi Yin Boey's *Teaching Intermediate-level Technical and Musical Skills through the Study and Performance of Selected Piano Duets* (2004).

¹³ Marilyn S. M. Newman, *The Comprehensive Catalogue of Duet Literature for Female Voices: Vocal Chamber Duets with Keyboard Accompaniment Composed between 1820-1995*, (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Though other resources and articles have discussed general ways in which singers may grow in their musical development by singing duets, this project will study specific duets for the purpose of pinpointing those areas of vocal technique that may improve. Given that most of my former and current students are women, this dissertation will examine the vocal lines of eight duets for female voices, taking into consideration how their complementary intervals, rhythms, and texts can help these students develop as singers. Duets in English, German, French, Italian and Latin will be examined. The compositional styles range from the Baroque period through the 20th century. Genres include art song, oratorio, and opera. Both male and female teachers of singing may utilize this project as a practical resource and model in how to use other duets, including those for male voices, for similar purposes in their teaching studio.

Methodology

This project will demonstrate how the areas of intonation, legato singing, vocal agility, and dramatic skills in undergraduate singers may be improved by examining the vocal writing of eight duets of varying levels of difficulty, considering issues of range, text, vowels, phrasing, rhythm, and character. Each chapter will focus on one of the four vocal skills listed above, and will include two duets whose vocal writing make them appropriate candidates for pedagogical use in the improvement of that specific skill.

I will also give suggestions for how a teacher may use the duets in a voice lesson. For example, a female teacher may sing one of the vocal lines with good vocal technique, while the student sings the other line. By doing so, the teacher instructs by demonstration, rather than by verbal explanation; this method, to whatever extent she deems appropriate in a given lesson, can be a more effective approach to instill vocal concepts. This approach also invites a conversation

between teacher and student; the teacher may ask what the student heard and observed as she sang her part. These questions are crucial for creating a unified ensemble.

A sample examination of a duet by Felix Mendelssohn demonstrates how it may be used to strengthen the area of intonation, primarily through vowel matching. "Herbstlied" is from Felix Mendelssohn's Op. 63, a collection of six vocal duets published in 1844. Mendelssohn's *allegro agitato* setting of Karl Klingeman's text highlights the recurring theme of how soon ("wie bald") the season of spring and its merriness turns into winter and its resulting silence. The poem may also be an allegory of how quickly one's life passes by. The range of both parts is not wide, making the song accessible to younger undergraduates; the first soprano line ranges from F-sharp₄ to F-sharp₅, and the second soprano is from D₄ to D₅. The song contains several passages in which the two parts sing together in harmony; many of these passages are scalar. This type of vocal writing is ideal for teaching the fine points of intonation.

The animated song begins with a one-measure introduction by the piano which leads directly to the entrance of the vocal lines with the text, "Ach, wie so bald verhallet der Reigen, wandelt sich Frühling in Winterzeit! Ach, wie so bald in trauerndes Schweigen wandelt sich alle die Fröhlichkeit!" ("Oh, how soon the cycle ends, Spring turns into wintertime! Oh how soon all happiness turns to sad silence!"). The two sopranos sing in continuous thirds within a range of about an octave for the whole of this passage, with the exception of the last note, on which they sustain a unison F-sharp₄; see the opening phrase in Example 1.

Example 1: Felix Mendelssohn, "Herbstlied" mm. 1-9

Allegro agitato

Ach, wie so bald ver-hal-let der Rei-gen
Ach, wie so bald ver-hal-let der Rei-gen

wan-delst dich Fröh-ling in Win-ter-zeit!
wan-delst dich Fröh-ling in Win-ter-zeit!

In a voice lesson, a soprano teacher may sing one of the parts while the student sings the other. If the student usually sings the first soprano part in a choir setting, it may be helpful for her to sing the second soprano line in addition to the first soprano, giving her the opportunity to sing the harmony in an appropriate range. An inexperienced harmonic singer may require practicing the second soprano line multiple times while the teacher sings the first soprano part, so that her ear will become more comfortable with singing "under" another part. Some singers may have a tendency to "drift up" and join the teacher in unison on the first soprano part. This inclination can be cured with repetition and patience.

The first few lines should be practiced separately and under tempo. The teacher should focus on the sustained notes by listening especially for vowel purity¹⁵; for example, the words "ach," "bald," "Reigen," "wandelt," "Winterzeit," "alle," "Schweigen," and "Fröhlichkeit" all contain the [a] vowel. By singing a pure and open [a] vowel, the student is better able to sing in tune the ascending harmonic minor and major thirds. On the first syllable of both "Reigen" and "Schweigen," the interval is a major third. The teacher should listen for a pure [a] on the beginning syllable of "Reigen" and "Schweigen." Both should be sung as the diphthong [aɪ], however, it is the [a] vowel within this diphthong that should be extended before closing to [ɪ]. As the student sings these passages with her teacher, she will learn to sustain the principle vowel to result in a unified blend.

After working on each line separately and at a slow tempo, the two parts of the entire refrain (mm. 1-17) may be sung together, still under tempo, with teacher and student alternating each part. They share equal responsibility in producing true major and minor thirds; the teacher may bring this to the attention of the student by encouraging her to listen to these intervals as they both sing. If the student hears inaccurate intervals, she should not hesitate to pinpoint the errors, regardless of who is at "fault;" this fosters critical listening and thinking on the part of the student. In time, the refrain may be sung at the *allegro agitato* tempo with vowel purity and intonation remaining intact.

This project will discuss seven additional songs in similar fashion to assist university voice professors in the continual search for new teaching methods to use in their studios. Enthusiastic students will, as a result, gain confidence in four main areas of singing. This approach to duet literature provides interest and variety in a typical voice lesson for both student

¹⁵ The teacher may demonstrate these measures by singing with an open, resonant space in the vocal tract. The student may then imitate her teacher by singing each of the soprano lines with similar vocal technique.

and teacher, while enabling students to collaborate with other student singers, and possibly their own teacher.

Tentative Chapter Headings and Summaries

Chapter I: Introduction

- This chapter will give a brief overview of the history of both pedagogical duets and duets composed primarily for performance. Sources encouraging the use of duets for student singers will also be considered.
- Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the benefits of duet singing, focusing on the areas of intonation, legato, vocal agility, and dramatic skills, while also discussing the overall benefit of creating more confident performers through singing with another person.

Chapter II: Utilizing Mendelssohn's "Herbstlied" and Fauré's "Puisqu'ici bas toute âme" to improve intonation

- This chapter will focus on specific sections within each duet that are suitable for teachers in helping their students to improve intonation, based on the intervals and text of the two vocal lines.
- Minor and major thirds are prominent in both duets; these intervals are useful when facilitating lessons in ear building and training. The range of the Fauré is wider than the Mendelssohn, making the former better for junior or senior students.
- The chapter will suggest that a teacher may collaborate with a student in a voice lesson.

Chapter III: Utilizing Mozart's "Sull'aria" from *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Offenbach's "Belle Nuit" (Barcarolle) from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* to improve legato

- This chapter will explain how these two opera duets of similar tempi and text setting may be used for students to improve legato singing by listening to each other's vowel purity and phrasing.
- Both duets call for two women of different *Fächer*, allowing for students to practice "ensemble" singing through legato lines, despite their distinct vocal timbres.
- The chapter will also suggest that the teacher pair an advanced singer with a younger singer in a voice lesson, thereby giving older students the opportunity to begin "teaching" through modeling good technique.

Chapter IV: Utilizing Purcell's "Sound the Trumpet" and Vivaldi's "Laudamus Te" from Gloria to improve vocal agility

- These two Baroque duets include several melismatic passages (i.e. singing several notes on one syllable) with varying rhythms.
- The chapter will discuss how student singers may improve vocal flexibility by listening to each other to maintain a steady tempo while singing accurate rhythms.

Chapter V: Utilizing Sullivan's "Long years ago, fourteen maybe" from *Patience* and Britten's "Letter scene" from *Turn of the Screw* to improve dramatic skills

- This chapter will discuss two opera duets in English whose conversational and dialogue-oriented libretto make them suitable for students to improve their acting.
- The chapter will explain why Sullivan's duet may be used for younger singers, while Britten's duet is appropriate for more advanced students, based on the vocal writing and the nature of the libretti.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

- This chapter will propose the further researching of duets for additional pedagogical purposes.

Appendix:

- A list of select duets for two male singers, as well as duets for one female and one male will be offered.
- These duets will be appropriate to improve the same vocal skills as in the dissertation.

Bibliography:

- This will include all consulted books, journal articles, scores, recordings, and dissertations.

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