Three Browning Songs
Music by Amy Beach (1867-1944)
Poetry by Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Amy Beach is one of the first American female composers of note. Although her music was assumed inferior in her own time because of her gender, her music is inventive, charming, and heartfelt. These qualities are apparent in Beach’s *Three Browning Songs* and also have a freshness about them in her creative use of rhythms and harmonies. Although well-removed from common practice tonality and infused with rhythmic variety, her music still carries a sense of familiarity.

In *Three Browning Songs*, Beach creates a miniature song cycle, in which we are led from the beginning of a new love, into the uncertainty that comes as life and love begin to change, and finally into the calm assurance of mature love. In spite of the different affects expressed in the three songs, each piece sparkles with a charming innocence and energy.

1. “The year’s at the spring”

   The year’s at the spring,
   And day’s at the morn;
   Morning’s at seven;
   The hillside’s dew-pearled;

   The year’s at the spring,
   And day’s at the morn;
   The lark’s on the wing;
   The snail’s on the thorn;
   God’s in His heaven,
   All’s right with the world!

2. “Ah, Love, but a day!”

   Ah, Love, but a day!
   And the world has changed!
   The sun’s away,
   And the bird estranged,
   The wind has dropped,
   And the sky’s deranged;
   Summer has stopped.

   Look in my eyes!
   Wilt thou change too?
   Should I fear surprise?
   Shall I find aught new
   In the old and dear,
   In the good and true,
   With the changing year?
   Look in my eyes!
   Wilt thou change too?

3. “I send my heart up to thee”

   I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
   In this my singing.
   For the stars help me, and the sea bears part.

   The very night is clinging
   Closer to Venice’ streets to leave one space
   Above me, whence thy face
   May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling place.

   I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
   In this my singing.
Selections from *Sei ariette*
Music by Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)
Poetry by Pietro Antonio Domenico Bonaventura Trapassi, a.k.a. Pietro Metastasio (1698-1792)

Although principally known for his operas, Vincenzo Bellini also left a legacy of beautiful songs, some of which he termed “ariette” (little arias). These three songs come from a collection of six of his “ariette”. The text of these three songs are all written by Pietro Metastasio, famous in the eighteenth century for his *opera seria* libretti, including the libretto of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s (1756-1791) *La clemenza di Tito*. Rather than an entire opera, however, Bellini here sets Metastasio’s simple, beautiful love poetry.

Bellini’s music demands a particular style of singing known as “bel canto” (beautiful song). Although each poem is tenderly set, the principal objective in these pieces was not the dramatic expression of the text, but rather to give text to a beautiful voice.

Translations by Kelsey K. Rogers.

4. “Almen se non poss’io”

*Almen se non poss’io*
seguir l’amato bene,
affetti del cor mio,
seguitelo per me.

*Già sempre a lui vicino*
raccolti amor vi tiene
e insolito cammino
questo per voi non è.

At least if I cannot
Follow my beloved,
Affections of my heart,
Follow him for me.

Already you are always close to him
Love gathers you near him
And for you
This is not an unusual path.

5. “Per pietà, bell’idol mio”

*Per pietà, bell’idol mio,*
non mi dir ch’io sono ingrato;
infelice e sventurato
abbastanza il Ciel mi fa.

*Se fedele a te son io,*
se mi struggo ai tuoi bei lumi,
sallo amor, lo sanno i Numi
il mio core, il tuo lo sa.

*Ma rendi pur contento*

della mia bella il core,
e ti perdono, amore,
se lieto il mio non è.

Have mercy, my beautiful idol,
Don’t tell me that I am ungrateful;
Heaven makes me
Unhappy and unfortunate enough.

If I am faithful to you,
If I struggle towards your beautiful eyes,
Love knows it, the gods know
My heart, your heart knows it.

6. “Ma rendi pur contento”

*Gli affanni suoi pavento*
più degli affanni miei,
perché più vivo in lei
di quel ch’io vivo in me.

But only make happy
The heart of my beauty,
And I will forgive you, Love,
If my heart is not light.

Her worries I fear
More than my own,
Because I live more in her
Than I live in myself.
German Transformations

The next set of songs is composed of works by two German composers, Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Richard Strauss (1864-1949). Although each song creates a unique atmosphere, the text of each involves some kind of transformation – either one hoped for or one that has already happened.

In "Ständchen" (Serenade) we find a young lover serenading their beloved. The piano accompaniment mimics the accompaniment of a guitar. The transformation desired by the singer seems a small one – for their beloved to come down and “make [them] happy”. We are not quite certain of the serenade’s success, though Schubert leaves us in no doubt of the passion of the singer.

In "Die junge Nonne" (The Young Nun) there is a transformation of quite a different kind. A young nun describes a storm raging outside, and in the storm sees a remembrance of the passion that once raged in her. Perhaps she gave in to another’s "Ständchen", only to be left alone and despondent. Whatever the story behind her failed love, she has experienced a transformation offered by her faith. In her Savior she finds a “heavenly bridegroom” and “eternal love”, through which she discovers that the storm no longer rages within her.

From “Die junge Nonne” we move to a young mother’s cradle song in Strauss’s “Wiegenlied” (Cradle Song). The transformation of this song has already taken place. The young mother encourages her child to dream of beautiful things and times, of heaven, of the night of their birth, to the night that "his love turned this world to a heaven for me”. That love, and this child, have transformed the mother’s existence, and this song is a moving tribute to the joy a child brings into the life of its parent.

Finally, in Strauss’s “Morgen!” (Tomorrow!) we anticipate the transformation from loneliness—that of a lover left behind when their beloved has passed on—to the unity found in following the beloved into the next life. This is one of Strauss’s most finely crafted works, revealing a deep emotional connection to the text. The lyrics seem to flow out of the piano, as though the singer and the pianist are having a conversation, into the middle of which we are dropped. Finally, the piano slows, and in it we hear the singer’s breath slow, and finally give way, in a joyous reunion with their beloved.

Translations by Kelsey K. Rogers.
**Ständchen**, from *Schwanengesang*
Music by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Poetry by Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860)

Leise flehen meine Lieder
Durch die Nacht zu Dir;
In den stillen Hain hernieder,
Liebchen, komm' zu mir!

Flüsternd schlanke Wipfel rauschen
In des Mondes Licht;
Des Verräters feindlich Lauschen
Fürchte, Holde, nicht.

Hörst die Nachtigallen schlagen?
Ach! sie flehen Dich,
Mit der Töne süßen Klagen
Flehen sie für mich.

Sie verstehn des Busens Sehnen,
Kennen Liebesschmerz,
Rühren mit den Silbertönen
Jedes weiche Herz.

Lass auch Dir die Brust bewegen,
Liebchen, höre mich!
Bebend harr' ich Dir entgegen!
Komm', beglücke mich!

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**Die junge Nonne**
Music by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Poetry by Jacob Nicolaus Craigher de Jachelutta (1797-1855)

Wie braust durch die Wipfel der heulende Sturm!
Es klirren die Balken, es zittert das Haus!
Es rollet der Donner, es leuchtet der Blitz,
Und finster die Nacht, wie das Grab!

Immerhin, immerhin, so tobt' es auch jüngst noch in mir!
Es brauste das Leben, wie jetzo der Sturm,
Es bebten die Glieder, wie jetzo das Haus,
Es flammte die Liebe, wie jetzo der Blitz,
Und finster die Brust, wie das Grab.

Nun tobe, du wilder, gewalt'ger Sturm,
Im Herzen ist Friede, im Herzen ist Ruh,
Des Bräutigams harret die liebende Braut,
Gereinigt in prüfender Glut,
Der ewigen Liebe getraut.

Ich harre, mein Heiland, mit sehndem Blick!

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**Serenade**, from *Schwanengesang*

My songs fly lightly
Through the night to you;
Little love, come to me!

The thin treetops whisper rustling
In the light of the moon;
The traitors' hostile laughter
Fear not, dear one.

Do you hear the nightingales' beatings?
Ah! They plead to you,
With their sweet tones' lamentation
They plead for me.

They understand the stirrings in my chest,
They know love's pain,
With their silver tones they stir
Every soft heart.

Let your breast also be moved,
Little love, hear me!
Trembling I await you!
Come, make me happy!

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**The Young Nun**

How the howling storm roars through the tree tops!
It rattles the beams, it shakes the house!
The thunder rolls, the lightning flashes,
And the night is dark as the grave!

Ever so, ever so, it raged like this within me!
Life roared, as now the storm,
My limbs trembled, as now the house,
Love blazed, as now the lightning,
And my bosom was as dark as the grave!

Now rage wilder, you tremendous storm,
In my heart is peace, in my heart is rest,
The Bridegroom awaits the loving bride,
Cleansed in refining heat,
My heart has found eternal love.

I wait, my Savior, with longing gaze!
Come, Heavenly Bridegroom, summon the bride,
Release the soul from earthly constraints.
Hark, peacefully sound the bells from the tower!
The sweet sound draws me
Ceaselessly to eternal heights.
Hallelujah!

__Wiegenlied__
Music by Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
Poetry by Richard Dehmel (1863-1920)

Träume, träume, du mein süßes Leben,
Von dem Himmel, der die Blumen bringt.
Blüten schimmern da, die buben
Von dem Lied, das deine Mutter singt.

Träume, träume, Knospe meiner Sorgen,
Von dem Tage, da die Blume sproß;
Von dem hellen Blütenmorgen,
Da dein Seelchen sich der Welt erschloß.

Träume, träume, Blüte meiner Liebe,
Von der stillen, von der heilgen Nacht,
Da die Blume seiner Liebe
Diese Welt zum Himmel mir gemacht.

Cradlesong

Dream, dream, you my sweetest life,
Of the heaven that brings flowers.
Blossoms shimmer there, they tremble
From the song that your mother sings.

Dream, dream, bud of my cares,
Of the day that the bloom broke open;
Of the clear blossom-morning,
That your little soul opened to the world.

Dream, dream, blossom of my love,
Of the silent, of the holy night,
That the flower of his love
Turned this world to a heaven for me.

Tomorrow!

And tomorrow shall the sun shine again
And on the way that I must go,
Shall we, the happy ones, again unite
In the midst of this sun-breathing earth...

And to the beach, the wide, waving-blue,
We will silently and slowly descend,
Speechless we will look in each other’s eyes,
And upon us will sink the blissful, speechless silence...
Fêtes galantes I
Music by Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Poetry by Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

Claude Debussy wrote two song cycles entitled “Fêtes galantes” and the following set of songs comprises the first set. Setting the poetry of the French “Prince of Poets”, Paul Verlaine, Debussy seems to perfectly capture the mood and tone of the poetry with his music. The three poems do not tell a unified story but describe different scenes that might have occurred at the same party, as the three paintings on a triptych are disparate but unified. “En sourdine” captures the silence, stillness, and serene bliss of young lovers after their passion has been satisfied. “Fantoches” takes a completely different turn and throws us into a puppet show with well-known commedia dell’arte characters. Finally, in “Clair de lune” the speaker tells an enchanting story of a beautiful scene, that is somehow tinged with sadness, as though all the enjoyment is a façade. And yet, we still feel the beauty among the sadness.

Translations by Kelsey K. Rogers.

**En sourdine**

Calmes dans le demi-jour
Que les branches hautes font,
Pénétrons bien notre amour
De ce silence profond.

Fondons nos âmes, nos cœurs
Et nos sens extasiés,
Parmi les vagues langueurs
Des pins et des arbousiers.

Ferme tes yeux à demi,
Croise tes bras sur ton sein,
Et de ton cœur endormi
Chasse à jamais tout dessein.

Laissons-nous persuader
Au souffle berceur et doux
Qui vient à tes pieds rider
Les ondes des gazons roux.

Et quand, solennel, le soir
Des chênes noirs tombera,
Voix de notre désespoir,
Le rossignol chantera.

**Fantoches**

Scaramouche et Pulcinella
Qu’un mauvais dessein rassembla
Gesticulent, noirs sous la lune.

Cependant l’excellent docteur
Bolonais cueille avec lenteur
Des simples parmi l’herbe brune.

Muted

Calm in the half-light
That the tall branches make,
Let us fully embody our love
In this profound silence.

Let us merge our souls, our hearts,
And our ecstatic senses,
Among the listless obscurity
Of the pines and the flowering plants.

Half-close your eyes,
Fold your arms across your chest,
And from your sleeping heart
Chase away all plans.

Let us be reconciled to the
The sweet and lulling breeze
That comes at your feet to ruffle
The waves of red grass.

And when, solemnly, the evening
Falls dark over the oaks,
Voice of our despair,
The nightingale will sing.

Puppets

Scaramouche and Pulcinella
Gathered together by an evil plan,
Wave to each other, shadows under the moon.

However, the excellent doctor
From Bologna slowly collects
Some medicinal herbs among the brown grass.
Lors sa fille, piquant minois,  
Sous la charmille, en tapinois,  
Se glisse, demi-nue, en quête  
De son beau pirate espagnol,  
Don't un amoureux rossignol  
Clame la détresse à tue-tête.

Meanwhile his sharp-faced daughter,  
Glides cunningly under the arbor,  
Half-naked, in quest  
Of her handsome Spanish pirate,  
Whose amorous nightingale  
Cries the distress loudly.

**Clair de lune**

Votre âme est un paysage choisi  
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques  
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi  
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur  
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,  
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur  
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,  
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres  
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,  
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

**Moonlight**

Your soul is a chosen landscape  
On which go charming maskers and folk dancers  
Playing the lute and dancing and almost  
Sad beneath their fantastic disguises.

All are singing in the minor mode  
Of all-conquering love and the good life,  
They don't seem to believe in their happiness  
And their song blends with the moonlight,

To the moonlight sad and beautiful,  
That makes the birds dream in the trees  
And the fountains weep for ecstasy,  
The great, slender fountains among the statues.
Suor angelica is the second opera from Giacomo Puccini’s set of three one-act operas, known as Il Trittico. It is normally proceeded by Il tabarro and followed by Gianni Schicchi, with each opera intending to express one of three affects: the tragic, the lyric, and the comic. Suor angelica presents the lyric affect. Puccini was drawn to this story in part because his own sister was a nun. Suor angelica is the story of a young woman in 17th-century Italy, who is banished to a convent, as a result of bearing a son outside of marriage. For seven years Angelica has devoted herself to the religious life of the convent, but in all that time has heard no news of her family, or her son.

In this scene, her aunt the princess, finally makes an appearance, in order to persuade Angelica to sign over her inheritance to her sister. As the scene continues, the aunt’s refusal to allow any tenderness or reconciliation brings Angelica to an ardent demand to hear of her son, only to then be told that the child died two years earlier. The aria which follows, “Senza mamma” is one of Puccini’s best-loved and most tender.

Translations by Kelsey K. Rogers.

La zia principessa:
Il principe Gualtiero vostro padre, la principessa Clara vostra madre, quando vent’anni or sono vennero a morte, m’affidarono i figli e tutto il patrimonio di famiglia.


Sister Angelica:
Dopo sett’anni son davanti a voi. Ispiratevi a questo luogo santo... È luogo di demenza, è luogo di pietà!

La zia principessa:
Di penitenza.

Io debbo rivelerarlì la ragione perché addiveni a questa divisione. Vostra sorella Anna Viola anderà sposa.

Sister Angelica:
Married?! Married little Anna Viola, my little sister, the little one?

Ah! Ah! It’s been seven years, seven years have passed!

Ah! Ah! Oh little blond sister that is to be married, oh my little sister, be happy! And who is she marrying?

La zia principessa:
Chi per amore condonò la colpa di cui macchiaste il nostro bianco stemma!

Sister Angelica:
One who for love forgave the sin with which you stained our spotless family honor!

Sister Angelica:
Sorella di mia madre, voi siete inesorabile!
La zia principessa:
Che dite e che pensate? Inesorabile? Inesorabile? Vostra madre invocate quasi contro di me? Contro di me?

Di frequente la sera, là nel nostro oratorio, io mi raccolgo. Nel silenzio di quel raccoglimenti, il mio spirito par che s’allontani e s’incontri con quel di vostra madre in coloqui’eteri, arcani! Com’è penoso, com’è penoso udire i morti dolorare e piangere!

Quando l’estasi mistica scompare, per voi ho serbata una parola sola: Espiare! Espiare! Offrite la alla Vergine la mia giustizia!

Suor Angelica:
Tutto ho offerto alla Vergine, sì, tutto; ma v’è un offerta che non posso fare: alla Madre soave delle Madri, non posso offrire di scordar… mio figlio!

Mio figlio! Mio figlio, il figlio mio! Figlio mio! La creatura che mi fu, mi fu strappata! Figlio mio, che ho veduto e ho baciato una sola volta! Creatura mia! Creatura mia lontana! È questa la parola che invoco da sett’anni. Parlatemi di lui! Com’è, com’è mio figlio? Com’è dolce il suo volto? Come sono i suoi occhi? Parlatemi di lui! Di mio figlio, parlatemi di lui...

Perché tacete? Perché? Perché? Un altro instante di questo silenzio e vi dannate per l’eternità! La Vergine ci ascolta e Lei vi giudica!

La zia principessa:
Or son due anni, venne colpito da fiero morbo. Tutto fu fatto per salvarlo…

Suor Angelica:
È morto?

Senza mamma, o bimbo, tu sei morto!
Le tue labbra, senza i baci miei,
Scoloriron freddo, freddo!
E chiudesti, o bimbo, gli occhi belli!
Non potendo carezzarmi,
Le manine compenestri in croce!
E tu sei morto senza sapere
Quanto t’amava questa tua mamma!
Ora che sei un angelo del cielo,
Ora tu puoi vederla la tua mamma!
Tu puoi scendere giù pel firmamento
Ed aleggiare intorno a me… ti sento…
Sei qui… sei qui… mi baci… m’accarezzi.

The princess aunt:
What did you say and what did you think? Ruthless? Ruthless? You invoke your mother against me? Against me?

Frequently in the evening, there in our chapel for prayer, I collect myself. In the silence of these reflections, my spirit seems to wander and meets with that of your mother in ethereal, mysterious conversations! It is so painful, it is so painful to hear the dead suffer and weep!

When this mystical ecstasy disappears, for you I have reserved only one word: Atone! Atone! Offer my justice to the Virgin!

Sister Angelica:
I have offered everything to the Virgin, yes, everything; but there is one offering I cannot make: to the sweetest Mother of all Mothers, I cannot offer to forget… my son!

My son! My son, my son! Son of mine! The little creature that was taken from me! My son, that I have seen and I have kissed only once! My little one! My little one far away! And this is the news that I have begged for seven years. Speak to me about him! How is he, how is my son? How is his sweet face? How are his eyes? Speak to me of him! Of my son, speak to me of him...

Why are you silent? Why? Why? Another instant of this silence and you damn yourself for eternity! The Virgin hears us and She judges you!

The princess aunt:
Two years ago, he was struck by a dread disease. Everything was done to save him…

Sister Angelica:
He’s dead?

Without a mother, oh my baby, you have died!
Your lips, without my kisses,
Faded and turned cold, cold!
And you closed, oh my baby, your beautiful eyes!
Not being able to caress me,
Your little hands you laid in a cross!
And you have died without knowing
How much your mother loved you!
Now that you are an angel of heaven,
Now you can see her, your mother!
You can descend down from the firmament
And blowing gently around me… I feel you…
You are here… you are here… you kiss me… you caress me.
Ah! dimmi quando in ciel potrò vederti?
Quando potrò baciarti?...
O dolce fine di ogni mio dolore!
Quando in cielo con te potrò salire?...
Quando potrò morire?
Quando potrò morire?...
Dillo alla mamma, creatura bella,
Con un leggero scintillar di stella...
Parlami, amore, amore!...

Ah! Tell me when I will be able to see you in heaven?
When can I kiss you?...
Oh, sweet end of all my sufferings!
When in can I ascend with you in heaven?...
When will I be able to die?
When will I be able to die?...
Tell it to your mother, beautiful creature,
With a gentle twinkling of a star...
Speak to me, love, love!...