Childhood among the ferns
Gerald Finzi

From Gerald Finzi’s song cycle *Before and after summer*, *Childhood Among the Ferns* is a contemplation of what it means to enter adulthood from a child’s perspective. Poet Thomas Hardy captures a sense of youthful whimsy that remains throughout the entire text until, in the final stanza, the tone slowly slips away. The speaker questions, “Why should I have to grow to man’s estate and this afar-noised World perambulate?” Finzi replicates this fleeting whimsical feel by shifting the excited and awed setting of the first two-thirds of the song and turning it bit by bit into a slow, frustrated tone mixed with longing as if it were an emerging adult losing their last pieces of child-like wonder, changed by the world.

Let Us Garlands Bring
Gerald Finzi

Another song cycle by Gerald Finzi, *Let Us Garlands Bring* is a setting a five Shakespearean songs. Today, the first two songs from this cycle, *Come away, Come away, Death* and *Who is Sylvia?*, will be performed. *Come away, Come away, Death* is a text from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The singer is a jester who is called upon to sing for the entertainment of the characters on stage. While originally the song was meant to be an overdramatic piece of comedy about the hyperbolic nature of heartbreak, Finzi sets it as something to be taken seriously. Dirge-like rhythms and chords in D minor set the tone, and phrases throughout the piece languor on the melodrama of this song.

*Who is Sylvia?* is a vast departure from its preceding song. The text originates from Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The song is a toast to the graces of Sylvia, the love of Thurio who knows her to be so overwhelmingly beautiful and holy. The rhythm and meter of this song is quite upbeat, and the pace does not slow down. The music flows steadily and does not take time to revel through to the end, only briefly lengthening the beats during interludes and finishing with an allargando in the final phrase of the voice part.

Cinco Canciones Negras
Xavier Montsalvatge

Montsalvatge’s *Cinco Canciones Negras* (“Five Black Songs”) is a cycle of five poems highlighting the voices of disenfranchised Afro-Cuban and Afro-Latinx peoples. Commissioned by Mezzosoprano Mercédès Plantada to be premiéred at her recital, Montsalvatge combined Antillean inspiration with his native Castilian nationalistic influences into the song *Cancion de cuna para dormer a un negrito*. With the astounding positive reception of this piece and Plantada’s encouragement, Montsalvatge fleshed out this single song into a full set of five songs.

The first song, *Cuba dentro de un piano* (Cuba in a piano), is a setting of an underground text by Spanish poet Rafael Alberti, who was, at that time, exiled from Spain. In early 20th century Spain, literature written by or about Native Americans or Black people were all censored, purged, or
forbidden, yet Montsalvatge actively sought out these poems to give their voices an audience who would otherwise be unable to hear such poetry. The poem is a telling from a Cuban of the Spanish-American War. Interspersed are passages from a song that the narrator recalls as they recount the events. Finally the darkest truth emerges, and the narrator reveals that after so many fought so hard to keep their “beautiful Trinidad,” Cuba was lost and “the blue pearl of the Caribbean shines no more.”

*Chevere* is the third song from this set written by the Afro-cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. *Chévere*, meaning bully, is the subversion of the chivalrous knight from medieval Europe and fantasy. The knight would be the hero, save the girl, slay the dragon; whereas, the Chévere would take anything he could and cut it all to pieces until there was nothing left but the Black woman whom he would, too, attack. However, the Chévere wasn’t fantasy, though. The Chévere was the white men in Latin America ripping apart marginalized communities and exploiting Black women at that time.

*Cancion de cuna para dormer a un negrito* is the fourth song of *Cinco Canciones Negras*. A text from Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, it is a lullaby from a Black mother to her son. The opening word “Ninghe” is a Congolese word similar to “lullay” in English used to lull children to sleep. On the surface, it’s a tender motherly piece, but at another glance, from “Identity in *Cinco Canciones Negras*” a paper by Alice Henderson, it’s the perspective of “a woman whose vulnerability has been exploited and her child, the product of that violence.”

I. Cuba dentro de un piano
(Cuba inside a piano)

Cuando mi madre llevaba un sorbete de fresa por sombrero
y el humo de los barcos aún era humo de habanero.

    Mulata vueltabajera ...

    Cádiz se adormecía entre fandangos y habaneras
y un lorito al piano quería hacer de tenor.

... dime dónde está la flor que el hombre tanto venera.

    Mi tío Antonio volvía con su aire de insurrecto.
La Cabaña y el Príncipe sonaban por los patios del Puerto.

(Ya no brilla la Perla azul del mar de las Antillas.
   Ya se apagó, se nos ha muerto.)

    Me encontré con la bella Trinidad ...

Cuba se había perdido y ahora era verdad.
    Era verdad,
    no era mentira.

    Un cañonero huido llegó cantándolo en guajira.
    La Habana ya se perdió.
    Tuvo la culpa el dinero ...

    Calló,
cayó el cañonero.

    Pero después, pero ¡ah! después
fue cuando al SÍ
lo hicieron YES.
III. Chévere

Chévere del navajazo,  
se vuelve él mismo navaja: 
pica tajadas de luna,  
mas la luna se le acaba; 
pica tajadas de sombra, 
mas la sombra se le acaba; 
pica tajadas de canto, 
mas el canto se le acaba; 
y entonces pica que pica carne de su negra mala.

I. Chévere

The dandy of the knife thrust himself becomes a knife: 
he cuts slices of the moon, 
but the moon is fading on him; 
he cuts slices of shadow, 
but the shadow is fading on him; 
he cuts slices of song, 
but the song is fading on him; 
and then he cuts up, cuts up the flesh of his evil black woman.

IV. Cancion de cuna para dormir un negrito  
(Lullaby to put to sleep a black boy)

Ninghe, ninghe, ninghe,  
tan chiquitito, 
el negrito que no quiere dormir.

Cabeza de coco,  
grano de café,  
con lindas motitas, 
con ojos grandotes como dos ventanas que miran al mar.

Cierra los ojitos, 
negrito asustado; 
el mandinga blanco te puede comer. 
¡Ya no eres esclavo!

Y si duermes mucho, 
el señor de casa promete comprar traje con botones para ser un ‘groom’.

Ninghe, ninghe, ninghe,  
duírmete, negrito, 
cabeza de coco, grano de café.

Lullay, lullay, lullay, 
tiny little child, 
little black boy, who won’t go to sleep.

Head like a coconut, 
head like a coffee bean, 
with pretty freckles and wide eyes like two windows looking out to sea.

Close your tiny eyes, 
frightened little boy, 
or the white devil will eat you up. 
You’re no longer a slave!

And if you sleep soundly, 
the master of the house promises to buy a suit with buttons to make you a ‘groom’.

Lullay, lullay, lullay, 
sleep, little black boy, 
head like a coconut, head like a coffee bean.
Les berceaux
Gabriel Fauré

Les berceaux, with poetry by Sully Prudhomme, is a French art song by Gabriel Fauré. It tells the story of the men and women of the port towns where the men leave to sea in search of far horizons. The women stay back and weep, not only for their husbands, but for their children who the mothers know will one day leave them as well for such a treacherous journey. Fauré uses a swaying 12/8 meter that emulates not only the ships of the men but the cradles they leave behind,

Le long du quai les grands vaisseaux,
Que la houle incline en silence,
Ne prennent pas garde aux berceaux
Que la main des femmes balance.

Along the quay the great ships,
Listing silently with the surge,
Pay no heed to the cradles
Rocked by women's hands.

Mais viendra le jour des adieux,
Car il faut que les femmes pleurent,
Et que les hommes curieux
Tentent les horizons qui leurrent.

But the day of parting will come,
For it is decreed that women shall weep,
And that men with questing spirits
Shall seek enticing horizons.

Et ce jour-là les grands vaisseaux,
Fuyant le port qui diminue,
Sentent leur masse retenu
Par l’âme des lointains berceaux.

And on that day the great ships,
Leaving the dwindling harbour behind,
Shall feel their hulls held back
By the soul of the distant cradles.

Le Colibri
Ernest Chausson

Translating to “The Hummingbird,” Le Colibri is a love song about a hummingbird drinking from a golden flower. Poet Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle romantically details the journey of the little green “king of the hills” as he leaves his nest to a nearby spring surrounded by bamboo and beautiful hibiscus. He lands on a flower of gold and “drinks so much love” from it that he dies before he can know if he made use of it all. Chausson builds such beautiful text painting from this poem, and the tone of this piece is truly something to be relished.

Le vert colibri, le roi des collines,
Voyant la rosée et le soleil clair
Luire dans son nid tissé d’herbes fines,
Comme un rayon s’échappe dans l’air.
Il se hâte et vole aux sources voisines,
Ou les bambous font le bruit de la mer,
Ou l’aoka rouge aux odeurs divines
S’ouvre et porte au cœur un humide éclair.

The green humming-bird, the king of the hills,
On seeing the dew and gleaming sun
Shine in his nest of fine woven grass,
Darts into the air like a shaft of light.
He hurries and flies to the nearby springs
Where the bamboos sound like the sea,
Where the red hibiscus with its heavenly scent
Unveils the glint of dew at its heart.

Vers la fleur dorée il descend, se pose,
Et boit tant d’amour dans la coupe rose
Qu’il meurt, ne sachant s’il l’a pu tarir.

He descends, and settles on the golden flower,
Drinks so much love from the rosy cup
That he dies, not knowing if he’d drunk it dry.

Sur ta lèvre pure, o ma bien-aimée,
Telle aussi mon âme eut voulu mourir,
Du premier baiser qui l’a parfumée.

On your pure lips, O my beloved,
My own soul too wold sooner have died
From that first kiss which scented it!
Papageno! Papagena! Papagena!

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

From Mozart's famous *Die Zauberflöte*, this scene comes at the tail-end of the opera. Tamino and Pamina have had their story come to an end, but Papageno is left all alone after losing his wife-to-be to a test of will. Papageno, overcome with frustration and grief after losing the only thing he’s ever wanted, plans to commit suicide. Before he can do so, the three magic knaben from earlier in the show appear and remind him of the magic bells he had obtained. Papageno begs the bells to bring him his wife, and after a short tune, his lovely Papagena arrives. The two dream (and argue) of the life they’re going to build for a minute then leave stage to do so.
Drei Knaben:

Papageno:
Erst einen kleinen Papageno-

Papagena:
Dann eine kleine Papagena-

Papageno:
Dann wieder eine Papageno-

Papagena:
Dann wieder eine Papagena-

Papageno:
Papageno!

Papagena:
Papagena!

Both:
Es ist das höchste der Gefühle.
Wenn viele, viele Papageno (Papagena),
Der Eltern Segen warden sein.

Papageno:
Bist du mir nun ganz gegeben?

Papagena:
Nun, bin ich dir ganz gegeben!

Papageno:
Nun, so sei mein liebes Weibchen!

Papagena:
Nun, so sei mein herzenstäubchen!

Both:
Welche Freude wird das sein,
Wenn die Götter uns bedenken,
Unsrer Liebe Kinder schenken,
So liebe, kleine Kinderlein!

Three Boys:

Papageno:
First a little Papageno-

Papagena:
Then a little Papagena-

Papageno:
Then another Papageno-

Papagena:
Then another Papagena-

Papageno:
Papageno!

Papagena:
Papagena!

Both:
It is the loftiest of feelings,
When many, many Papagenos (Papagenas),
The blessing of parents will be.

Papageno:
Are you now given to me completely?

Papagena:
Now, I have been given completely to you!

Papageno:
Now, be my dearest little wife!

Papagena:
Now be my hearts little dove!

Both:
What joy that will be,
When the gods shower with gifts,
And bestow our love with children,
So dear, small little children
All translations are taken from IPA source and Oxford Lieder.