

Some Thoughts on Writing Art Songs:

Ricky: When I was in college and first becoming a composer, I was obsessed with Shostakovich's 14th Symphony, settings of poems about death for soprano, bass and chamber orchestra, and Ned Rorem's Ariel song cycle which uses the poems of Sylvia Plath. Both pieces were so brilliant that I felt I knew the poems in a whole new way, a deeper way than reading them on the page. Already in love with poetry, the idea of setting poems to music to find my own musical voice seemed appropriate and natural as I wanted to emulate these composers I so admired. It seems as if I dip into poetry to find where I am at any given moment and very often the poem is exactly what I need for that day; the poem is the necessary balm for my often turbulent soul. I believe, if I have done my job, the music illuminates and clarifies the poem as it is being heard, liberating it from its original form, not to distort it, but to exalt it.



Jake: My heart and soul are in song, and have been since I was very little. Even my very first compositions were songs to my own texts. I love that people have been sharing the magical combination of words and music throughout history, and I love that a song can be active and narrative and also be very introspective. For me, my heart lies in that special combination of an operatically trained voice, great text and music. This is the root of all my compositional instincts, and the basis for all of my work. As for the poems I choose to set: I have to fall in love with a text. I can't set words that don't sing to me clearly; and it is always my hope that the music I write will add an even broader dimension of emotional and theatrical storytelling.



Lowell: Art Song is one of the few genres that I have composed a number of works for that were not commissioned, simply for my own pleasure. I find working with a poem to be very liberating because the emotional ground plan is already laid out. There is none of the 'stress' that I associate with writing a string quartet or a symphony, where one is constantly trying to justify abstract musical choices that in fact have no ultimate justification. Writing songs is a very enjoyable process. The poems seem to pick themselves. When I first read a poem, I instantly know whether I can set it to music or not. This has nothing to do with whether it's a good or bad poem: I could never imagine setting some of my favorite poems to music and, conversely, some poems that I don't actually like, I often think would make a good song. Part of this has to do with clarity of language and directness of communication. Perhaps more importantly, the poem has to leave room for the music to do something. If a poem is too complete or too perfect, the music can be superfluous.



Glen: I love writing art songs because of the great singers who sing them. I find that classical singers, who spend much of their lives with established rep, are especially hungry for new music. I've been arrogant enough to send many of them e-mails out of the blue offering my songs; almost instantly I get a reply saying, "Yes please!" I couldn't possibly set all of the poems I love to music even if I wrote five a day. But I feel my music doesn't "add" anything to the poetry at all. The poems exist and are beautiful in their natural state. All I do with my music is reflect my own personal feelings about the poetry. I'm a composer so I speak through music. Hopefully with the music and then the performance, the poem is transformed into a whole other thing: a song.

Canadian bass baritone Daniel Okulitch's career first garnered national attention as Schaunard in the original cast of Baz Luhrmann's Tony award winning Broadway production of *La Boheme*, and has since been established as a leading singer and dramatic interpreter in a wide variety of repertoire. In opera, Mr. Okulitch has garnered acclaim in major baritone roles of Mozart, most notably Don Giovanni and Figaro, which have been seen in New York, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Warsaw, Vancouver, Dallas, Detroit, Hawaii, Hamilton, and St. Louis. Other roles have included his Teatro alla Scala debut as Theseus in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Swallow in Peter Grimes for his debut at Washington National Opera, and Escamillo in *Carmen* at Vancouver Opera.

In contemporary opera, Mr. Okulitch has excelled in creating leading roles, most notably Seth Brundle in Howard Shore's *The Fly* at the Chatelet and Los Angeles Operas, Willy Wonka in Peter Ash's *The Golden Ticket* in St Louis and Atlanta, and Inspector Gert Osterland in Thomas Pasatieri's *Frau Margot* with Fort Worth Opera. He took the lead role in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* in Calgary and Fort Worth to great acclaim. Other contemporary roles have included Olin Blitch in Floyd's *Susannah*, Frederich Bhaer in Adamo's *Little Women*, David Dichiera's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and Donald Gallup in Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*.

On recording, he can be heard on the original cast recording of Baz Luhrmann's production of *La Boheme*, Chausson's *Le Roi Arthus* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*, and DiChiera's *Cyrano de Bergerac*.



Mr. Okulitch is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including First Prize from the George London Foundation in 2004, The Sullivan Foundation 2004, 2nd Prize from the Licia Albanese/Puccini Foundation Competition, First Prize from the Joyce Dutka Arts Foundation in 2004, a Grant from the Singers Development Fund in 2003, 5th Prize in the Palm Beach Opera Vocal Competition in 2002, and was a Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions in 2000 and 2001. He is a 2006 and 2008 recipient of a Canada Council Grant for Professional Musicians and received the Andrew White Memorial Award and a Corbett Award while a student at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, where he received an Artist Diploma in Opera, after completing his BM and MM degrees in Voice and Opera respectively, from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

