

**REACHING ARCADIA: RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES IN VOCAL ART
MUSIC INCLUDING PLANS TO INTRODUCE THIS MUSIC TO A RURAL
AUDIENCE**

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ABSTRACT

Oberlander, Erin Marissa, DMA, Department of Music, North Dakota State University, November, 2011. Reaching Arcadia: Rural and Agricultural Themes in Vocal Art Music Including Plans to Introduce this Music to a Rural Audience. Major Professor: Dr. Virginia Sublett.

Throughout the history of Western Music, composers have written works on rural and agricultural subjects. The first half of this dissertation examines a number of important works from the Baroque era through the present day and the composers who have chosen this specialized subject matter.

Rural communities are underserved where the arts are concerned. Yet, rural audiences have perhaps the best chance at identifying with the subjects of this particular subset of vocal art music. The second half of this dissertation examines reasons why it is important to reach rural communities with vocal art music. Four sample recital programs appropriate for rural audiences are included.

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To Dr. Virginia Sublett, for her cogent insights and tireless support,

And to my husband, Bill, for bringing us back to the rural life and for believing the art
within me can flourish there.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of Western music, composers have written with two different aims in mind, subject to the tastes of patrons and the public. The first is to write absolute music, i.e. music that is written for music's sake alone that has no suggested or explicit subject matter. Examples of absolute music were highly prominent during the Classical Era (1750-1820) when symphonies and concertos were known by opus numbers rather than by names or special titles. Later composers such as Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) continued the practice of writing nonrepresentational music as a deliberate statement of competing philosophical preferences about music's purpose. On the other end of the continuum is programmatic music, i.e. music that has specific or suggested subject matter. Found in this category is music ranging from early pastoral works of the Renaissance and Baroque eras such as Heinrich Biber's (1644-1704) *Sonata violin solo rappresentativa* in which the instruments are used to make the sounds of barnyard animals or Clément Janequin's (1485-1558) "Le Chant des oiseaux" with its imitations of bird songs, to works of the Romantic era, like Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770-1827) Symphony no. 6 in F (*Pastorale*) and Robert Schumann's (1810-1856) Symphony no. 3 in E-flat (*Rhenisch*), to operas and art songs, where the words themselves delineate the subject matter for the listener.

During the Romantic Era (1820-1900) the pendulum shifted towards the programmatic end of the musical spectrum. Art song rose to prominence. Instrumental works often were titled or subtitled with suggested imagery rather than being numbered.

Composers attempted to depict places, people, and experiences by musical means; even feelings or the suggestion of certain feelings became very important. Subject matter often elevated Romantic cultural values, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) idea of the "natural man," the idea of individual perspective and emotional expression, and the purity and simplicity of nature. During the late nineteenth century there arose in French, British and American art musics a propensity for composers to write programmatic works in which nature was venerated. Among these works are those that specifically identify Arcadian scenes of rural life featuring, lush, utopian rural landscapes with unspoiled creatures, often shepherds and nymphs, living harmoniously. Some musical works specifically editorialized on more pragmatic aspects of the agricultural processes, equipment, and people.

The purpose of this disquisition, then, is twofold. First, it will introduce the beginnings of rural and agricultural themes in vocal art music, moving through the early Baroque forms and touching on a few composers of the Romantic era, introducing late nineteenth century French and British works on these themes, but focusing mainly on late nineteenth French and twentieth century American composers who have used rural or agricultural themes in vocal art music. Found at the end of this portion of the discussion is a section on living composers of vocal art music who are currently working within this specific subject matter.

The second purpose of this disquisition is to identify ways in which this specific set of music might be brought back to the rural community—to a population that is generally underserved where the arts are concerned but perhaps has the greatest likelihood of identifying with the images and messages of this specific subgenre of vocal art music. In

this section, reasons are identified regarding why bringing this music to rural communities is not only important but also vital for those communities as well as to the artistic community that produces those works. In an attempt to understand exactly how to approach recitals and concerts in rural communities, an examination of several arts organizations that have reached out to the rural communities follows. Found at the conclusion of this section are four suggested recital programs containing music on rural and agricultural themes that would be appropriate for rural and urban audiences alike.

PART I. RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES IN VOCAL ART MUSIC

CHAPTER 1. EARLY PASTORAL MUSIC

Pastoral music, a type that speaks of the countryside, herd animals and shepherds, nymphs, and gods and goddesses in nature, goes back to the very beginnings of Western music. The Greeks were the first to use these types of images in their dramatic works. The initial Greek pastoral music noted in the Greek historical records was by Stesichorus and dates back to the sixth century BCE.¹ This type of pastoral music was general instrumental music accompanying a drama, often featuring a flute-like instrument called the *syrinx*. Pastoral song is not mentioned in the historical record until the third century BCE with the musico-dramatic works of Theocritus.² For the purposes of this discussion, Greek pastoral music within the context of drama is important in the later resurgence of pastoral musical dramas during the early Baroque era as shall be seen later in this disquisition.

Prior to the Baroque Era, pastoral dramas were not a regular part of entertainment at courts or public places, but occasional examples may be seen. One important prototype was Adam de la Halle's (1237? -1288) play set to music from the thirteenth century called *Le jeu de Robin et Marion*. Musical dramas were much less common, however, than more simple song forms using nature or countryside themes. Among these were the songs of the *troubadours* and *trouvères* in France. The *frottola* in Italy and the *chanson* in France were song forms often exhibiting these images. Eventually, these same pastoral themes would become an important part of the Italian *madrigal* wherein these natural themes lent themselves to text painting and melodic depiction. Within these works, certain stock

¹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Pastoral,"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed January 18, 2011).

² *Ibid.*

characters came to be expected. Characters such as Clori, a young shepherdess, or Sylvia, a demi-goddess of the forest, were the types of individuals commonly featured in these songs. These songs might also use imitations of sounds, such as echoes in the mountain country.³ Cantatas also came to feature pastoral images and characters.⁴ By the sixteenth century, dramatic pastorals were common at courts in Italy.⁵ Within these works, classical Greek mythological characters were often represented in their usual countryside setting. Early monody also employed many of the same pastoral scenes and characters, for instance, to describe the changing seasons.⁶ These works, along with the dramatic pastorals and *intermedi*, were some of the forerunners of early opera.

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, opera came into full bloom with pastoral works representing the bulk of the first operas. Ottavio Rinuccini's (1562-1621) *Euridice* and representations of *Dafne* by Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), Marco da Gagliano (1582-1643), and Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), as well as Claudio Monteverdi's (1567-1643) *Orfeo* are among them. During this time, monarchs commonly used allegory presented in dramatic form to reinforce the idea of their own rule and prominence. Chief among the families to use this tactic was the Medici family of Florence. They drew upon Greek mythology for much of the dramatic work presented at festivals, celebrations, and weddings. These *intermedi* were often performed between acts of larger dramatic works. Many of these *intermedi* would use pastoral and natural elements. Aphrodite and her nymphs danced in the countryside, gods and goddesses floated on clouds, and elements such as constellations and weather events were featured. It is important to note that Greek

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Walter Hill. *Baroque Music: Music in Western Europe, 1580-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005) p. 40.

classicism was very much in vogue at the time, and artists and monarchs in some way felt they were reproducing elements of Greek drama, using this drama to influence the emotions and thoughts of the listeners by setting the text to music. The idealized pastoral scenes present in much of this drama added to the conceit that the particular monarch's rule would also be ideal. In fact, the Medici family used these dramas to put forth the concept that they would be ushering in a new Golden Age.⁷ Many of these early opera-like dramas are now referred to as "pastoral tragicomedies."⁸ John Walter Hill writes that the drama *L'Euridice* performed at the marriage of Maria de' Medici to Henry IV, King of France, "belongs to the tradition of the pastoral play, or more precisely, the subgenre of the pastoral tragicomedy, since its characters are the noble shepherds, shepherdesses, nymphs, gods, and demi-gods of ancient Greek myths."⁹

Later operas of the century moved away from pastoral works in favor of historic or comic material. However, even these works had interspersed among them small pastoral scenes referred to as "pastoral oases" which were used to break up the action or lighten the mood.¹⁰ In seventeenth-century Spain, *zarzuela* used predominantly rural images.¹¹ In England, an early musico-dramatic form called the masque incorporated music, dance and drama, often employing images from nature such as seascapes and mythological creatures.¹² John Blow's (1649-1708) masque, *Venus and Adonis* and George Frideric Handel's (1685-1759) masque, *Acis and Galatea*, (which is also sometimes referred to as a

⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Pastoral,"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed January 18, 2011).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hill, p. 180.

“pastoral opera”)¹³ are two such works. Subsequently, the masques’ musical and dramatic successor, English opera during the Baroque era, also favored pastoral settings. Henry Purcell’s (1659-1695) semi-operas, *The Fairy Queen* and *The Tempest*, as well as his full opera *Dido and Aeneas* are such works. Later English operas also featured Arcadian images and rural scenes. John Gay’s (1685-1732) pastoral ballad opera *The Beggar’s Opera* uses many of these images. Some operas by this time were so fully entrenched in the Arcadian subject matter that they came to be known by the term “pastoral opera.” This term has also been adopted for earlier works using predominantly rural and mythological images.

The first entirely sung French drama was *Le Triomphe de l'Amour sur des bergers et bergères* (*The Triumph of Cupid over the Shepherds and Shepherdesses*) by Michel de La Guerre, first performed in 1655.¹⁴ French opera, developed under the stern but creative leadership of composer Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), also made use of Greek mythology and pastoral images. Again, as for the Italian monarchy, the use of such allegory was meant to help validate and glorify the reign of Louis XIV, The Sun King. Lully’s famous *Alceste* has pastoral scenes including one that directs “the sea nymphs and tritons put on a sea festival, in which the sailors and fisherman are brought together.”¹⁵ Such pastoral divertissements like these emphasize the fact that pastoral scenes were often used as a break from the more serious action of the drama. This contrast between the elaborate music used for the serious drama and the more folk-like simplicity of the pastoral music would later become even more prominent during the Romantic era. Lully was not

¹³ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Pastoral,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed January 18, 2011).

¹⁴ Hill, p. 232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 247

the only prominent French Baroque composer to write works on pastoral themes. His artistic successor, Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), wrote in the pastoral genre often enough to have created a specific subgenre, known as *pastorals heroïques*, describing these works.¹⁶

There are, perhaps, fewer examples of pastoral works within sacred vocal music. However, the use of pastoral themes does occur in sacred instrumental music of the Baroque era, especially in that intended as Christmas music. Christmas pastorals in Italy introduced certain instrumental motifs that eventually came to be heard in much European instrumental music. Angular melodies in triple meter, parallel thirds, drones, and symmetrical phrase structure were a few of the compositional techniques associated with this pastoral music.¹⁷ These techniques, to the ears of the listeners of the time, were reminiscent of the music played by shepherds on their bagpipes in town squares during the Christmas season.¹⁸ An obvious reason this shepherd music was considered appropriate for the season was the direct association to the shepherds in the Christmas story itself. Germany had its own particular flavor of pastoral Christmas music, including animal sounds and birdcalls that mimicked the menagerie present at the birth of Christ.¹⁹ All of these Christmas pastoral sounds eventually became part of the musical heritage of Europe and found their way into much of the Christmas music written during the Baroque Era as well as later times. Pastoral masses written during Classical and Romantic periods, such as those of Anton Diabelli (1781-1858) and Franz Schubert (1797-1828), use such techniques

¹⁶ David Schulenberg, *Music of the Baroque* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 177.

¹⁷ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Pastoral,"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed January 18, 2011).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

as echoes, fanfares, and flutes and oboes depicting the shepherds and are examples of how these pastoral sounds trickled down into the musical language of Europe.²⁰

Because of the dissemination of much of this Christmas music, eventually, these same techniques became associated with any pastoral work, not just music for the Christmas season. For instance, Antonio Vivaldi's (1678-1741) instrumental concertos, *Le quattro stagioni* (*The Four Seasons*), have many of these same characteristics even though it is not a work for Christmas time. Handel's well known *Messiah* incorporates pastoral techniques in the section depicting the Nativity of Christ.

A specific genre for the voice that enjoyed the benefit of the musical imitation of nature was the Italian chamber cantata. These secular cantatas were often pastoral not only in their sounds, but also in their texts, most of which concerned unrequited love between nymphs and shepherds who were frolicking in idyllic conditions in the Greek countryside.^{21 22} Some composers who wrote within this genre were Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682), and Handel. One fairly well known cantata that falls into the pastoral category is A. Scarlatti's "Correa nel seno amato" ("It runs in the beloved breast") from the 1690s. This is a shepherd's lament. As David Schulenberg writes:

the text [of the cantata] focuses on a series of images from nature, such as the early morning frost on the grass, which grows within earshot of the murmuring waves of a conveniently nearby stream. As conventional as such images may have been, they served the composer well by inspiring imaginative use of the conventions of word painting.²³

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 116.

²² Hill, p. 411.

²³ Schulenberg, p. 118-120.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), although known less for his works with programmatic or secular content than for his sacred and instrumental works, did write a few secular vocal cantatas with pastoral subject matter. His familiar cantata *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten* (BWV 202), otherwise known as the *Wedding Cantata* and *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd* (BWV 208), otherwise known as the *Hunt Cantata*, are examples.

By the eighteenth century, more of a contrast could be heard between pastoral music and the typical concert music of the day. Pastoral music was becoming more natural, with beautiful, simple melodies and an avoidance of complexity, whereas the contrapuntal musical texture of the high Baroque, considered more artistic at the time, was more embellished and complicated. The folk-like appeal of the pastoral-style music worked well within the constructs of comedic works, resulting in *vaudeville* comedies in France that were similar to the style of the ballad operas in England.²⁴ Eventually, these *vaudeville* comedies formed the basis for a new form called “soft pastorals” in which rural life and people were romanticized and elevated. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s one-act opera from this time period, *Le Devin du village*, is considered a soft pastoral.²⁵ This idealized view of country life would help to spur further developments, both dramatically and musically, in pastoral-like forms in the Romantic Era.

²⁴ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Pastoral,”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed January 18, 2011).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2. GERMAN PASTORAL VOCAL MUSIC OF THE ROMANTIC ERA

During the Romantic Era, several new genres of concert music rose to prominence. One of these was the art song. Considered as appropriate for the recital hall as for music making at home, art songs use texts from high-quality literary works and are constructed using compositional techniques not normally seen in music of the popular or folk categories. Some of these techniques include text painting, complex harmonies, contrapuntal writing, lack of doubling of the voice line in the piano part, and technically demanding melodic lines that require a trained, rather than an amateur, singer to execute them well.

Art song flowered for a variety of reasons during the Romantic Era, one of the most important being the availability of rich and descriptive poetry that allowed for artistic text setting. The poets writing at this time, primarily in Germany, but later in France, displayed their Romantic idealism in a visceral way. For instance, a tree was not just a tree, but it was a glorious image of growth. A poetic brook was simply not just a brook; it was also a metaphor for the turbulence and unpredictability of life. Sometimes, these natural elements took on a human or even a supernatural character, embodying companionship, death, life, or aspects of magic. In these ways, Romantic Era poets elevated nature. In addition, many poets and writers of this era attempted to validate folk materials such as legends, traditions, and stories of fantastical creatures, kings, and by-gone eras by incorporating these subjects into a higher art form than mere folk stories. Where in previous eras these stories would have been dismissed as trifles, in the Romantic Era they became part of the cultural identity

and affirmed the common person's perspective even while polishing that very perspective through the medium of art. By doing this, these poets desired to impress upon their readers the fact that the aesthetic experience of the individual was more valid than any scientific rationalization of life. In other words, life did not need to make sense from an intellectual standpoint; rather, an individual's reaction to life was what held value. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) are poets whose works exemplify many of these Romantic ideals.

In the lyrical lines and descriptive imagery of these literary works, composers saw the potential for music that could more fully express the perspective and emotions of the individual. They also understood that music held great promise to enhance poetic intensity by the means of text painting, greater dynamic contrast, and dialogue between the voice and accompanying instruments. Because of these poetic works, higher quality art song was able to emerge. Two significant composers of Romantic Era art song, Franz Schubert (1797-1828) and Robert Schumann (1810-1856), used these poems to create a new type of song that was descriptive, lush, and laden with musical and literary imagery. The result elevated the early German *Lied* into a more complex art song that grew beyond its parlor tune status to find a new home in the recital hall.

Franz Schubert was the first major art song composer to make more out of a song than simple melody with a basic harmonic accompaniment. He used many quality literary works to create a towering catalogue of over six hundred *Lieder*, many song groupings, and several substantial song cycles.

A perusal of the subject matter he often chose shows that, for Schubert, the landscapes of mountains and rivers held the most appeal in terms of geography. Schumann's experiences with travel through mountainous regions also seem to have emotionally influenced his own love of the outdoors. He said to his mother "Man is not so unhappy as he imagines, for he has a heart which always finds responsive echoes in nature."²⁶ He indicated to a friend in a letter that he chose Byron's *Manfred* to set as an opera for the express purpose of introducing the landscape and images from the Alps.²⁷

Schubert was sensitive enough to landscapes around him to be attracted to pastoral themes in much of the poetry he chose to set to music. Naturally then, several of the art songs he wrote had texts that featured mountain scenes, among them "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" ("The Shepherd on the Rock," poetry by Wilhelm Müller), "Schweizerlied" ("Swiss Song," poetry by Goethe), "Der Alpenjäger" ("The Alpine Hunter," poetry by Schiller) and his work for girls' choir, "Coronach" ("He is Gone on the Mountain," poetry by Sir Walter Scott).²⁸

Two of Schubert's song cycles have natural elements that seem to act as characters. His cycle from 1823, *Die schöne Müllerin* ("The Fair Miller Maid"), on twenty poems by Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827), tells the story of a young man who is in love with the miller's daughter. This lonely lad often finds companionship in a brook. In that same brook, he eventually takes his own life once he realizes he will lose the miller's daughter to his rival, the hunter. The obvious rural setting—the grain mill and the brook—along with the rural characters, the miller's daughter, the miller, himself, and the hunter, show how the

²⁶ A. Hyatt King, "Mountains, Music, and Musicians," *The Musical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (October 1945): 405. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/739225> (accessed November 17, 2010).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 406.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 405.

pastoral genre of earlier times was updated in the Romantic era. Here, the folk-like story is promoted to a more artistic medium in the *Lied*. In addition, the skillful text setting and evocative accompaniments help to illustrate more about this environment and its story than merely recounting the events. Schubert's flowing piano parts, especially in songs like "Wohin?" ("Where to?"), depict the miller's water wheel as well as the flowing of the brook itself. All of these techniques help to heighten the emotional response of the listener, making the story more intense, personal and relatable, even within the context of more intricate music. Furthermore, what appears to be a simple folk tale is in fact much more complex. About this cycle John Reed writes that it is "a statement of the human condition, in particular about the age-old conflict between the emotions of the natural man and the conventions of polite society."²⁹ This deepening of meaning behind these pastoral stories illustrates a change towards this subject matter between the facile or grandiose pastoral plays of the Baroque Era to these more humble, yet psychologically perplexing stories in the Romantic Era.

A more disturbing and perhaps less audience-accessible cycle is Schubert's second song cycle, *Winterreise*, ("Winter Journey") also on texts by Wilhelm Müller. In this set of twenty-four songs, a scorned lover fails to come to terms with his situation as he aimlessly wanders through the woods and the countryside during the frigid winter. One of the main themes of this cycle is the young man's isolation in nature and from other human beings.

Susan Youens describes the man's situation:

Until the final lines of the cycle, the wanderer talks only to himself or to the animals and objects in the surrounding landscape—a crow, the river, a

²⁹ John Reed, "Die Schöne Müllerin Reconsidered," *Music & Letters* 59, no. 4 (October 1978): 413. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/733940> (accessed January 24, 2011).

barking dog, the “town of inconstancy.” The creatures and the inanimate elements function both as extensions of himself . . . and as indices of his isolation—the reliance that he cannot, until the end, place in other human beings is transferred to the world of nature. Only in the last verse of the song does the wanderer approach another human being.³⁰

Today Wilhelm Müller is not considered a major poet of this era, yet Schubert chose his poems for both of these extensive vocal works. The poetry, while not particularly elegant, does realistically portray elements of nature. In *Winterreise*, the poet emphasizes the harshness of the winter cold in which the wanderer’s tears freeze, as well as the difficulty of making his way through the snow, to name a few of the sober depictions his work offers. Youens argues that it is this very realistic quality that attracted Schubert to the poetry. “Müller had a great gift, at its best in this cycle, for descriptions of Nature; an artist could easily paint each of the twenty-four scenes, so vividly are they described.”³¹ Indeed, an artist does paint the scenes, but in this case, it is with melodies and harmonies, motives and colors of sound, rather than oil and canvas. The cycle is replete with images of the countryside, as a perusal of the titles of many of the songs confirms: “Die Wetterfahne” (“The Weather Vane,”) “Der Lindenbaum” (“The Linden Tree,”) “Auf dem Flusse” (“On the Stream,”) “Frühlingstraum” (“A Dream of Springtime,”) “Die Krähe” (“The Crow,”) “Im Dorfe” (“In the Village,”) “Der Wegweiser” (“The Sign Post,”) and “Die Nebensonnen” (“The Phantom Suns.”)³²

Schubert wrote other songs that contain rural and agricultural imagery, his famous song “Die Forelle” (“The Trout”) and his “Mondnacht” (“The Moonlit Night”) and “Die

³⁰ Susan Youens, “Retracing a Winter Journey: Reflections on Schubert’s ‘Winterreise,’” *19th-Century Music*, 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 129. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/746578> (accessed January 24, 2011).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

³² Youens makes the case that the phantom suns described in this song are, in fact, the meteorological phenomenon known as “sun dogs.” These occur when very cold ice crystals high in the atmosphere act as prisms in the sunlight, creating rainbows that appear around the image of the sun.

Vögel” (“Birds”) among them. A thorough discussion of all of these works is beyond the scope of this disquisition. The survey of his two large cycles provided here is intended to show Schubert’s interest in portraying rural scenes in his vocal music.

If Franz Schubert’s musical relationship to nature was often one of expression of isolation and the harshness of life, Robert Schumann’s was often one of expressions of joy and love. In fact, one of his largest creative outpourings of song came in 1840, the year he was finally able to marry his beloved, Clara, over the objections of her father, who bitterly contested the courtship.

Schumann’s works do not have as much of an obvious connection to rural and agricultural subject matter as do Schubert’s. However, there are several examples of his unique approach to the subject matter. Schumann’s catalogue of art songs contains several songs about hunting. His Opus 137 songs for men’s chorus on the subject includes “Zur hohen Jagd” (“On to the High Chase,”) “Jagdmorgen” (“A Hunting Morning,”) and “Bei der Flasche” (“At the Bottle”). The eleventh song of his Opus 39 *Liederkreis* contains a vivid depiction of a hunting party. Opus 30, which contains three songs, each a portrait of a different character, has for its first song the story of a little boy with a magical hunting horn (“Der Knabe mit dem Wunderhorn.”) The poetry from which this song was taken is part of a larger collection of German folk poems published in the early 1800s. This collection was extremely influential on many German composers during the Romantic era, such as Brahms and Mahler, and even into the twentieth century.

For Schumann, the connection to rural living comes mostly in the form of forest locations. His Opus 24 and Opus 39 song cycles, both entitled *Leiderkreis*, employ images

of the forest, its creatures, and its people. A sample of some of the titles of the Opus 39, with text by Joseph van Eichendorff (1788-1857), supports this hypothesis: “In der Fremde” (“From the Direction of Home, Behind the Red Flashes of Lightning,”) “Waldgespräch” (“Conversation in the Wood,”) “Auf einer Burg” (“In a Castle,”) “In der Fremde” (“I Hear the Brooklets Rushing,”) and “Im Walde” (“In the Woods,”) The fifth song of the cycle, “Mondnacht” (“Moon-night,”) contains a pretty depiction of the countryside:

*Die Luft ging durch die Felder,
Die Ähren wogten sacht,
Es rauschten leis die Wälder,
So sternklar war die Nacht.³³*

(The air coalesces with the fields,
The ears of corn sway smoothly,
The forests rustle lightly,
So clarion was the night.)³⁴

Both the tenth and the eleventh songs of this cycle refer to hunting. Many of the songs express a sense of yearning created by the landscape that then translates into a yearning for a beloved, as is typical of a large amount of this Romantic Era poetry. Again, from the fifth cycle of the song, “Mondnacht:”

*Es war, als hätt' der Himmel,
Die Erde still geküsst,*

³³ Robert Schumann, *Liederkreis*, Ed. Sergius Kagen (New York: International Music Co.)

³⁴ Author's translation.

*Dass sie im Blütenschimmer,
Von ihm nur träumen müsst.*³⁵

(It was as if the heavens
The earth quietly kissed,
So that in a shimmer of blossoms,
Of him only she must dream.)³⁶

Of Eichendorff's poetry, Karen A. Hindenlang writes:

Incredibly spacious landscapes are a hallmark of his work. The poet painted enormous scenes, creating images of vast distances that exceed quotidian vision. Frequently his landscapes are presented from a strangely omniscient viewpoint fixed high in the air; the view simultaneously embraces an entire vista and the tiniest distant detail.³⁷

Hindenlang goes on to explain that these landscapes, for Eichendorff, were his way of working out human existence and position in the universe.³⁸ Schumann's particular gift with Eichendorff's poetry was his ability to be able to depict these same landscapes, as well as their particular ambience, through his use of both a melody and an accompaniment that become partners in interpreting the poetry. The *Groves Music Online* article regarding Schumann's music explains, "Motivic recall and transformation are deftly aligned with poetic content in the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*...where a compact but expressive figure first

³⁵ Robert Schumann, *Liederkreis*. Ed. Sergius Kagen (New York: International Music Co.)

³⁶ Author's translation.

³⁷ Karen A. Hindenlang, "Eichendorff's 'Auf einer Burg' and Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Opus 39," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 574. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/763536> (accessed January 26, 2011).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 575.

introduced in the accompaniment of the opening song (“In der Fremde”) becomes an emblem for yearning, removal in time and space, and finally for ecstatic union with nature.”³⁹

In other songs, Schumann uses the forest imagery to induce a state of dread or fright. His Opus 119 grouping *Drei Gedichte aus den Waldliedern* (“Three Songs from the Waldliedern”), with texts by Gustav Pffarius, contains three stories about the woods, two of which are meant to incite fear. The first song, “Die Hütte,” (“The Cottage”) speaks of a charming cottage in the forest that someone has built to protect himself against the elements and give him domestic comfort. However, the second song, “Warnung” (“Warning”), cautions of the spooky rustling of leaves in the night in the woods and of an owl with eyes like fire. The third song “Der Bräutigam und die Birke” (“The Bridegroom and the Birch Tree,”) is a disturbing tale of a conversation between a doomed birch tree and a bridegroom making many demands upon it, until at last it is burned in the fire.

In his songs, Schumann most frequently uses textual references to nature to illustrate and celebrate romantic love. Depictions of mountainsides, flowers, and starry skies help to emphasize the intoxication of this love, and Schumann’s music further deepens the sensations of longing and love found in the poetry.

Several other Romantic Era composers used similar or the same poetry as that of Schubert and Schumann. Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) was a late Romantic era composer who, as previously mentioned, was strongly influenced by the folk poetry of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Mahler’s song cycles *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (*Songs of a Wayfarer*)

³⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Schumann, Robert.”
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40704pg9>> (accessed January 26, 2011).

and *Lieder aus 'Des Knaben Wunderhorn'* (*Songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn*), as well as his second, third and fourth symphonies, were taken from and shaped by the work. His early cantata *Das klagende Lied* (*Songs of Lamentation*) show how his own poetic style as writer of the texts was influenced by the Germanic folk tradition. The cantata contains three separate songs that relate the love story of a queen and her knight, often describing forest locales. Mahler's works for the voice, especially his song cycles mentioned, have as their hallmark the veneration of nature, and they sometimes describe scenes of rural life. For example, the third song of his *Wunderhorn* cycle entitled "Das irdische Leben" ("The Earthly Life") depicts the process of sowing, growing and reaping corn that is then ground and made into bread, but not before the family's child dies of hunger. The fourth song, "Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?" ("Who Thought up This Little Song?"), describes a young girl in a house high on a mountain whose lovelorn song carries across the mountain meadows and ponds. The seventh song of the same cycle, "Rheinlegendchen" ("Rhine Legend"), also speaks of the reaping process of grain. A young man harvests his field, using the analogy of bringing in his crops to contrast his inability to keep his sweetheart.

The composer who was perhaps most influenced by Germanic folk poetry and stories during the Romantic era was Johannes Brahms (1833-1897). He set numerous groupings of folk poetry throughout the course of his career. Some of these texts were from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, but most were from other sources he collected during investigation of early music. Many legends of the forest, of the courting of young maids, and of the sylvan flora and fauna present themselves in these works. Brahms cared so deeply for the folk idiom that he compiled collections folksongs as part of his research into older musical forms. Three sets of eight, sixteen and twenty German folk songs

respectively were published posthumously. Two collections were also presented to the Schumann family: the 28 *Deutsche Volkslieder* to Clara and the *Volks-Kinderlieder* to the Schumann children. In addition, forty-nine folk songs were published in seven volumes as the *Deutsches Volkslieder* in 1884.⁴⁰

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) composed an extensive amount of vocal music of which there are numerous pieces containing natural themes and a few that exhibit explicitly rural and agricultural themes. One example is his song “Die Spröde” (“The Shepherdess”) from his *Goethe-Lieder* that depicts a pastoral scene of lambs and a young maiden on the countryside. Another song from that same book, “Anacreons Grab” (“Anacreon’s Grave”) refers to pastoral scenes not only with its mention of natural elements from the Greek countryside, such as the laurel tree, but also with its naming of Anacreon, a Greek poet. Wolf’s *Mörücke-Lieder* also contains several examples of overtly rural or agricultural subject matter. “Jägerlied” (“Hunter’s Song”) describes birds on the mountaintops as the hunter stalks his prey, all the while yearning for his love. This short piece is folk-like, with simple accompaniment textures and melodies that are believable as a tune a hunter may sing in the mountains. “Der Jäger” (“The Hunter”) from the same book is also about hunting. This time the hunter welcomes a hunt out in the storms in order to spite his love, with whom he has had a fight. The song describes the joy of hunting and the satisfaction of his independence in nature in contrast to his imaginings of her at home, weeping that he is gone. The agitated piano accompaniment of fast, broken chords seems to depict the hunter riding out among the forest. Finally, again from the *Mörücke-Lieder* is “Storchenbotschaft” (“Stork’s Message,”) a piece that again directly depicts a rural scene. This time, a shepherd

⁴⁰ *Grove Music Online* s.v. “Brahms, Johannes,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51879pg11> (accessed February 1, 2011).

is out among the hills when two storks visit him to tell him that he is to be the father of twins.

The works of these composers presented here are meant to give an overview of what this poetry was like and how Romantic Era composers of the voice interpreted it. The elevation of nature was a prominent characteristic of Romantic Era poetry, and thus, of Romantic Era vocal art music. In this way, Romantic Era music deepened its relationship to nature, the countryside, and rural life, leading to further musical developments in this subject area towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the music of France, England and America.

CHAPTER 3. RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES IN BRITISH VOCAL MUSIC OF THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

English folk song, one of the glories of the English musical heritage, had nearly died out by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1928, Donald Attwater described his perspective on the plight of English folk song:

All old folk singers agree that up to about 1840 everyone in the country parts of England could and did sing the old songs, in the traditional way. It is not clear why that particular date should mark a break. For a hundred and fifty years Puritanism did its worst, apparently with not much success where songs were concerned, and perhaps the first serious blow came from John Wesley when he 'converted' half of England (which badly needed it) and popularized evangelical hymns. The 'industrial revolution' followed, continuing to depopulate the rural districts up to our own day; side by side with it went the 'agrarian revolution' which did away with peasant status by enclosing the common lands, and disposing of the yeoman by buying him out. Folk-song lived on among what was left of the 'peasantry,' but about a hundred years ago, farmers began to give up their 'harvest-homes,' shearing suppers, rent dinners, and other occasions when landlords, tenants and labourers met together to eat, drink and sing; they are quite gone now, and with them the last real stronghold of folk-song. Then came compulsory schooling, in 1870, and this particular brand of teacher and curriculum inflicted upon the country children of England is one in face of which no moribund art or traditional culture can recover or survive.⁴¹

This slow death of the traditional English folk song evidently alarmed several researchers enough that they began studying and compiling these folk songs. Lucy Broadwood, Sabine Baring-Gould, Frank and Emma Mary Kidson, and Fuller Maitland

⁴¹ Donald Attwater, "English Folk-Song," *Music and Letters* 9, no. 2 (April 1928): 137-138. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/726706> (accessed February 3, 2011).

were some of the individuals involved in this collection and research. The Folk-Song Society, established in 1898 by Broadwood, Frank Kidson, Maitland, and others, endeavored to prevent the musical heritage of the English common people from being lost.

Researcher and music administrator Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) was among the earliest folk song collectors. He first became inspired to do so after seeing an English folk dance in 1899 and later in 1903 when he heard a gardener singing “The Seeds of Love” while he worked.⁴² The tunefulness and beauty of this music convinced Sharp of the importance of preserving English folk songs, a task to which he devoted himself for the rest of his life. He wrote and published several important scholarly works on the subject, including *Folk Songs from Somerset* and *English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions*. His folk song collections and writings about folk songs influenced composers of vocal music in England, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, George Butterworth, and Gustav Holst who, in turn, participated in the English folk song revival, collecting folk songs and exhibiting the traces of those songs in their own music.

As a member of the Folk-Song Society, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) started collecting folk songs in 1904.⁴³ His first collection, *Bushes and Briars*, was published in 1908. Over the course of his career, he collected more than eight hundred folk songs. The majority of these were extracted from the regions of Sussex, Norfolk and Essex,⁴⁴ many of them during his walking tours of the countryside with his friend and colleague, Gustav Holst (1874-1934). While vocal music would not form a prominent part

⁴² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Cecil Sharp,”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25594> (accessed February 3, 2011).

⁴³ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Ralph Vaughan Williams,”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42507> (accessed February 3, 2011).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of Holst's output, it did play a large part in that of Vaughan Williams, both in choral and solo vocal categories.

Rural scenes and pastoral ideas also found a place in much of Vaughan Williams' instrumental works. For instance, his *Third Symphony*, also known as his *Pastoral Symphony*, evokes the English countryside. He wrote several orchestral fantasias inspired by folk tunes, including his *Bucolic Suite* (unpublished), the three *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, *Fantasia on English Folk Songs* (now lost), and *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* (unpublished). He also wrote an orchestral suite for a film, entitled *The Story of a Flemish Farm*. His stage works also feature rural and agricultural themes. *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, premiered in 1922, would later become part of his larger morality play/opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Perhaps more significant to the subject matter at hand is his romantic ballad opera *Hugh the Drover*. This opera is set in a small Cotswold village in the nineteenth century.

A survey of Vaughan Williams' solo vocal works shows evidence of how deeply influenced he was both by the musical style and the subjects of his native folk music. In fact, William Kimmel identified it as one of three main influences on Vaughan Williams' melodic style, the others being early church music (including Gregorian chant), and what Kimmel called "contemporary melodic devices."⁴⁵ Kimmel believed that the influence of English folk music can most easily be discerned in Vaughan Williams' use of the modal melodies common in English folk tunes, primarily the Aeolian, Dorian and Mixolydian modes.⁴⁶ Pentatonic scales, a common feature of folk music of Western Europe and the

⁴⁵ William Kimmel, "Vaughan Williams' Melodic Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Oct. 1941): 491. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/739496> (accessed February 3, 2011).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 492.

United States, are also frequently present in Vaughan Williams' melodies.⁴⁷ Kimmel is careful to point out that the composer does not simply reproduce the melodies or the form of folk songs in his music. In fact, his music features a certain freedom of form not inherent in most folk music, but it does contain occasional aural hallmarks that more directly point towards the folk idiom. Kimmel writes that

certain characteristic figures recur again and again in Vaughan Williams' melodies....I do not mean to infer that Vaughan Williams consciously inserted such figures into his melodies in order to secure a folk quality, but I would rather point out those features of his melodic style which give it a definite pastoral quality.... Occasionally melodies are found which are definite imitations of folk melodies with symmetrical phrases and a strict metrical pattern. These are unquestionably employed to evoke the definite mood associated with folk songs.⁴⁸

Kimmel here refers to the rustic quality often attributed to Vaughan Williams' music that goes beyond the literal mimicking of folk tunes. Even though his specific melodies may not be literal restatements of folk songs, they transmit the mood and atmosphere of folk tunes.

Another element that reinforces this atmosphere of the countryside and rural experiences are the texts of several of his vocal and choral works. Ursula Vaughan Williams, the composer's second wife and biographer, drew a natural connection between Vaughan Williams' art music and folk music, stating, "it should not be forgotten that one of the glories of folksong is the complete partnership of words and music, a balance that the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 494.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 495.

long periods of oral transmission had refined and perfected.”⁴⁹ One of his first collections, *Folksongs from the Eastern Countries*, compiled between 1903 and 1906 and edited by Cecil Sharp, showed a strong bent towards rural and agricultural subject matter even in the titles of the songs. “Bushes and Briars,” “A Bold Young Farmer,” “The Lark in the Morning,” “The Lincolnshire Farmer,” and “The Sheffield Apprentice” are some of the songs reflecting this tendency. A later collection from 1912, *Folksongs for Schools*, almost exclusively demonstrates this same subject matter in songs such as “The Jolly Ploughboy,” “The Cuckoo and the Nightingale,” “The Servant Man and Husbandman,” “The Female Highwayman,” “The Carter,” “I will give my love an apple,” “The Fox,” “Farmyard Song,” and “The Painful Plough.”

According to William Kimmel, Vaughan Williams chose for his subject matter poems of three different categories: those of folk or folk-like nature, those that are from the Elizabethan era, and those of a mystical nature, mostly from poets of his own time.⁵⁰ Several of Vaughan Williams’ song cycles exhibit subject matter related to rural life. His cycle for voice and violin, *Along the Field*, with texts by A.E. Housman (1859-1936),⁵¹ uses the palette of nature to reflect upon three main subjects: the cooling of love (no. 4), the fickleness of love, separation (no. 3) and death. The seventh song of the cycle, “Fancy’s Knell,” looks at death through a pastoral lens. The poem begins quite cheerfully:

When lads come home from labour
At Abdon under Clew

⁴⁹ Ursula Williams, from *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* 99 (1972-1973): 83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/766156> (accessed February 3, 2011)

⁵⁰ William Kimmel, “Vaughan Williams’ Choice of Words,” *Music & Letters* 19, no. 2 (April 1938): 132. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/727060> (accessed February 7, 2011).

⁵¹ All texts from *Along the Field* are quoted from the Oxford University Press Edition (1954).

A man would call his neighbor
And both would call for me.
And where the light in lances,
Across the mead was laid,
There to the dances
I fetched my flute and played.

The poem continues to describe the pleasure of leisure in the countryside. The poet writes of the light in the countryside, the greenness of the grass, and of the pairing of young lovers. What seems to be a happy poem, however, ends on a dismal note in the last line of the final stanza:

The lofty shade advances,
I fetch my flute and play:
Come, lads, and learn the dances
And praise the tune today.
To-morrow, more's the pity,
Away we both must hie,
To air the ditty,
And to earth I.

The eighth and final song of the cycle has a similar tone⁵²:

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

⁵² Many other composers have found this text compelling and have set it to music including Samuel Barber, George Butterworth, and Ivor Gurney.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

Housman uses the scene of a rural countryside to tell the story of a young man courting a maiden in the longer poem, "Good-bye," which Vaughan Williams sets as song number six of the cycle. Here, a seemingly innocuous setting of fields of gold cup flowers and grassy meads provides space for a young man to work his manipulations on the mind and emotions of the young maid. His words, speaking of the need to preserve innocence, are belied by his attempts to force physical affection on the girl. This situation does not end the way the young man intends, however, as the maiden bids him goodbye.

Housman describes the cooling of love between two individuals in the fourth song of Vaughan Williams' cycle, "In the morning, in the morning":

In the morning, in the morning,
In the happy field of hay,
Oh they looked at one another
By the light of day.

In the blue and silver morning
On the haycock as they lay,
Oh they looked at one another
And they looked away.

In addition to the images of green grass, haycocks and fields of flowers, the cycle also contains several other rural images. Trees with silvery leaves, fields of grain, bowers

of laurels, and sweeping country sides are more images presented in the poetry, and thereby in the cycle. All of the songs of the cycle contain such images, creating a sense of cohesion and continuity.

Housman's 1896 publication of *A Shropshire Lad* had great significance to Vaughan Williams' song output. This book contained sixty-three poems about an imaginary countryside bearing much resemblance to English rural areas. The work was inspirational to several other British composers, among them Ivory Gurney, George Butterworth, and Peter Warlock, who, along with Vaughan Williams, set poems from the book. Vaughan Williams' cycle *On Wenlock Edge* contains six poems from Housman's work. The poetry, while obviously written by an educated and gifted poet, retains a folk-like quality in the simplicity of the subjects chosen as well as in the structure of the poetry itself. Most of the poetic lines are short and symmetrical, and their structures as well as the ABAB end rhyme scheme lend themselves fairly readily to regular periodic musical phrases. The first poem "On Wenlock Edge," demonstrates these qualities in its first stanza:

On Wenlock edge the wood's in trouble;
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
The gale, it plies the saplings double,
And thick on Severn snow the leaves.⁵³

Housman often uses the innocuous setting of the countryside to allude to death, and most of the poems in Vaughan Williams' cycle are of this variety. The third song of the

⁵³ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *On Wenlock Edge* (Boosey & Hawkes)

cycle, “Is my team ploughing?” relates a disturbing conversation between the ghost of a young man and his good friend. The ghost asks about the activities of his team of horses, his sweetheart, and his friend. In the end, the friend replies thusly:

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.^{54 55}

The musical choices Vaughan Williams made with this poem enhance the dramatic atmosphere. He uses a thin, drawn texture for the accompaniment of the ghost’s questions and a thicker, more robust accompaniment for the living friend’s reply. The accompaniment for the ghost consists primarily of sustained, open chords whose hollowness creates an ethereal atmosphere. Conversely, the melody for the living friend uses a wider range, and the chords contain much more color.

Vaughn Williams’ well-known cycle, *Songs of Travel*, with poetry by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), explores a lonely and transient lifestyle in the country. The poetry contrasts the concept of home and of being settled in a domestic life with the life of a wanderer. The first song of the set, “The Vagabond,” is often performed. In it, the traveler boldly and willing accepts his fate to wander. Carol Kimball remarked that this song has an “open air quality.”⁵⁶ Vaughan Williams’ active bass line in the piano accompaniment seems to illustrate the traveler’s footsteps as he strides along the road. The melody is fairly

⁵⁴ This text was also set by George Butterworth and Ivor Gurney.

⁵⁵ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *On Wenlock Edge* (Boosey & Hawkes)

⁵⁶ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature*, Redmond, WA: Pst...Inc (1996): 314.

uncomplicated, and the poetry is such that it seems it could be a folk song from any rural locale. The wanderer states his thesis in the second stanza:

Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above,
And the road below me.⁵⁷

Throughout the cycle, the wanderer idealizes many of the things he claims not to want, especially romantic love. Yet, even these poems about love end with the young man leaving. The fourth song of the cycle, “Youth and Love,” concludes:

Thick as stars at night when the moon is down,
Pleasures assail him. He to his nobler fate
Fares; and but waves a hand as he passes on,
Cries but a wayward word to her at the garden gate,
Sings but a boyish stave and his face is gone.⁵⁸

The final song, “I have trod the upward and the downward slope,” shows, both poetically and musically, that the wanderer has resigned himself to his fate. Gone is the boisterous music of the first song of his youth. The text in its entirety reads:

I have trod the upward and the downward slope,
I have endured and done in days before;

⁵⁷ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Songs of Travel* (London: Boosey & Hawkes)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope;
And I have lived and loved, and closed the door.⁵⁹

Vaughan Williams' cycle *Four Poems of Fredegond Shove* similarly illustrates rural scenes. The first song, "Motion and Stillness," sets a poem that succinctly describes a rural scene by the sea:

The sea shells lie as cold as death
Under the sea,
The clouds move in a wasted wreath
Eternally;
The cows sleep on the tranquil slopes
Above the bay;
The ships like evanescent hopes
Vanish away.⁶⁰

The text of "Four Nights," the second song, uses images from nature to describe the changing of the four seasons. Swans on lakes, willow trees, scythes harvesting ripened grain, yellow stars, harvest sunsets, and the silence of winter are all described with vivid language. An excerpt from the poem:

When I lie down in summertime
I still can hear the scythes that smite
the ripened flowers in their prime,
And still can see the meadows white.
In summertime my rest is small,
If I find any rest at all.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems of Fredegond Shove* (London: Oxford University Press)

The third poem of the set, entitled “The New Ghost,” recounts an early spring scene in a country churchyard as a ghost rises from the grave to meet his Lord. Shove uses several images from nature as metaphors for new birth.

The Lord held his hand fast, and you could see
That He kissed the unsheathed ghost that was gone free
As a hot sun, on a March day, kisses the cold ground;
And the spirit answered, for he knew well that his peace was
found.⁶²

Reminiscent of *Die schöne Müllerin*, the fourth poem of Vaughan Williams’ cycle is on the subject of a water mill. Shove details the daily life of the miller and his family. The poetry speaks of the miller’s sleeping wife, the children on their way to school, the décor of their home, and the dust created by grinding wheat. Whether or not it was intentional, Shove’s poem carries strong similarities to Wilhelm Müller’s “Halt!” from *Die schöne Müllerin* with idealized descriptions of the warm, welcoming, and clean miller’s home and the happy miller family in the following stanza:

The supper stands on the clean-scrubbed board,
And the miller drinks like a thirsty lord;
The young men come for their daughter’s sake,
But she never knows which one to take;
She drives her needle, and pins her stuff,
While the moon shines gold, and the lamp shines buff.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

According to William Kimmel, this set is one of Vaughan Williams' works that shows his "love of nature and the countryside."⁶⁴ More specifically, he writes "'The Water Mill,' which Vaughan Williams set in 1925, is typical, concerned with barefoot children, willows and swallows, whirrs of water and smells of rain, dusty flour and 'clean-scrubbed board.'"⁶⁵

Several other major works by Vaughan Williams show a tendency towards this same subject matter. Several pieces in his *Ten Blake Songs* for tenor (soprano) and oboe, set to texts by William Blake (1757-1827), use pastoral images, namely "The Piper," "The Shepherd," and "The Sun-flower." However, the grouping is unified more by spiritual images rather than rural images, as much of the poetry has little to do with nature and fits more easily into the third category suggested by Kimmel, that of the mystical.

The same may be said of Vaughan Williams' song cycle, *The House of Life*, with poetry by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). In fact, Kimmel makes the case that almost none of Rossetti's poetry, either in this cycle or in any of the rest of his works, shows an affinity or relationship to nature.⁶⁶ However, one song of the cycle, the well-known "Silent Noon," is an exception. Kimmel states that with this sonnet, Rossetti takes a departure from his normal mode, "achiev[ing] a natural and fresh picture of nature."⁶⁷ In the sonnet, Rossetti describes two lovers enjoying summer noontime in the countryside. Dragonflies,

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Kimmel., 134.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 135.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

fields of golden flowers, blossoming hedges, and even weedy herbs work together to help create this perfect, still moment in time for the lovers. From the first stanza of the poem:

All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorne hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hourglass.⁶⁸

The structure of Rossetti's poem is more complex than folk poetry, which tends toward simple AABB, ABAB, ABCB, or even AAA rhymes and regular rhythm patterns, e.g.

In Scarlet Town, where I was born,
There was a fair maid dwellin'
Made every youth cry well-a-day
Her name was Barbara Allen.

Consequently, Vaughan Williams did not treat Rossetti's text with the parallel periods that would better suit folk-like poetry, such as he wrote for "The Vagabond." Instead, he used unequal phrase lengths determined by the poetic scansion and constructed a piano accompaniment that underscores the natural atmosphere and suggests the living things depicted in the poem. Long, sustained chords, sometimes thick textured and other times thin textured, allow the ear to "hear" this suspended moment. The vocal line seems to

⁶⁸ Ralph Vaughan Williams, *House of Life* (Boca Raton, FL: Masters Music Publications, Inc.)

hover over the accompaniment, much as the billowing clouds hover over the two lovers or the dragonfly hovers “like a blue thread loosened from the sky.”

Vaughan Williams was by far the most prolific composer of songs in his generation. However, there were several other British composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who composed songs on rural and agricultural themes. Roger Quilter (1877-1953) wrote several short song sets that use these themes. His *Three Blake Songs*, *Three Pastoral Songs*, *Two September Songs*, *Shakespeare Songs*, and his *Old English Songs*, which happen to be folk songs, all display this subject matter.

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) had an affinity for the poetry of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), whose work belongs to the movement called Naturalism, which speaks of people being shaped and changed by their every day environment. In Hardy’s case, this shaping often had a negative connotation. Hardy’s poetry was difficult to set to music. It often had rambling lines and was not always symmetrical. According to N.G. Long, Finzi overcame these intrinsic issues by choosing melodies that tend to follow the poetry with a syllabic setting and wrote several successful song cycles. “This freedom of the vocal line within the framework of a more tightly constructed instrumental accompaniment is the secret to the effectiveness of so much of Finzi’s vocal writing. It is in effect an extension of the recitative technique, which explains why it is always so grateful to sing . . .”⁶⁹

Several of Finzi’s song cycles contain elements of rural life. His Opus 2 cycle, *By Footpath and Stile*, is one example. The cycle speaks of calling on friends in the country, remembering a picnic, and the budding leaves in spring. In the third song of the cycle, “The

⁶⁹ N.G. Long, “The Songs of Gerald Finzi,” *Tempo* New Series, no. 2 (Dec., 1946): 9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/943970> (accessed Feb 8, 2011).

Oxen,” the narrator recalls the old legend that cattle and oxen kneel at midnight on Christmas Eve, just as they knelt at the manger cradling the infant Christ. The first stanza of the poem reads:

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
“Now they are all on their knees,”
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.⁷⁰

Finzi used Hardy’s poetry for his cycle *Earth and Air and Rain* (Op. 15). Here, the references to nature are not central to the subject matter as they are in *Footpath and Stile*. In the first song, “Summer Schemes,” the narrator speaks of taking to the countryside to explore the crags and streams. There is an appealingly child-like sense of wonder pervading this poem. Several of the other songs display a similar tendency, using repeated nonsense phrases, such as the refrain “Rollicum-rorum, to-lol-lorum, Rollicum-rorum, to-lol-lay!” in the sixth song.⁷¹ A verse-chorus structure pervades much of the cycle, giving it a folksy feel. This can especially be seen in the song “To Lizbie Brown.” The accessible formal structure lends a comfortable, folk-like and rural feeling to the work.

Much like Ralph Vaughan Williams, George Butterworth (1885-1916) had an affinity for British folk song and folk dances. He met Vaughan Williams and Cecil Sharp in the early 1900s and joined the Folk-Song Society in 1906.⁷² Butterworth wrote a handful of

⁷⁰ Gerald Finzi, *By Footpath and Stile* (London: Boosey & Hawkes)

⁷¹ In fact, much of the poetry of Thomas Hardy that was set by Finzi has a child-like whimsy or themes of childhood, for example “A Young Man’s Exhortation,” “Budmouth Dears,” “Childhood Among the Ferns,” and “To Lizbie Brown.”

⁷² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “George Butterworth”
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04467> (accessed February 10, 2011).

meticulously crafted compositions, many of which were folk-inspired, until his death in the war trenches in August of 1916. *Grove Music Online* describes Butterworth's place in history: "Butterworth belonged to the generation of British composers constructing for themselves, after the downfall of Oscar Wilde and decadence, a minimalist masculinity in two pastoral images: the conservation of folk music and the poetry of A.E. Housman."⁷³ Butterworth arranged a set of eleven folk songs, his *Folk Songs from Sussex*, and several folk dance pieces. His main contributions for voice with rural themes were two song cycles with texts by Housman, *Six Songs from a Shropshire Lad* and *Bredon Hill and Other Songs*.

The first and last songs of the *Shropshire Lad* contain the most obvious rural images. The final song, "Is my team ploughing," as previously noted, was also set by Vaughan Williams. While Vaughan Williams' setting contains a chant-like modal melody for the ghost character and forte dynamics with chordal accompaniments for the friend's reply, the Butterworth setting employs a wider melodic range, faster dialogue, and chordal accompaniment throughout the piece. The first song, "Loveliest of Trees," describes the blossoming cherry tree in spring.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ George Butterworth, *A Shropshire Lad and Other Songs* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd.)

The five songs of *Bredon Hill* use a natural imagery throughout the cycle. The first song describes the ringing of church bells across the countryside.

In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.⁷⁵

The second poem, “Oh fair enough are sky and plain” contrasts the charms of the countryside to that of the ocean:

Oh fair enough are sky and plain,
But I know fairer far:
Those are as beautiful again
That in the water are;

The pools and rivers wash so clean
The trees and clouds and air,
The like on earth was never seen,
And oh that I were there.

These are the thoughts I often think
As I stand gazing down
In act upon the cressy brink
To strip and dive and drown;

⁷⁵ Ibid.

But in the golden sanded brook
And azure meres I spy
A silly lad that longs and looks
And wishes he were I.⁷⁶

The vivid imagery depicted in the poem is stated plainly enough, leading to a folk-like feeling. Butterworth used certain compositional techniques that give more sophistication to this folk-like feeling. According to Paul Leitch, Butterworth often constructed his music around a singular recurrent motive in both the voice and the accompaniment, a technique similar to one used by Housman for his poems, which were also frequently organized around one central image or concept.⁷⁷ Butterworth also uses text painting, such as the descending piano melody used for the introduction of “Loveliest of trees” that represents the falling cherry blossoms. Overall, Butterworth’s accompaniments are less complex than Vaughan Williams’ and his textures tend to be a bit thinner, giving the majority of the responsibility for expression to the voice and thus to the poetry. This attention to textual detail is especially noticeable in such songs as “Loveliest of trees” and “O fair enough are sky and plain.”

Peter Warlock (1894-1930), born Philip Heseltine, was less influenced by folk song than others in his generation. He shared their passion for re-invigorating English music; however, Warlock’s interests centered more on early English concert music, especially the English *ayres* from the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. This is not to say that Warlock did not make use of English folk song. In fact, some of his works bear the mark of it. “Little Trotty Wagtail,” for example, uses a modal melody as well as a text by John Clare that is

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Paul Leitch, “Butterworth’s Housman Re-assessed: Lad Culture,” *The Musical Times* 140, no. 1866 (Spring 1999): 19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1193484> (accessed Feb 10, 2011).

reminiscent of folk poetry.⁷⁸ Other works use fragments or whole portions of folk tunes (“Roister Doister” from *Peterisms*).⁷⁹

Warlock, much like Schumann, excelled in smaller musical forms; the majority of his output is that of solo songs. His choice of poetry was very diverse and wide-ranging. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), and Thomas Campion (1567-1620) find a place among many lesser-known poets such as George Peele (1556-1596), Robert Nichols (1893-1944), Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), Edward Shanks (1892-1953), and Thomas Fletcher (1666-1713). He was particularly skillful with his melodic text setting, but was criticized by Gerald Cockshott of “over-harmonization” of his songs.⁸⁰ This fact notwithstanding, Cockshott writes of Warlock’s best songs that “few composers have been so scrupulous in their choice of poetry [as Warlock] and few have shown such care in giving each syllable the accent it requires.”⁸¹

Warlock wrote but a few songs on rural or agricultural themes. His *Three Belloc Songs* set to poetry of Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) hold two examples. The first song, “Ha’nacker Mill,” uses the images of a small town with a mill as a stage to describe the desolation brought to England by an unspoken force. The second song, “My own country,” describes a long journey and a desire for the comforts of the narrator’s native land. Sheep in valleys, beech and yew trees, and verdant woods are images used in the poem. A single song entitled “Milkmaids,” with text by Dr. James Smith, a fourteenth century writer, speaks of two milkmaids, their dress, and the cider and sugar they carry to make desserts.

⁷⁸ Gerald Cockshott. “Some Notes on the Songs of Peter Warlock,” *Music & Letters* 21, no. 3 (July, 1940): 249. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/728361> (accessed Feb 10, 2011).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 253.

⁸¹ Ibid., 255.

The song “I have twelve oxen” is a folk-like text from the sixteenth century by an anonymous poet. It reads much like a child’s nursery rhyme, depicting four different oxen of four different colors in four different locations interspersed with nonsense syllables. The poetry “When as the rye,” also published as “Chopcherry” in Warlock’s first set of *Peterisms* is by George Peele, another fourteenth century writer. The text is simple, yet evocative:

Whenas the rye reach to the chin,
And chop-cherry, chop-cherry ripe within,
Straw berries swimming in the cream,
And school boys playing in the stream;
Then, O, then, O then, O, my true love said,
Till that time come again
She could not live a maid.⁸²

“The Countryman,” with text by late sixteenth century writer John Chalkhill, is an interesting early example of a writer contrasting the charms of the country with the fickleness of city and court life.

.....
For courts are full of flattery,
As hath too oft been tried;
.....
The city full of wantonness
And both are full of pride.
.....
But oh, the honest countryman,
Speaks truly from his heart,

⁸² Peter Warlock, *Warlock Songs* (London: Boosey & Hawks)

.....
His pride is in his tillage,
His horses and his cart:
.....

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One major work by Warlock is entirely on rural themes, his cycle for tenor, flute, English horn, and string quartet, *The Curlew*, with four texts by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). The work begins with an extensive introduction in the instruments before the entry of the voice. The texts reflect a rural setting by the sea and musings on lost love and yearning. Elements of British folklore, such as royalty and witches, are also intertwined within the cycle. From the third piece of the cycle, “The Withering of the Boughs”:

I know of the leafy paths the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles of wool,
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.⁸⁴

There is symmetry created in the cycle through the poetry used in the first and last songs that mentions the hair of the lost lover lying on the chest of the beloved. Imitations of birdcalls feature throughout the cycle, often in the English horn. The music is overall quite dissonant and melancholy, using bitonality as well as many descending vocal lines.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Peter Warlock, *The Curlew* (Boca Raton, FL: Edwin F. Kalmus & Co., Inc.)

Like Warlock, Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) was another exception to the rule of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British composers in that he was not significantly influenced by the folk song movement. Gurney was also unique among his contemporaries in that he was not only a gifted composer but also a talented poet. Along with some of his own poetry, Gurney set many poets popular with his contemporaries, among them Elizabethan and Jacobean writers as well as the writings of A.E Housman. Unlike many, however, he also set the poetry of other World War I era poets.

His musical idiom was Germanic in nature, drawing from the Romantic tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century German composers. It features thick, lush and colorful chords that at times were limited by the timbre of the piano and seemed to demand the color and depth of expression possible with a symphony orchestra. Gurney did not concern himself with the painting of specific texts within a poem; instead, his aim was to convey the over-arching emotional atmosphere and idea of a poem. As might be expected from a composer who was also a poet, his text setting tends toward a scrupulous observance of word-stress and inflection.

Several of Gurney's song groups and cycles contain songs on rural and agricultural themes. The collection issued as *A First Volume of Ten Songs* holds several songs that fit this description. "Down by the Sally Gardens," which uses the text from the original folksong paired with a new melody and accompaniment, takes places in a willow-filled countryside. "You are my sky" compares the two moods of a lover to a sunny meadow and stormy clouds. Hilaire Belloc's poem "Ha'nacker Mill," previously cited, also finds a place in this collection.

Gurney's cycle *Ludlow and Teme*, with texts by A.E. Housman (1859-1936), uses many natural images. The first song, "When smoke went up from Ludlow," portrays an imaginary conversation between a farmer and a mocking blackbird. "Far in a western brookland" describes the ubiquitous and romanticized wanderer. "Ludlow Fair" characterizes attendees at a country fair.

The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,
There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,
The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,
And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.⁸⁵

Finally, the discussion turns to the music of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), whose significance to English music in the twentieth century cannot be overstated. He brought earlier composers' dreams of a national English art music to full fruition, especially in opera, a genre to which he contributed several masterworks that are now in the standard repertoire, such as *Peter Grimes*. Peter Pears has written that Britten deliberately distanced himself from some of the earlier composers of the English folk song revival (Ralph Vaughan Williams among them), seeming to indicate that these composers were less talented than he.⁸⁶ His musical style was extremely studied and intellectual, yet did not lose the ability for emotional expression. He juxtaposed older compositional techniques, such as counterpoint and passacaglia or ground bass, with newer-sounding harmonies, chromaticism, and a thoroughly modern rhythmic vigor.

⁸⁵ Ivor Gurney, *Ludlow and Teme* (London: Stainer & Bell Ltd.)

⁸⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Benjamin Britten,"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg2> (accessed February 10, 2011).

One of his particular gifts was for text setting. Britten spent time a significant amount of time making new realizations of Henry Purcell's songs, as well as the latter's opera *Dido and Aeneas*. This labor of love introduced Britten to Purcell's superb skill in following the word inflections of the English language, something that would continue to inform Britten's own approach to the English language for his entire career. According to Pears, for whom much of Britten's vocal music was written, "the composer extracts from the words their latent music....He can match the thorniest epigrams with an apt and memorable phrase."⁸⁷ Britten's use of rhythmic asymmetry, melodic inflection, and irregular phrase lengths leads to a natural flow of language in his operas and other vocal works.

Britten largely disliked the composers of the Romantic era. He especially hated the music of Brahms. To his credit, he often returned to review entire scores of the older composer only to find that his original opinion of their inferiority was confirmed.⁸⁸ Britten preferred neo-Classical composers such as Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Baroque composers Monteverdi and Bach, and the late Classical/early Romantic era composers Christoph Gluck (1714-1787), Franz Schubert, and Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826).⁸⁹

Two additional musical influences on Britten were the compositions of Mahler and Shostakovich. Mahler, in particular, was cited by Britten as being readily perceived in his own music. However, this similarity is lost with all but the most careful analysis of the styles of the two composers. Donald Mitchell indicates that Britten's association with

⁸⁷ Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 61.

⁸⁸ The Earl of Harewood, "The Man" in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 6.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Mahler was one not of style or technique but one of “overt expressiveness.”⁹⁰ Even after all of Britten’s exposure and study of these composers, his own style, his own color and approach, come through clearly. Pears said that his style is not all “cut from the same roll of cloth” and that musically, “he is not a Unitarian, he is a Greek who worships all the gods.”⁹¹ Mitchell concurs, stating that:

His ‘style,’ his ‘profile,’ is singularly and immediately recognizable and ‘individual,’ but the techniques that service the style often represent the summation of astonishingly heterodox compositional principles drawn from a variety of distant and recent pasts and presents...and our understanding of this clarifies the paradox with which we have previously been saddled: how was it that so eclectic a composer should always be so conspicuously like no one but himself?⁹²

In light of Britten’s well known opposition to twelve-tone serial techniques, it may seem surprising to add Schoenberg to the list of “approved” composers. In fact, Britten considered Schoenberg’s way of conceiving composition no less diatonic than any other approach, but simply a reinforcement of diatonicism.⁹³⁹⁴

Though Britten was influenced by the previously mentioned composers, he never simply imitated them. Instead, he took their examples and reinterpreted them to suite his own proclivities. Pears said of Britten’s somewhat neo-Classical bent that “whereas Stravinsky was the greatest destroyer of the worn-out nineteenth century tradition, Britten

⁹⁰ Donald Mitchell, “What do we know about Benjamin Britten Now?” in *The Britten Companion*, ed. Christopher Palmer (New York: Press Syndicate of the Cambridge University Press, 1984), 30.

⁹¹ Pears, 69.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁹³ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 206.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, 26.

belongs to the next generation, whose job it is to re-build. After revolution comes consolidation, and in re-building one takes one's choice from the various materials to hand."⁹⁵

In the early stages of his artistic life, while Britten would admit to certain musical influences from specific composers, he was reluctant to admit any influence from England or English composers. It took a trip to North America (1939-1942) for Britten to reconcile his own musical ideas with those of his own country and its music. He wrote and published articles, such as his 1941 article *England and the Folk-Art Problem*, about the amateur nature of the use of folk tunes from the British Isles by other English composers. He then proceeded to publish nine volumes of the same. However, Britten's folk songs are of an art-song caliber.

Upon his return to England from the United States, Britten said that he felt that the genre of opera was one where he could make a unique contribution to England and English music.⁹⁶ That contribution extended far beyond the British Isles, however, as his operas made their way into the repertoire of opera houses across Europe and throughout the Americas. Britten was one of very few composers to concentrate significantly on opera during the second half of the twentieth century and is generally considered to be the most noteworthy English opera composer since Purcell.

Britten's newfound commitment to Englishness manifested itself in his operas not only in the occasional use of folk-like melodies for characters and ensembles but also in many of their geographical settings. *Albert Herring*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Peter Grimes*,

⁹⁵ Pears, 64.

⁹⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Benjamin Britten," <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg9> (accessed December 9, 2008).

and *Gloriana*, take place in the English countryside or have scenes there, and feature homespun colloquialisms typical of those locales. Some of Britten's specific musical choices, particularly the preference at times for the Lydian mode,⁹⁷ also have a very Anglican sensibility. This is especially palpable at the beginning of the second act of *Peter Grimes*.

Rural and agricultural themes in Britten's non-operatic music are also frequent. His *Spring Symphony* (Opus 74) is in effect an orchestral song cycle, although its twelve songs and choruses are based on poetry by different poets, among them John Milton (1608-1674), George Peele (1556-1596), William Blake, W.H. Auden (1907-1973), and Richard Barnfield (1574-1620). The songs are sung in order by different soloists, much in the manner of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*.

The first song in the *Spring Symphony*, "Shine out," is an invocation to the sun to burn away the winter. The second song and third songs, "The merry cuckoo" with text by Edmund Spenser and "Spring, the sweet spring," with text by Thomas Nash (1594-1647), are full of images of the natural world in the springtime. The lengthy fourth song of the cycle, "The driving boy," with original text by John Clare (1793-1864), thoroughly describes the countryside, from its plants and animals to its people. Describing the driving boy in its second stanza, the poem states:

The driving boy beside his team
And cock his hat and turn his eye
Of flower and tree and deepning skye

⁹⁷ Erwin Stein, "Peter Grimes" in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists*, eds. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 130.

And oft burst loud in fits of song
And whistle as he reels along
Cracking his whip in starts of joy
A happy dirty driving boy^{98 99}

The fifth song, “The morning star,” on a text by John Milton, again describes the coming of morning and the coming of spring through the context of blooming flowers and the bountiful countryside. Songs nine, “When will my May come,” and ten, “Fair and fair,” are pastoral evocations of the springtime.

In addition to this major orchestral song cycle, Britten arranged several groupings of folk songs that could be said to contain rural themes. However, perhaps his greatest contribution to this area of subject matter was in his operas. As previously mentioned, many of his operas evoke the English countryside with their peculiar language, provincial folk and country settings. In addition to the works already mentioned, *Albert Herring*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Peter Grimes*, which have for their settings English rural areas, Britten also wrote an operetta on a specifically American rural topic, that of *Paul Bunyan*. While perhaps not his most successful work, the appearance of this operetta in Britten’s catalogue only furthers the idea that Britten found some amount of importance in folk-tales, in common people, places and work, and in the countryside.

⁹⁸ Britten made certain artistic choices with this lengthy text including the omission of several whole lines of poetry and the changing of certain words in the original from plural to singular.

⁹⁹ Benjamin Britten. *Spring Symphony*, Op. 44 (London: Boosey & Hawkes)

CHAPTER 4. FRENCH VOCAL MUSIC OF THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES EXHIBITING RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES

During the hundred years between the Revolutions of 1848 and the end of the Second World War, France experienced the flowering of its own art song, the *Mélodie*, in the works of composers like Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894), Amédée-Ernest Chausson (1855-1899), Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), and César Franck (1822-1890). Inspired by the revolution in poetic styles that began with Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and continued through the Parnassian and Symbolist movements, French composers had at their fingertips an extraordinary array of contemporary poetry that placed greater reliance on suggestion and deliberately obscured meaning than that available to British composers, whose own great poets such as Hardy, Housman, and Thomas were working with more literal descriptions of place and mood. French poetry of this era contained fewer stereotypical descriptions of the countryside. French songs containing references to rural life fall into three categories: descriptions of barnyard animals and scenes including descriptions of agricultural equipment, descriptions of rural life in the form of a few folk song arrangements from other countries, and descriptions of pastoral places and characters in the Greek tradition.

Claude Debussy occasionally used the third type. The texts he chose for his *Chansons de Bilitis* cycle harken back to the Greek times in very literal ways through the use of specific Greek characters and places within the texts of the works. Although

Debussy's friend, Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925) claimed that he had found and translated the poems from an old Greek manuscript, Louÿs actually wrote them.¹⁰⁰ His ability to disguise his own poetic style and imitate that of the Greek poets was so clever that he fooled researchers for several years.

These three erotic poems contain references to a Greek flute-like instrument, the *syrix*, in the first piece, "La flûte de Pan" ("The Flute of Pan") and nymphs and satyrs in the third piece, "Le tombeau des naïades" ("The Tomb of the Water-Nymphs.") The first poem also mentions the festival of Hyacinthus, a Greek demi-god. Several years after composing this cycle, Debussy returned to similar subject matter, composing another *Chansons de Bilitis*, in this case an instrumental composition meant to accompany the reading of twelve different poems by Louÿs. These poems treat similar subject matter, as the title of the first poem, "Chant pastoral," ("Pastoral Song") indicates. References to the mythological figures Pan, Perseus, Aphrodite, nymphs, and typically pastoral locales such as meadows and brooks are made throughout the set of poems. Since these poems recall pastoral images of the Classical era, much like early opera of the Baroque era, these works relate to rural life. The images and settings are bucolic as are the characters, such as Hyacinthus and the nymphs and satyrs mentioned in the dialogue of "Le tombeau des naïades."

*Les satyres et les nymphes aussi.
Depuis trente ans, il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible.
La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.*

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Bernac, *The Interpretation of French Song*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970: 195.

*Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau.*¹⁰¹

The satyrs and the nymphs also [are dead],
In thirty years there hasn't been a winter so terrible.
That is the trail of the footsteps of a satyr.
But let's rest here at their tomb.¹⁰²

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894) was one of several French composers to write songs describing animals. His style is unique, individual and sometimes humorous. As Pierre Bernac said: “Undoubtedly, he gave [music] back its humor and joy, as well as the most delicate traits and finest shades of tenderness.”¹⁰³ His three pieces from 1889, “Villanelle des petit canards,” (“Villanelle of the Little Ducks”) “Ballade des gros dindons,” (“Ballad of the Fat Turkeys,”) and “Les Cigales,” (“The Cicadas”), while not conceived by the composer as an official set or cycle, are sometimes referred to as his “Barnyard Suite.” The first piece, with its picturesque text by Rosamonde Gérard, describes a noisy flock of ducks waddling along a riverbank and noisily splashing in the water. It compares them to “good country folk” talking and going about their daily business. Chabrier’s piano accompaniment is delicate, with many arpeggiated chords and scale passages imitating the splashing water that glistens in the sunlight. The second piece, “Ballade des gros dindons,” has a much more mocking tone. The serious plodding chords that underscore the sung texts give way to a bizarre waltz in the interludes between the stanzas. *Grove Music Online* indicates that these waltz interludes are a direct reference to

¹⁰¹ Claude Debussy, *Chanson de Bilitis*, ed. Sergius Kagen (New York:International Music Co.)

¹⁰² Author’s translation.

¹⁰³ Bernac, 81.

the mandolin serenade in Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*, creating "a comic disjunction associating large turkeys burdened by their pendulous wattles to an archetypal seducer."¹⁰⁴

Edmond Rostand's (1868-1918) poem, portrays a ridiculous scene:

*Les gros dindons, á travers champs,
D'un pas solennel et tranquille,
Par les matins, par les couchants,
Bêtement marchent á la file,
Devant la pastoure qui file,
En fredonnant de vieux fredons,
Vont en procession docile
Les gros dindons!*¹⁰⁵

The fat turkeys, they cross the fields,
With solemn and tranquil steps,
In the morning, in the evening,
Stupidly they march single-file,
In front of a old peasant woman who sings,
Humming an old song,
They move in docile procession
The fat turkeys!¹⁰⁶

The poem in its entirety shows the absurdity of these birds and their daily activities, calling them "pompous auctioneers" and "portly bailiffs." The music, with its overly serious tone, leaves little doubt of Chabrier's humor and irreverence.

The final song, "Les cigales," is less mocking in its approach, though it is still humorous. The piano part emulates the chirping of the cicadas¹⁰⁷ while the vocal part arches over with a pretty melody. The poetry, also by Gérard, describes the insects as a

¹⁰⁴ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Emmanuel Chabrier"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05351> (accessed February 15, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Emmanuel Chabrier, *Six Mélodies* (Paris: Enoch et. Cie, 1890).

¹⁰⁶ Author's translation.

¹⁰⁷ Bernac, 89.

group of choristers singing to the stars with a “raucous hooting.” The poet also compares them to stringed instruments, stating their songs exceed that of violins.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) also wrote a set of songs on texts pertaining to animals by Jules Renard (1864-1910). The five-song cycle *Histoires naturelles* features the peacock, the cricket, the swan, the king fisher, and the guinea fowl. Each song is a poetic and musical caricature of the animal for which it is named. Their mood has been compared to that of Chabrier’s animal songs. They caused a scandal among Ravel’s critics because of their atypical text setting, in which Ravel compressed the ending feminine “e’s,” making the work less formal and more like spoken French.¹⁰⁸ Ravel had his reasons for doing so: “The direct clear language, the profound and latent poetry of the *Histoires Naturelles* has long tempted me. Even the text itself demands from me a particular kind of declamation, closely linked to the inflexions of the French language.”¹⁰⁹

Much like Chabrier did for his animal songs, Ravel used the piano to illustrate certain characteristics of the animals. In fact, Ravel intended for the music to be a literal interpretation of the creatures. He told Jules Renard that “I have tried to say in music what you say with words, when you are in front of a tree, for example. I think and feel in music, and should like to think and feel the same things as you.”¹¹⁰ For example, the French overture style of “Le paön” demonstrates the seriousness of the bird’s courtship strut. The clear and smooth arpeggios in the piano part in “Le cygnet” emulate a mirror-glass- smooth lake surface. The sparse accompaniment of sustained open chords in “Le martin-pêcheur”

¹⁰⁸ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Maurice Ravel.”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52145> (accessed February 15, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ Ravel quoted in Bernac, 250.

¹¹⁰ Quote from the diary of Jules Renard, translation taken from Peter Kaminsky, “Of Children, Princesses, Dreams, and Isomorphisms: Text-Music Transformation in Ravel’s Vocal Works,” *Music Analysis* 19, no. 1 (March 2000): 29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/854389> (accessed February 14, 2011).

encapsulates the moment in time when a king-fisher mistakes a fishing pole for a tree branch. The fisherman holds his breath as the bird clings to the pole, observing its grandness, wishing not to spoil the moment. In “Le grillon” the machine-like perpetual motion of the piano accompaniment seems to imitate the tedious and methodical tasks performed by the cricket, stopping when the cricket also stops to think. The staccato accompaniment with its many repeated notes in “Le pintade” seems to reflect the guinea fowl pecking for worms or something else that may be bothering her.

In addition to his *Histoire naturelles*, Ravel’s *Chansons de Madecasses* (*Songs of Madagascar*) have images pertaining to rural life, in this case, rural life in Africa. These three pieces, tinged with eroticism and exoticism, use language evocative of many natural elements. In the first piece, “Nahandove,” (“Nahandove”) a man speaks of waiting for his lover to come to him in the moonlight. He describes the dew, the songs of the night birds, and the leaves and herbs he has prepared as a bed for them. The second piece, “Aoua!” describes the treacherous experience the villagers have had with the white men who have come to their land. The third song, “Il est doux” (“It is sweet”) returns to the same mood as the first piece. Again, the man describes the cool evening breezes, the moonlight on the mountains and the leafy trees as he asks the women to sing and prepare the evening meal.

Ravel’s *Cinq melodies populaires grecques* (*Five Popular Greek Melodies*) employ folk idioms through imitations of Greek instruments, hints at modality, and rustic vocal ornaments. Not all of the poetry of the pieces treats explicitly rural subjects, although some refer to rural life. One of the songs does have more direct references. “Chansons des cueilleuses de lentisques” (“Song of the Pistachio Gatherers”) is an agricultural work song one can imagine hearing in the fields at harvest time.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) also wrote a cycle cataloguing various animals. His *Le Bestiaire*, with texts by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), consists of six short songs. Apollinaire was one of the first modernist poets in France. His work was influenced by Cubism, and in fact he is given credit for coining that term in a review of Picasso's painting. These early poems are not meant to be exact representations of the animals but point to something beyond the mundane and factual. In the original publication of thirty poems, each was accompanied by a woodcut by artist Raoul Dufy (1877-1953).

Poulenc approached the poems with individualism, choosing, like Ravel, unusual word settings to emphasize the text. He also used interesting figures in the piano accompaniment to create the sounds of movements of some of the animals. For instance, the first piece "Le dromadaire" ("The Dromedary") uses fast descending minor scales with rests in between each arpeggio in the right hand of the piano part that seem to represent the deliberate, heavy and labored steps of the dromedary. The narrator of the poem speaks of Don Pedro de Alfarrobeira, a Portugese explorer who roamed the deserts of the world with his four dromedaries. The poet then remarks that he would do the same should he have four dromedaries. After the last vocal line, Poulenc unexpected changes the tonality and texture of the accompaniment to something akin to a dance, a funny and strange commentary on the poetry. "La chèvre du Thibet" ("The Tibetan Goat") unfavorably compares a goat's fine wool to the hair of the narrator's lover. "La sauterelle" ("The Grasshopper") is a simple and lyrical song that speaks of the grasshoppers eaten by John the Baptist in the wilderness. The poet states that he hopes his poetry is just as nourishing for his audience. With Poulenc's characteristic doubling of the vocal line in the piano and its chordal and dance-like accompaniment, "Le dauphin" ("The Dolphin") takes on the character of a salon song.

This is also ironic as the poet is using the metaphor of a dolphin swimming in bitter water to describe the bitterness of his own life. In “L’écrevisse” (“The Crayfish”), the poet remarks how he is similar to the crawfish, moving backwards away from any uncertainty. Poulenc’s pensive and nervous-sounding piano accompaniment and unpredictable melodies as well as the dramatic slowing down at the end of the piece help to illustrate this sense of uncertainty. “La carpe” (“The Carp”) contains water figures in the form of slow grace notes reminiscent of small waves in the piano accompaniment.

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) had first-hand experience with agricultural life. The son of an almond dealer, he grew up in Aix-en-Provence and was familiar with the sounds and sights of almond processing. He also learned many of the songs of the women who sorted the almonds.¹¹¹ He was highly influenced by the landscape of Provence. Milhaud often went for long walks in the countryside, absorbing the sights, sounds and smells it had to offer. All of this had a formative impact on his creative process. He once stated:

It is difficult to explain. I don’t know if you can understand. But when I am in the country at night, plunged in silence, and I look at the sky, it seems to me that from every point in the firmament and even from the center of the earth, rays and impulses come toward me; each of these impulses carries a different thread of music, and all the infinity of musical lines cross and intersect each other without ever losing their individual clarity and distinctness. It is an incredible feeling. I have always tried to express this emotion, this sensation of a thousand simultaneous lines of music launched toward me.¹¹²

¹¹¹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Darius Milhaud.”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18674> (accessed February 15, 2011).

¹¹² Darius Milhaud, quoted in Anne L. Patterson, “The Solo Songs of Darius Milhaud: A Historical and Analytical Contribution to the Curriculum of the College Voice Studio,” PhD diss., University of Florida (1989) from Collaer, P. J. H. Galante, trans. *Darius Milhaud*. San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1982: 37.

During World War I, Milhaud was employed by the French Foreign Ministry in Brazil where he was an assistant to the poet, Paul Claudel (1868-1925). There he grew to love a different type of landscape, one covered in jungles and rivers and having a heavy, tropical atmosphere. This experience, too, would influence his work, not only through fresh natural images but also through the active rhythms of Brazilian music.

Milhaud's provincial influences extended to poetry, especially that of Francis Jammes (1868-1938). This poet's work, though popular to an extent for the time, never gained full acceptance from the urban and academic critics, especially in Paris. His poems are imbued with many images and pictures of rural life from his home in the Basque region. Lilacs blooming, grassy prairie meadows, various birds, streams, and wheat are just a few of the images he uses in his poems, often to express the yearning and devastation of love lost. Milhaud was also influenced by some of the writings of his fellow Provençal friends, Léo Latil (1890-1915) and Armand Lunel (1892-1977).

The types of works in which Milhaud incorporated and expressed his love of nature, especially that of his native Provence, are many and varied. He wrote several operas and ballets about the region, *Le Carnaval d'Aix* (*The Carnival of Aix*), *La Cueillette des citrons* (*The Picking of the Lemons*), *La Branche des oiseaux* (*The Branch of the Birds*) among them. Of his vocal works, there are two outstanding and often quoted examples of works using explicit agricultural references, his two song sets *Machines agricoles* (*Agricultural Machines*) and *Catalogue de fleurs* (*Catalogue of Flowers*).

Catalogue de fleurs, written in Aix in 1920 on texts by Lucien Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897), is meant to read like a seed catalogue for flowers, but with a poetic twist.

Each of the seven songs is a description of a specific flower: violet, begonia, fritillaries, hyacinths, crocuses, Swan River daisy, and foxtail lily. Some of the descriptions are very matter-of-fact, even including pricing information, Latin and hybrid names of the plants, and growing instructions. The entire cycle, only about five minutes in length, is whimsical as well as accessible for both singer and audience.

The work was much criticized during its time and continues to be misunderstood. Musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky made one of the more positive statements when he wrote that the cycle is “a surrealistic florilegium with melodious characterizations of seven flowers, set to music with a fine Parisian flair.”¹¹³ David Cox, who contributed a chapter on French art song to Denis Stevens’s *A History of Song*, called the songs “humorous,” lamenting that Milhaud’s music was “poured out with a dreadful fertility.”¹¹⁴ Some critics have accused Milhaud of paying little heed to his choice of texts for his works. Others insinuated that he chose the texts for shock value or to be avant-garde. This criticism frustrated Milhaud. He stated:

Not a single critic understood what had impelled me to compose these works, or that they had been written in the same spirit as had in the past led composers to sing the praises of harvest-time. ...I have never been able to fathom why sensible beings should imagine that any artist would spend his time working, with all the agonizing passion that goes into the process of creation, with the sole purpose of making fools of a few of them.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Nicolas Slonimsky quoted in Anne L. Patterson, “The Solo Songs of Darius Milhaud: A Historical and Analytical Contribution to the Curriculum of the College Voice Studio,” PhD diss., University of Florida (1989): 56. From *Music Since 1900*.

¹¹⁴ David Cox, “France,” in *A History of Song*, Denis Stevens, ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (1960): 221.

¹¹⁵ Anne L. Patterson, “The Solo Songs of Darius Milhaud: A Historical and Analytical Contribution to the Curriculum of the College Voice Studio,” PhD diss., University of Florida (1989): 57.

As previously noted, Milhaud was familiar with the sounds of agricultural machinery such as almond processors, and his *Machines agricoles* may reflect this aural influence. Many layers of sound compete for the listener's attention, much in the manner of farm equipment. This song cycle uses polytonality and competing instrumental timbres to interpret the words.

The musical interpretation of a machine may seem a strange act; however, several previously mentioned composers have done so in small ways, for instance, Schubert's musical interpretation of the water mill in *Die schöne Müllerin* as well as the spinning wheel in "Gretchen am Spinnrade." Charles W. Hughes explains the relationship between machines and the composer:

A composer may concentrate on the machine. He may at the same time express the human reaction to the machine. This relationship varies with the relationship of the worker to the machine and the use which society has made of the machine. . . For all these aspects and uses of the machine composers have found music, at first hesitantly, then with a surer and firmer touch.¹¹⁶

In Milhaud's case, his understanding of these machines was expressed using his own unique musical interpretation of their movements and sounds in this song cycle. The work is scored for medium voice and seven instruments: flute, clarinet, bassoon, violin,

¹¹⁶ Charles W. Hughes, "Music and Machines," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 5, no. 1 (Sept., 1946): 33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/426022> (accessed February 15, 2011).

viola, violoncello, and contrabass. The rhythmic energy of the vocal line is speech-like rather than lyrical:

*La déchaumeuse-semeuse-enfouisseuse est avec élançons et certaines parties renforcées pour pouvoir supporter convenablement la caisse semoir*¹¹⁷

The plower-sower-burier is reinforced with props and certain attachments so as to give proper support to the sower-case¹¹⁸

Inspired by the availability of fine poetic texts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, English and French composers alike found in art song the perfect opportunity to synthesize text and music. By the end of the nineteenth century, American composers eagerly seized the same opportunity in the poetry of their compatriots, while at the same time seeking to establish a truly “American” style and spirit in art music, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

¹¹⁷ Darius Milhaud, *Machines agricoles* (Vienna: Universal)

¹¹⁸ David Cox, translation from “France,” in *A History of Song*, Denis Stevens, ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (1960): 221-222.

CHAPTER 5. AMERICAN VOCAL MUSIC OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

EXHIBITING RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES

The idea of a recognizably American school of art music composition, as opposed to one heavily dependent on European models, began to take shape at the end of the nineteenth century. Several factors may be identified that had a significant influence on the development of American art music in general, American art song, in particular, and especially American art song that celebrated rural and agricultural themes.

In 1892, Czech nationalistic composer Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) accepted a post teaching at the newly founded National Conservatory of Music in New York. Dvořák's reputation as a composer whose music embodied his own native Bohemia made him attractive to the Conservatory's leaders, who greatly wanted him to help the United States music community create its own nationalistic musical style. While in the United States, Dvořák undertook a significant study of indigenous American music, including plantation songs, spirituals, and songs of the Native American Indians, as well as folk songs of various immigrant groups including Germans and Norwegians.¹¹⁹ In his mind, these various types of music were the true music of America. He believed that incorporating elements from all of them into a cohesive whole would create an American nationalistic style. Some of the specific characteristics he noted as being at least somewhat

¹¹⁹ John Clapham, "Dvořák and the American Indian," *The Musical Times* 107, no. 1484 (Oct., 1966): 863.

common between these styles were pentatonic melodies, drones, rhythmic elements like ostinati and syncopation, a flattened seventh scale degree, and plagal cadences.¹²⁰

Dvořák firmly believed that Americans should develop concert music that was in their own musical and linguistic vernaculars.¹²¹ From pre-Revolutionary times through the first half of the nineteenth century, most American composers wrote music in imitation of the European style. Operas and stage works presented in the United States were often written in Italian and other European languages. Dvořák saw this tendency as quite negative, saying:

If the Americans had a chance to hear grand opera sung in their own language, they would enjoy it as well and appreciate it as highly as the opera-goers of Vienna, Paris or Munich enjoy theirs. The change from Italian and French to English may have the effect of improving the voices of the American singers, bringing out more clearly the beauty and strength of the timbre, while giving an intelligent conception of the words that enables singers to use pure diction, which cannot be obtained in a foreign tongue.¹²²

Some American composers, such as Ernst Bacon, whose music is discussed later in this dissertation, shared Dvořák's belief that Americans needed to have concert music in their own vernacular.¹²³ American art song, which had its beginnings in the folk song-like works of nineteenth century composers, among them Stephen C. Foster (1826-1864), began to see a true awakening in the early twentieth century. What had previously been simple parlor-song music began to take on complexity.

¹²⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Antonín Dvořák"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51222> (accessed February 17, 2011).

¹²¹ Ernst Bacon, *Words on Music*, New York: Syracuse University, 1960: 36-37.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²³ Ernst Bacon, *Words on Music*, New York: Syracuse University, 1960: 36-37.

One of the factors influencing this burgeoning was an American lyrical poetry, developed through writers such as Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). This poetry often used natural images and the love of the wild to express the poet's thoughts about reality. This poetry, to some extent, embodied the "American spirit" of pioneering and exploration. Partly this was due to the concept of Manifest Destiny, a nineteenth century belief that the European settlers were providentially destined to settle North America. For better or for worse, this idea found its way into much of the literature of the time. The works by these writers became inspiration for many American composers of the early twentieth century who saw a great potential for American art song.

American folk song also experienced a sense of its own identity, both in the spirituals of Black American composers and the folk songs of Americans of Irish and Scottish descent. Stephen C. Foster wrote hundreds of songs, many of which were on subjects related to the rural south. Foster, a Northerner city-dweller, used romanticized images in his songs to describe these situations of which he had little first-hand experience.¹²⁴ Despite their lack of grounding in reality, Foster's songs, with their catchy melodies and easy-to-play accompaniments, have become part of the American vernacular music and are still widely recognizable. His songs "Oh! Susanna" and "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" are just two of those that helped to give American music its own identity.

Another factor in the development of North American music was the nineteenth

¹²⁴ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Stephen Foster," <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/10040> (accessed September 29, 2011).

composers in the twentieth century. Beginning with Canadian fiction writers including Frederick Philip Grove (1897-1948), Sinclair Ross (1908-1996), Edward McCourt (1907-1972), Robert J. C. Stead (1880-1959), and Robert Kroetsch (1927-2011), prairie realism focused on the early years of prairie settlement in an effort to depict the genuine conditions and situations of those times. Very often, works of prairie realism describe the landscape itself and the psychological affects it has on those who live on it. While this type of fiction created a sense of awareness about this region and its inhabitants, the way in which the writers approached the subject matter had some negative connotations. Alison Calder writes:

It is fairly easy to enumerate the qualities of the prairies as they appear in prairie regional fiction. The land and climate are everything. The prairies exist in a permanent, drought-produced dust storm, the tedium of which is broken only by the occasional blizzard. It is always circa 1935. There are no colours and no animals, unless you count domestic livestock that freeze or smother. Human beings die natural deaths only in that their deaths are caused by nature: they freeze, suffocate, drown, burn, or are driven to suicide. There are no urban centres; the ones that do exist are immeasurably far away from the isolated farm houses where the works are set. Even when there is a town, no one speaks to another; no one has any friends. There are vicious rivalries but no politics. Sex, when it occurs, is frequently adulterous, and usually followed by death.¹²⁵

Although the movement was not as pronounced in the United States, there were several important writers in whose novels life on the prairie was described, among them Willa Cather (1873-1947) and Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951). There is more of a sense of the pioneer spirit of settling and taming the west in United States prairie fiction than in the

¹²⁵ Alison Calder, "Reassessing Prairie Realism," *Textual Studies of Canada* 9, no. 9 (Spring 1997): 57.

Canadian novels. This contrast may spring at least in part from geographical factors: the American prairies could be conquered whereas the harsh climates of the Canadian prairies made them almost impossible to settle permanently, and in fact, there has been much migration out of the prairie provinces back to British Columbia.

Edward MacDowell (1860-1908), perhaps more than any other composer mentioned here, represented the tradition of an earlier era. His music, lush in its harmonic texture, was largely Germanic and of the Romantic tradition. In fact, the majority of his early vocal works are written in the German language and reflect his affinity for the preferred subjects of the Romantic era such as forests and folk legends. Perhaps this is not surprising considering that early in his compositional career he lived in different cities in Germany while refining his craft.¹²⁶

By the end of his career, MacDowell's somewhat against-the-grain opinion regarding the writing of vocal music included the idea that vocal music was most successful when the composer was also the lyricist. His Opus 47 *Eight Songs* is perhaps his work most reflective of rural and agricultural themes, albeit with a German Romantic idiom. "The Robin Sings in the Apple-Tree," "Midsummer Lullaby," "Folksong," "Confidence," "The West-wind Croons in the Cedar Trees," "In the Woods," "The Sea," and "Through the Meadow" all reflect the idealization of nature so often found in works of the Romantic era. The harmonic language, too, reflects the color and lush richness of accompaniments of the late Romantic era. The melodies are folk-like in their melodic simplicity, yet, the music itself is not predictable. There are many elements of the

¹²⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Edward MacDowell," <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/17317> (accessed September 28, 2011).

accompaniment, as well as the occasionally unexpected turn-of-phrase, which make the works more challenging than folk pieces. At the same time, there are some purposeful folk elements, such as the addition of a refrain of “la’s” as part of the vocal line in “In the Woods.” The text reflects the wooing of a girl by a young man in the woods who is later abandoned by him and shows echoes of earlier Germanic and French texts in the woodlands setting and the mention of the flute (such as Debussy’s “La flûte de Pan” from *Chansons de Bilitis*). The text of MacDowell’s song suits the modified strophic form he chose for it:

In the woods at eve I wandered,
Through the sunset’s crimson light,
In the woods, In the woods at eve,
There sat Damon, playing softly on the flute for my delight;
So, la, la, la . . .

Ah, he swore he loved me truly,
Begged me would I love him too,
And bewitched me with his music,
As it thrilled the forest through;
So, la, la, la . . .

Now my heart ne’er ceases longing
For a lover proven false,
Proven false, proven false,
And that cruel, haunting music,
Still my restless soul entralls.
So, la, la . . .¹²⁷

The set’s texts have a cyclical structure as they follow the course of one full year. The first few songs are set in spring and summer, the middle songs progress through fall

¹²⁷ E. A. Mac-Dowell, *Eight Songs* Op. 47 (London: Brietkopf & Härtel), 1893.

into winter, and the final song is set yet again in summer. In this set, MacDowell himself wrote three of the texts, reflecting his late-career views on music and poetry.

Through his interactions with certain important early American music figures such as Dvořák,¹²⁸ Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) helped to influence the direction of American music. Burleigh, although not a composer, was an important soloist in the New York City area, promoting Black American spirituals with his singing. His well-crafted performances and sensitive arrangements gave credence to the concept of the Black American spiritual as part of America's folk tradition.

Scott Joplin (1867-1898) promoted various American musical styles through his compositions. While he is perhaps best known for his ragtime piano pieces, Joplin also composed in several other forms, including songs and stage works. He published his opera, *Treemonisha*, in 1911.¹²⁹ The work, whose music is clearly inspired by the harmonies and rhythmic energy of ragtime, explores the lives of slaves on an abandoned Arkansas plantation.

Charles Ives' compositional style contrasts sharply with that of Barber's. Ives (1874-1954) is known for his uniquely American sound that juxtaposes jazz, folk songs, band tunes, and American religious songs with European musical traditions. The result was a fascinating amalgam of American music at the time, including that from both inside and outside the United States.

¹²⁸ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Harry T. Burleigh,"

http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/04378?q=burleigh&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit (accessed September 29, 2011).

¹²⁹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Scott Joplin,"

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14478> (accessed September 29, 2011).

Ives' formative musical experiences were many and varied. As a young musician, his musical experiences included Protestant hymns, the folk songs of Stephen Foster, and the music of his father's band, in which Ives played percussion. The elder Ives was also a musician at revival camp meetings, which gave his son the opportunity to be exposed to this type of spiritual song.

In college, Ives studied the typical European canon. After his marriage, Ives was deeply influenced by his wife's strong patriotism. Harmony Ives' feelings of love toward her country found an echo in her husband's music.

The couple had first-hand experience with rural life. In 1912, they purchased a small farm with a guest cottage outside of Danbury, Connecticut.¹³⁰ Thereafter, it was their custom to spend half of their year on the farm and half of the year in the city. They also felt strongly about helping the poor; as part of the Fresh Air Fund, they opened their guest cottage to financially-compromised families.¹³¹

The poetry that Ives chose to set in his songs reflects both his patriotism and his love of nature and rural life. Ives' music would likely have much appeal to rural audiences because of the familiar tunes he included, the American flavor of his style, and the subjects of the poetry. Many songs are on natural themes ("The Houstatonic at Stockbridge" and "Autumn,") while others center on patently American subjects ("The Indians" and "Charlie Rutlage"). Still others are settings of German Romantic poets who, as previously noted, often chose subjects from nature for their poetic works.

Ives' folk song settings clearly reflect American themes and landscapes. "Charlie Rutlage," for example, is based on an American folk song that tells the story of a cowboy

¹³⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Charles Ives."
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14000> (accessed February 21, 2011).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

who has died. From the first lines of the poem:

Another good cowpuncher has gone to meet his fate,
I hope he'll find a resting place within the golden gate.
Another place is vacant on the ranch of X I T,
'Twill be hard to find another that's liked as well as he.¹³²

Ives chose to set some texts by John Greenleaf Whittier (1907-1952), for example, "Serenity." The son of a Quaker farmer, Whittier reflected rural New England life in the mid-nineteenth century in his poetry.¹³³ The text for Ives' "The Indians" comes from Charles Sprague's "Centennial Ode," written as a tribute to the Pilgrims for the one hundredth anniversary of Boston's settlement.¹³⁴ According to Ruth C. Friedburg, this work appealed to Ives because of its connections to social justice and its patriotic portrayal of America's beginnings.¹³⁵ She also indicates that Ives intended this work as "a dirge to a lost race."¹³⁶

Ives, like many other American composers of his generation, chose poetry of the Transcendentalists. He set Emerson's "Duty" and Whitman's "Walt Whitman" from *Song of Myself* and even wrote an original text entitled "Thoreau:"

He grew in those seasons like corn in the night,
rapt in revery, on the Walden shore,
amidst the sumach [sic], pines and hickories,
in undisturbed solitude.¹³⁷

¹³² Charles Ives, *114 Songs* (New York: Peermusic Classical)

¹³³ Ruth C. Friedburg, *American Art Song and American Poetry*, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 1981) 1:58.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³⁷ Charles Ives, *114 Songs* (New York: Peermusic Classical)

Ives poem reflects both Thoreau's and his own way of communing with nature. In Ives' case this is through music. This text is a meditation written at the beginning of the song, which is otherwise wordless. Some performers choose to speak the written meditation while others do not. The song, as it were, is otherwise unsung.

In addition to those of other poets already mentioned, Ives used a text by Vachel Lindsay (1897-1931), a Midwestern writer whose work "brings whole groups of common people before us in living color and action"¹³⁸ for his famous song "General Booth enters into Heaven."

Friedburg sums up Ives' songs well by writing, "In Charles Ives' work, we find not only a continuation of the search to express the soul of America, but something that would have pleased Emerson equally: a translation into musical terms of Transcendentalism, his religio-philosophic system based on the oneness of nature, humanity, and God."¹³⁹

Arthur Farwell (1872-1952) was deeply influenced by Dvořák's call for a truly American musical style. As a result of Farwell's attempts to follow this call, he established his own publishing company, Wa-Wan Press. It operated from 1901-1912, publishing quarterly volumes of both vocal and instrumental American music. Some of Farwell's own works were featured in the publication, many of them based on Native American subjects and melodies. In Farwell's opinion, Native American music was the key to creating an authentically "American" style of art music.

Music for the general population was important to him. Some of his work exhibits a popularized style that fails to lift it into the realm of the finest America music. Other compositions, however, artfully bridge the aesthetic gap between the music favored by

¹³⁸ Friedburg, 68.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

connoisseurs of the concert hall and that preferred by a wider community of listeners. He was an innovator who wrote “community music” for events like pageants and masques. In the sense that Farwell looked outside the normal sources for inspiration for his music, he was an experimental composer. He collected and arranged music of several indigenous American populations, including the music of American Indians, Spanish-American music of the US Southwest, cowboy songs, African American tunes, and folk music of Anglo-American immigrants. His Opus 19 *Songs of the West and South*, his Opus 32 *Three Indian Songs* and his Opus 59 *Songs of Old California* are examples of these types of collections. Farwell was also one of the first composers who attempted to set African American spirituals in a more authentic style.

Farwell’s literary influences include several American writers, especially Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. His catalogue contains several important song sets of Dickinson’s work, including his Opus 101 *Four Emily Dickinson Songs*, his Opus 107 *Twelve Emily Dickinson Songs*, and his Opus 112 *Ten Emily Dickinson Songs*.

Composer and art song compiler and arranger John Jacob Niles (1892-1980) was also a noted dulcimer player and a major proponent of the folk-song revival of the mid-twentieth century. His works relate to the subject matter of rural and agricultural themes in that they are often directly collected or infused with and inspired by elements of traditional folk music of the Appalachian Mountain region. In addition, he also collected Black American music. His famous Christmas song “I Wonder as I Wander,” represents some of the best qualities of his work: haunting melodies, minor modes, and folk-like melodic contours reflecting simple yet poignant text. This work, in particular, seems to reflect the loneliness and isolation of mountain living. Others of his pieces that reflect the lifestyle of

rural life are “Go ‘way from my window,” with its vernacular text and “Black is the color of my true love’s hair.”

William Grant Still (1895-1978) experienced a long and distinguished career in which he won many awards and accolades for his rich and diverse music. While his music does not tend to have obvious rural or agricultural subject matter in terms of textual material, some of his vocal works do have a connection to rural life in that they are arrangements of Black American spiritual songs. These songs originally were work songs out in the fields on the Southern plantations during the years of legal slavery in the United States. Vocal works like his “Deep River” and his “Steal Away to Jesus,” reflect the yearning of enslaved peoples for freedom, encoded in the terminology of the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition. Many of these tunes were sung in the work fields to lift their spirits, to pass the time, and to pass secret messages regarding the Underground Railroad and the escape to freedom in the north.

Still's vocal catalogue also includes several selections about specific locales in the United States. “Arkansas” is an energetic song filled with dotted rhythms and regards the pride of the land and people of this state. “Bayou Home” and “Mississippi” both idealize the Deep South, the swamplands, and the lifestyles of the middle and lower class in these areas. “Bayou Home,” with its pianistic accompaniment filled with colorful and often dissonant chords, reflects the longing for home even as one embarks on a journey away from it. The song is constructed in two sections, the first of which functions something like a recitative as there are many tempo changes and pauses for dramatic affect and to highlight the text. The second section of the piece stays in tempo and is more lyrical, with

long, legato phrasing. The text of a portion of the second section reflects the rural area the person is leaving with references to the bayou, the gulf, oak trees and sugar cane.

After the turn of the twentieth century, composers began to develop a new American musical idiom in virtually every genre, including opera, symphonies, chamber works and even experimental music. Art song was one of the most significant genres in which an American flavor, both in musical and textual senses, started to emerge. As Ernst Bacon said:

It is quite possible that some of the best musical writing in America has taken the modest form of song. We are already one of the richest countries in folk song—a literature which stems from backgrounds as numerous and diverse as our melting pot, but more particularly from the land of our principal language. Our folk song has been described by John Powell as being older than most of Western Europe's because of the two-century-long isolation of Appalachia during the modernization of all Western Europe.¹⁴⁰

As a composer, Ernst Bacon (1898-1990) himself was best known for his art songs, the majority of which use poetry of the Transcendentalist poets Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Bacon's contributions to the musical settings of Emily Dickinson's work include a two-volume collection entitled *Nature Time and Space*, another collection, *Songs from Emily Dickinson*, and a cycle *From Emily's Diary*. His settings of Whitman include *Songs at Parting: A Selection of Walt Whitman's Poems*. Paul Horgan said of these works that, "to the texts of Whitman—with whose amplitude of vision his own may be compared—and Emily Dickinson—whose unique delicacy also seems to find affinity in

¹⁴⁰ Bacon: 37.

Bacon's aesthetic nature—he has made his song literature a great resource which in time will be far better known than it now is."¹⁴¹

Bacon was influenced by folk songs and used folk melodies in some of his songs such as "The Erie Canal" and "Buffalo Gals." He possessed a strong appreciation of the natural world and surrounded himself with others who felt likewise. Ansel Adams, whom Bacon counted among his friends, said of the composer: "Some of his music suggests an Adams-like re-creation of nature in simple, arresting images."¹⁴² Because of his choice of poets, nearly all of Bacon's music has a direct association to nature.

In addition to his songs, Bacon wrote a chamber opera entitled *A Tree on the Plains*, with text by Paul Horgan, which dealt directly with rural subject matter. The plot turns on the somewhat stereotypical dilemma of a farm person yearning for civilization. In the short work, sometimes referred to as a musical play, a farm girl dreams of escaping to the city until a young farmer steals her heart. The opera has no formal arias, and the music is folk-like and accessible for the singers and players.¹⁴³

The vocal works of Roy Harris (1898-1979), though a small amount of his output, are relevant to this discussion in that the subjects he chose reflect his rural upbringing in a log cabin in Oklahoma. As Harris' first composition teacher, Arthur Farwell encouraged Harris to create an American sound. Ruth C. Friedburg writes that "Roy Harris was very articulate about his aims as a composer and tried to establish verbal equations between the

¹⁴¹ Paul Horgan, "Ernst Bacon: A Contemporary Tribute," in *Ernst Bacon by Ernst Bacon*, Duke University.

¹⁴² Paul Griffiths, "Tribute to a Neglected Composer," *New York Times* (Late Edition, East Coast) Sept. 17, 1998 p. E.3.

¹⁴³ Quaintance Eaton, *Opera Production: A Handbook, Volume 1*, University of Minnesota Press (1961): 144.

American character and American music.”¹⁴⁴ He used folk tunes and popular dance and jazz tunes and preferred the writings of Whitman and Lincoln. His solo vocal cantata *Give me the Silent Splendid Sun*, for baritone and orchestra, is taken from texts by Whitman. Another cantata, *Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight* for mezzo-soprano, violin, cello and piano, contains texts by Vachel Lindsay.

Though rural and agricultural themes would not play a wide-sweeping role in their catalogues, there are nonetheless several other American composers who have contributed to this repertoire. Douglas Moore (1893-1969), who was encouraged by poet Vachel Lindsay to use Americana as a source of inspiration for his music, completed two operas on American rural subjects. *The Ballad of Baby Doe* depicts silver mining in Colorado, while *Giants in the Earth* is the story of Norwegian immigrants to Dakota Territory. He also worked on an opera that treats the life of Jesse James. His musical style has sometimes been compared to that of Copland, though Moore’s melodies are perhaps less jagged and more tuneful and show more influence from popular music.

John Duke (1899-1984) was perhaps the preeminent composer of American art song of the twentieth century. In his works, he attempted to create the American corollary to the German *Lied*. Most of his works do not exhibit natural, rural or agricultural themes. There are a few exceptions, however. His song “Spring Thunder” is based on a poem by Mark Van Doren (1894-1972), who grew up on a farm and was known as a “country poet.” Duke also set several songs by Emily Dickinson that primarily use metaphors from nature. “Bee! I’m expecting you!” is one of these songs. “The Fallow Deer” (poetry by Thomas Hardy), “In the Fields” (poetry by Charlotte Mew), “The Return from Town” (poetry by

¹⁴⁴ Friedburg, 1: 114.

Edna St. Vincent Millay), and the quirky song “Shelling Peas” (poetry by Jessica Jackson) are a few additional examples of Duke’s work exhibiting rural themes.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990), sometimes referred to as the “Dean of American Composers,” is heralded for having created a recognizably American musical style. Copland’s interests in jazz and American folk song echoed his American contemporaries, although he also had an avid interest in opera. Among his European influences were the works of Stravinsky (1882-1971), Milhaud, Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), and Mahler.¹⁴⁵ His music is known for its jagged and rustic melodies and rhythmic energy along with the ability to convey a pioneering spirit in an American sense.

With Roger Sessions, Copland organized concerts of American music known as the Copland-Sessions concerts. By doing so, he hoped that he might allow for himself and other American composers not only to subsist by writing music but also to find an American nationalistic style. He visited Mexico in 1932, where he was inspired by the revolutionary government, an experience that furthered his socialist tendencies.

The Great Depression in the 1930’s deepened Copland’s belief in socialism as a viable political alternative for the United States. He became more politically active from this point on. For instance, in 1934 he delivered a speech on behalf of Minnesota farmers, showing his empathy for this struggling sector of the economy. Not only did Copland speak up for the farmers, he decided to live like one. In 1947, he purchased a barn in rural New York, converting it to a home where he lived from 1952-1961.

Copland’s two sets of *Old American Songs* show his affinity for American folk song, these particular songs having been collected from various rural communities across

¹⁴⁵ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Aaron Copland,” <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06422> (accessed February 23, 2011).

and *Front Porch Saturday Night*.

Poets that Siegmeister set for his songs and song cycles included Robert Frost (1874-1963), Antonio Machado (1875-1939), William Blake, and e. e. cummings (1894-1962), among others. Several songs on rural and agricultural themes exist within his vocal catalogue, including “Johnny Appleseed” and “Long Afternoon.” From “Johnny Appleseed”:

Johnny Appleseed! Johnny Appleseed!
Of Jonathan Chapman two things are known:
that he loved apples, that he walked alone.
At seventy odd he was gnarled as could be,
but ruddy and sound as a good appletree.
For fifty years over of harvest and dew
he planted his apples where no apples grew.
The winds of the prairie might blow through his rags,
but he carried his seed in deerskin bags.¹⁴⁹

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) was not known for writing “American sounding” music, in the manner of someone like Aaron Copland, for example, and did not make frequent use American musical materials like jazz or folk tunes. Carol Kimball discerns an American flavor in his work that springs from its “directness and simplicity.”¹⁵⁰ His catalogue contains several works with textual references to rural and agricultural themes. His Opus 29 *Hermit Songs* are based on texts from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries from Irish monks. Although these works are not overtly “rural,” they do often express the joys of a simple life, of quiet companionship, and even of the edification caused by quiet time to oneself. A few of his songs have a stronger connection to rural life, “O Boundless,

¹⁴⁹ Elie Siegmeister, “Johnny Appleseed,” (New York: Edward B. Marks), 1947.

¹⁵⁰ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style & Literature*, Redmond, WA: Pst...Inc: 254.

Boundless Evening,” which describes a sunset over country fields, meadows and creatures, a modern pastoral depiction.

Barber used texts by James Agee (1909-1955) for his well-known works “Sure on this Shining Night” and *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. Agee was raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, which is closely surrounded by rural communities. His poetry uses images from this period in his life. “Sure on this Shining Night” describes the poet’s sense of wonder during an idealistic summer evening in the country. *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* uses many quaint images that are stereotypically Southern. The front porch in summer, locusts, and horses are combined in the poem that describes the poet’s sense of security with his family.

Paul Bowles (1910-1999) grew up in an emotionally turbulent home. In contrast to his hostile home life were happy summers spent on his grandparents’ farm, Happy Hollow Farm, in Massachusetts.¹⁵¹ This contrast is reflected in Bowles’ choice of subjects for his songs, which often present a romanticized view of rural life in small towns. Bowles’ choice of texts at times introduced a folk-like idiom into his music, and his musical style reflects his well-traveled life, incorporating American jazz, Mexican dance¹⁵² and even rhythms from Morocco.¹⁵³ Bowles studied with Aaron Copland, from whom he learned a respect for and excitement about American music.

Bowles collaborated with Tennessee Williams (1911-1923) on several occasions, the most notable of which was the setting of the *Blue Mountain Ballads*. Williams’ poetry often dealt with growing up in the rural South and had a folk-like flavor. “Despite his highly cultivated and urbane intellect, Paul Bowles has always been quite at home,

¹⁵¹ Friedburg, 3:23.

¹⁵² *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Paul Bowles,”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03762> (accessed February 24, 2011).

¹⁵³ Kimball, 259.

musically, in the folk milieu, and the ‘new simplicity’ of his style, raised by the critics of the forties, found a counterpart in this poetry.”¹⁵⁴ The four songs in *Blue Mountain Ballads*, “Heavenly Grass,” “Lonesome Man,” “Cabin,” and “Sugar in the Cane,” are about a fictitious Mississippi town. Friedburg remarks that in “Heavenly Grass” “we encounter one of the first-person monologues, in this case spoken by a simple, devout individual whose plain speech is transformed by Williams into intensely poetic imagery.” She goes on to write that “one is reminded of Agee’s view of ‘the mountain people’ as drawing both poetry and spirituality from their closeness to the earth. . . .”¹⁵⁵ In the final song of the set, Bowles uses jazz idioms to evoke a young woman’s bravado regarding her personal traits.

Several of his other vocal works also feature rural and agricultural themes. Among these are his 1944 *Three Pastoral Songs* for voice and string ensemble that were also set for voice and piano. The songs “Down in Yonder Meadow,” “The Feathers of the Willow,” and “The Piper” comprise this set. *Green Songs*, another set from 1935, includes “Grass” “Moon” “Farewell” and “Silence.”¹⁵⁶ Finally, his 1941 set *Five Songs about Spring* are musical excerpts from his musical compositions for the theatre piece *Love Like Wildfire* and comprise “Violet,” “Evening,” “Spring,” “Moonbeam,” and “Owl.” Bowles’ interest in American and rural subjects extended to folk songs. In 1939 he set his *Twelve American Folk Songs* and *Four American Folk Songs*.

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987) drew on the wealth of musical influences available to him by the middle of the twentieth century. They included atonal and polytonal techniques as well as common practice period tonality. Like composers from the Baroque

¹⁵⁴ Friedburg, 3:29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Green Songs* originally included a fourth song called “Farewell” as the third piece of the set; however, this song was not published with the set in Paul Bowles own *Selected Songs* from Soundings Press.

and Classical eras, Persichetti borrowed from his own compositions frequently. He spent his life not only as a composer but also as a performing pianist and music educator. He even dabbled in the visual arts, admitting, with a certain amount of humor, that he was never fully settled in any one career. In 1981 he remarked:

I've not decided what to do yet with my life. Perhaps I will concertize as a pianist, but, on the other hand, shouldn't I bring audiences some of those neglected orchestral pieces? Then again I'd love to have an herb farm if it weren't for my keen interest in sailing. I know I'd like the life of a Maine lobster fisherman, but my sculpting would keep me on solid ground. I'm too busy to decide what my life's work will be. I suppose, though, at some point, I should decide to work for a living.¹⁵⁷

Solo vocal music was a relatively small part of his output. Within his vocal catalogue, however, there are several works that exhibit rural and natural themes. Like many other composers of his time, he set Emily Dickinson's poetry. His Opus 77 *Emily Dickinson Songs* contains four songs, all of which use nature as the poetic medium of expression. The last song, "The Grass" is a good example. The poem describes all of the various things that grass does, ending:

And even when it dies, to pass
In odors so divine,
As lowly spices gone to sleep,
Or amulets of pine.

¹⁵⁷ Vincent Persichetti and Rudy Shackelford, "Conversation with Vincent Persichetti," *Perspectives of New Music*, 20, no. ½ (Autumn, 1981): 110-111. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/942408> (accessed March 1, 2011).

The cycle ends with Wallace's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," a collection of short poems in which the poet marvels over his own perception of reality. The fifth poem states:

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.¹⁶²

Persichetti explained his affinity and musical treatment of this particular poem:

I set nineteen poems; the twentieth and last poem of the cycle was to be "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." In this poem, I discovered that all of the previous nineteen were related musically and poetically, in one way or another. And so the last song is a large structure, containing musical materials of the preceding songs. When I wrote to Stevens about this, he replied that he hadn't been aware of these connections and gave me his full approval.¹⁶³

Persichetti's vocal works include a few more poems rich in natural images. From his Opus 76 *Robert Frost Songs*, the second song "The Pasture," is a wonderful example of a piece that exhibits explicitly rural subject matter:

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Persichetti and Shackelford, 119.

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long.
You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother.
It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long.
You come too.¹⁶⁴

Ruth Schönthal (1924-2006) wrote a song cycle with texts from Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." Her cycle features six short poems. The fifth poem, called "A Farm Picture" is a musical still life of Whitman's perception of an American farm. The other texts are not on rural themes, but on universal themes, such as motherhood and childhood.

Jack Beeson (1921-2010) wrote a song with a text by Abraham Lincoln entitled "Indiana Homecoming." Beeson was born in Indiana, and Lincoln also spent time there as a child. The work reflects sentimentality on the landscape and quaintness of the communities.

At least two composers of South American provenance deserve mention within the context of this discussion. The first is Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940), a Mexican composer and musician, who, while vocal pieces did not play a large part of his output, nonetheless wrote several pieces on natural and rural themes. In conjunction with Carlos Chavez, Revueltas organized concerts of the Mexican music about which he was so

¹⁶⁴ Vincent Persichetti, *Robert Frost Songs* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser Co.)

passionate. Later, as a conductor, Revueletas frequently programmed Mexican music.¹⁶⁵ His music is known for its rhythmic vigor and Mexican instrumental colors.

Three of his songs that exhibit rural and agricultural themes were all written in 1931. “Ranas” (“Frogs”) describes croaking frogs as the musical instruments of the night ponds. The instrumental version of this piece features drones in the muted horns while the high wood winds chirp, a combination of which sounds remarkably like frogs singing. “El Tecolote” (“The Owl”) relates a Mexican Indian legend of a ranchero, or cowboy, who has lost his lover to a horseman. This song features the incongruence of polyrhythms and bitonality in the instruments while the voice sings a simple, folk-like melody. His *Duo para Pata y Canario* (*Duet for Duck and Canary*) is scored for voice and chamber orchestra. The song speaks of a wild scene of all kinds of animals dancing, jumping, and singing. The vocal line of this piece falls in a broad pitch range, sometimes with wide intervals such as on the words “bella luna, bella luna” (“beautiful moon”). At other times, the vocal line moves mostly on repeated notes like recitative. The style is often declamatory throughout the piece. There is interplay between the instruments and the voice in a call-and-answer format throughout the work.

Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) was an Argentine composer with an extensive career and prolific output in a variety of musical forms. His work overall represents many folk elements of Argentine music including specific dance rhythms and scale patterns.¹⁶⁶ In terms of subject matter, his vocal works, which comprise a combination of choral and solo-

¹⁶⁵ “Silvestre Revueltras” webpage, Naxos website.

http://www.naxos.com/person/Silvestre_Revueltras/21020.htm (accessed September 29, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Alberto Ginastera.”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/11159> (accessed September 29, 2011).

vocal pieces, do not typically exhibit overtly rural or agricultural subject matter. The exceptions to this tendency are his *Cinco Canciones Populares Argentinas* (*Five Argentinian Folksongs*) from 1943. This is a collection of folk poetry that was set to music by Ginastera. “Chacarera,” the first song of the set, features ostinati and dance rhythms in the piano with a vocal line featuring the passionate flair often found in South American music. The second song, “Triste” (“Sad”), contains sustained chords in the piano and a legato line in the voice that also features many long, sustained notes. The singer is standing under a lime tree where he or she lost a lover. “Zamba” is a sorrowful song about unrequited love that features mention of natural things like stones and sand. The final song, “Gato” (“Cat”) features the same fast tempo and rhythmic energy as the first piece, giving the group of songs symmetry.

Next the discussion will move to the music American composers alive at the writing of this dissertation who have written vocal works containing rural and agricultural themes.

CHAPTER 6. RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL THEMES IN VOCAL MUSIC BY LIVING AMERICAN COMPOSERS

As the United States continued to be a major player in the growth of concert music throughout the twentieth century, new American composers who saw the potential in art song started to write within this genre. The spirit of American music exhibited by composers such as Copland, Bacon and others, continued to flourish as they and other composers defined and redefined the American sound. Art songs on rural and agricultural themes became even more prevalent during the mid to late twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The music discussed in this chapter represents the work of composers living at the time this dissertation was written whose vocal music pieces at least occasionally exhibit these themes.

Ned Rorem was born in Indiana in 1923 and raised in Chicago. He championed twentieth century American and French music. His studies in music included time at Northwestern University, Curtis Institute, as a copyist for Virgil Thomson, the Tanglewood Festival, Julliard, and the *Ecole Normal de Musique*. In his composition, he attempted to approach song the same way Poulenc did, with musical sensitivity and mindfulness of the text. Rorem has been praised for his melodic gift. He, himself, makes no claim to that gift. Rather, his approach to writing music is based on other precepts. He said of his song composition:

My three mottos for song writing: use only good poems—that is, convincing marvels in English of all periods. Write gracefully for the voice—that is, make the vocal line as seen on paper have the arched flow which singers like to interpret. Use no trick beyond the biggest trick—that is, since singing is already such an artifice, never repeat words arbitrarily, much less ask the voice to growl, shriek, or rasp. . . . I have nothing against special effects; they are just not in my language. I portray the poet by framing his words, not by distorting them.¹⁶⁷

Bret Johnson further identified three additional characteristics typical of Rorem's music: "chiming piano, rushing triplets, [and] sumptuous harmonies."¹⁶⁸ Johnson goes on to say that Rorem's music "has always been reflective—of mood, of landscapes (Assembly and Fall), of personalities (Remembering Tommy). . . .Vocal music is and remains his great strength, indeed his music complements and mirrors the human voice more than anything else."¹⁶⁹

Rorem set many poems by Theodor Roethke (1908-1963), who also had grown up in the Midwest, and whose poetry reflects elements of this upbringing such as nature, a simple life, and the experiences with his family's business. His father ran a greenhouse and Roethke spent much time around green growing things, leading to poetry reflecting nature in a very natural way. He periodically submitted texts to Rorem that he thought might be set to music. Rorem, though originally unenthusiastic about the prospect, ended up being quite successful with them.¹⁷⁰ Rorem's *Eight Poems of Theodore Roethke* was the result. Of this set, "Root Cellar" has very vivid images of onions and creatures found in a root

¹⁶⁷ Ned Rorem, "Why I Write as I Do," *Tempo* New Series, no. 109 (June, 1974): 40.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/944099> (accessed February 24, 2011).

¹⁶⁸ Bret Johnson, "Still Sings the Voice: A Portrait of Ned Rorem," *Tempo* New Series, no. 153 (June, 1985): 10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/946231> (accessed February 24, 2011).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷⁰ Friedburg, 3:227.

cellar while “Orchids” reflect memories Roethke had of the family greenhouse business. The music of the first piece has a sinister tone befitting the dark dungeon of the cellar, and the music of the second piece, with its jazzy, sensual vocal line, personifies the seductive flower. Other songs within the set are “Night Crow,” “My Papa’s Waltz,” “I Strolled Across an Open Field,” and “Snake,” which contains musical depictions of a snake gliding. Rorem set another Roethke text, “The Serpent,” a humorous song about a serpent who wants to sing.

Rorem set a significant number of poems by Walt Whitman, Paul Goodman (1911-1972), Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), and Witter Bynner (1881-1968). The poems by Plath and Stevens particularly utilize elements of nature in their imagery. Plath’s “Poppies in July” and Stevens’ “The River of Rivers in Connecticut” are examples. Rorem also contributed a setting for Housman’s “Is my team ploughing?”

While Ned Rorem has distinguished his career in song and instrumental genres, Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926) has distinguished his through his operas. Many of these operas are stories based on rural life, a lifestyle with which Floyd has personal experience. He is the son of a minister in rural South Carolina, a childhood environment that informed much of his work. Most of his operas have rural, Southern, or colonial settings.

Floyd’s other influences include his college piano instructor, Ernst Bacon, who helped Floyd find his own sense of an American style. According to *Grove Music Online*, Floyd owes much credit for his style to Bacon as well as to the social realism movement.

Musically, this translates into folk-like melodies, a quartal harmonic structure, and parallel chords, especially fifths.¹⁷¹

The composer wrote all of his own libretti; therefore, his operas show his personal touch not only musically but textually. His operas with specifically rural subject matter are *Slow Dusk*, *The Sojourner*, *Mollie Sinclair*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Cold Sassy Tree*, and *Susannah*. In 1956 Floyd won the New York Critics' Circle Award, among others, for *Susannah*.¹⁷² In 1958 this piece represented "American opera" at the Brussels World Fair.¹⁷³ This opera is a modern re-telling of the Apocryphal story of Susannah and the Elders, in this case set in New Hope Valley, Tennessee. In one particularly moving aria from the opera, "Ain't it a Pretty Night?" Susannah looks at the beauty around her in nature but also ponders what is in the world beyond her sheltered rural life.

Libby Larsen was born in Delaware in 1950, but her family soon moved to Minnesota. She credits her father, a chemical engineer developing new products in her childhood, with helping her to learn to think for herself. From this place, as well as an immersion in the Roman Catholic Church prior to Vatican II, the opposite of a free-thinking environment, in Larsen's opinion, helped her to develop her own way of viewing the world. The two extremes of these environments helped her to see the benefit of independent thought.¹⁷⁴

Her first musical influence came in Catholic school where she learned to sing Gregorian chant. This gave her a strong sense of melodic stress and shape as well as

¹⁷¹ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Carlisle Floyd."
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/09881> (accessed February 25, 2011).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Erdmann, "The difference between art and entertainment, the importance of electricity on the compositional art, James Brown, and more: A conversation with composer Libby Larsen," *Women of Note Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2002): 4.

individual expression. She began composing with friends on the playground at a very young age, “out of a sense of need...to communicate things that I was not able to express through any other venue.¹⁷⁵” She describes her compositional process as “creating sound sculptures.”¹⁷⁶ She composes because “it uses all of my brain, at least the brain that I can get in touch with, to try to understand how to communicate.¹⁷⁷” Above all, Larsen strives to write “true” music, music that is in line with her own ideals and creative beliefs. When a work does not meet these standards, she will throw it out entirely.

Larsen is an advocate for American music. She and composer Stephen Paulus (b. 1949) founded the Minnesota Composers’ Forum to promote the music of Minnesota composers. Larsen has been prolific in all musical genres, and by comparison, though not small in number, her art songs are a small portion of her total output; in total there are twelve cycles and many single songs. She also writes for symphonies, chamber groups, instrumental soloists, and virtually every other kind of classically accepted ensemble. Larsen made history by being the first woman composer in residence for a major orchestra. Larsen’s music has been described as having a modern American spirit, an update to Copland’s style for contemporary times. Her use of American vernacular prose, with its natural rhythms, inflections, and stresses helps give her work a particularly American flavor.¹⁷⁸

Her harmonic language is mostly traditional but with eclectic influences that juxtapose Mozart, Beethoven, Prokofiev, Berlioz and Bach with Chuck Berry, Big MaMa

¹⁷⁵ Ann McCutcheon *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 143.

¹⁷⁶ Erdmann, 4.

¹⁷⁷ McCutcheon, *The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process*, 144.

¹⁷⁸ Glenda Seacrest, “Songs from Letters and Cowboy Songs by Libby Larsen: Two Different Approaches to Western Mythology and Western Mythological Figures,” DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2000.

Thornton, and James Brown. Larsen is influenced by other American composers, like Philip Glass (b. 1937), as well as rock music, boogie-woogie, jazz, and Motown. All of these are American popular music sources she has analyzed as part of her need to understand her own compositional process.¹⁷⁹ While composing, Larsen is very cautious of any other music she listens to, and jazz and blues tend to be her muses. She prefers to combine certain aspects of these diverse musical experiences into her music at once. Although her music tends to follow a traditional harmonic language, she also plays with polytonality, dual modality, and tone clusters. To Larsen, color is the most important quality of music. Following color, she prefers rhythmic energy and structure to melody or harmony. Indeed, her music shows much rhythmic vigor.

Larsen's gift with text setting has been compared to that of Benjamin Britten.

Larsen thinks of each word as having a note value and chooses to change meters according to the needs of the text. Often because of this, her vocal lines have a natural melodic contour rather than feeling contrived. She desires to "honor the mystery of the voice as the ancient crier of the spirit."¹⁸⁰

Larsen draws her text from those of living poets as well as those of the past. Edwin Morgan (1920-2010), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Rilke, Dickinson, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), ancient Egyptian texts, letters of Calamity Jane, Willa Cather, Brenda Ueland (1891-1925), Jenny Lind (1820-1887), and last words of the wives of Henry the Eighth are all representative of the diverse poetry and prose appealing to Larsen. The

¹⁷⁹ Erdmann, 8.

¹⁸⁰ James R. Briscoe, *Contemporary Anthology of Music by Women* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 109.

subjects she chooses to explore are eclectic, but one unifying theme is that many of them are either by or about famous or strong female figures from history.

For Larsen, the music itself already exists in the air much the same way a sculptor sees a sculpture as needing to be liberated from a block of marble. She believes she literally takes the notes and the sounds from the air and puts them on paper. The way a sound fills an acoustical space and then decays is a never-ending source of fascination to Larsen. In fact, she feels she must work only in a studio that is a properly resonant space in order that she may experience the sensation of the reverberation of the sounds she is putting together. This experimentation with acoustical phenomena has lent itself to some interesting and progressive colors in her work, a quality that makes her work stand out from that of her contemporaries.

Larsen's opinions about American music and the direction thereof are cogent and refreshing, though in many ways her views echo that of her predecessors Bacon and Dvořák in that she believes Americans need to have their own style of concert music rather than imitating European models. Larsen's explains her own cultural experience within the context of composing: "Myself is everything in this [American] culture that has any kind of consensus at the moment, in a culture that in my definition is about 80 years old. That's about how old our culture is because that's how long we've been able to listen to each other on the radio."¹⁸¹ Because of her perception about the place of technology in our culture, especially how the youth of today are exposed primarily to electronic sound, Larsen has become an advocate of the use of electronics as well as the use of mixed sound (amplification) in opera in order to bridge the gap to contemporary audiences. She believes

¹⁸¹ Jennifer W. Kelly, "Libby Larsen Composes *Love Songs: Five Songs on texts by Women*. An Artist's Identity Informs her Work." DMA diss., University of California, 2005: 8-9.

that if we are to have an audience for classical music in the future, we must meet the younger audience on their own terms and with their own medium. Therefore, Larsen often uses electronic sounds in her works, validating certain electronic instruments for use in the art music context, such the keyboard synthesizer. She also incorporates other twentieth-century technology in her works. Her opera, *Frankenstein, the Modern Prometheus*, written in 1990, uses a multi-media approach via video and audio technology.¹⁸²

Larsen has particular opinions about the music and the audiences of the Midwest. Larsen believes there are geographically distinct cultures within the United States and identifies herself as a northerner. About this northern culture she stated: “Everyone works on an idea until it’s not a good idea, or until it succeeds...It’s also not liberal and it’s not conservative. It’s a collective point of view that seems to be in the air. This collective point of view comes from the northern Scandinavian background, collective farming.”¹⁸³

Even the changing seasons of the northern climates have influenced Larsen’s work. She desires to capture this cycle in her compositions, saying, “I love the fact that if it’s cold tomorrow then you and I could walk across the lake and we would have an experience we just could not get anywhere else. It’s really quite mystical.”¹⁸⁴ She speaks of the “architecture of the seasons¹⁸⁵” in her work. She states that the seasons serve as a metaphor for the important compositional technique of tension and release.

Most people here are six months ahead of themselves in their planning...It’s very very basic. You prepare for the extremes...Storms here for instance. West of Minneapolis is the beginning of the Great Plains, east of Minneapolis is much more hilly terrain. But, west of Minneapolis—our

¹⁸² Secrest: 3.

¹⁸³ Quoted in Kelly: 10.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

weather systems chiefly come from the southwest. So, if a tornado is brewing—we're in "tornado alley"—you can tell in the beginning of the day that you're going to get a whopper somewhere about 4:30 in the afternoon. Feel it in the air. You can look to the southwest sky and you can see the mare's tails clouds—just whispering. You think "uh-oh." And you don't think, "what a beautiful day," you think, "we're going to get a real whopper," and you go to the store and get your coffee, and everyone says, "it's going to be a big storm today" not "how are your kids?" (Laughs!) And you spend all day because you know it's going to this, and you watch the clouds build up, and feel the pressure build as the air loses its oxygen and you get a vacuum, and the birds start flying in different ways, and you watch this thing coming in, and you feel it coming, and then it hits! And it's about 10 minutes long and then it's done. That's tension and release.¹⁸⁶

It is this author's opinion that this same understanding and reverence for the landscape is inherent in many rural people, especially northerners. To have composers who themselves resonate with this idea, and then are able to communicate it through music is very important to communicating with this population. Larsen believes that the particular rural populations in her area, including the immigrant cultures of Minnesota, have affected not only her music, but also the success of her music with the public. According to her, these Scandinavian, German and Irish immigrants, each with their own musical traditions, inherently have a love of music that is "not necessarily hierarchical—'This is Orchestra.' Their folk music is a general love of music makin'. Haul off and dance or sing, you know."¹⁸⁷ Larsen believes this prevailing attitude towards music in the northern region contrasts with attitudes in other geographic areas, even in the adjacent areas of the Midwest. "And I've found that in other parts of the Midwest, people are willing to hear ideas, but ideas are often met with a conservative kind of..."we don't want change." And

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.: 14.

it's not, "Oh, goody, let's change," it's "huh, that's interesting." That's the way people respond."¹⁸⁸

Glenda Secrest notes that Larsen has a particular affinity for prose, possibly because it offers a freer treatment of text setting than poetry.¹⁸⁹ *The Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey, 1880-1902* for soprano and piano demonstrate Larsen's rhythmic flair not only in the speech-like vocal line that somehow seems colored with an "Old West" vocal inflexion, but also in the gunshot, haphazard accompaniment in the second piece dealing with Wild Bill Hickok's marksmanship. The third piece of this set, though slow, shows complex rhythmic writing in the arpeggios in the accompaniment running counterpoint to the vocal line. What would otherwise be a simple setting of common speech becomes a rhythmic adventure. This composition also shows the touch of whimsy that Larsen brings to much of her writing.

This cycle for soprano and piano is an example of Larsen's use of chant-like passages in her work. All of the pieces have unaccompanied or nearly unaccompanied sections sung freely and in a recitative style. This makes what are already straightforward, if not blunt, words even more poignant. The group comprises five songs, all but one quite short. The rhythmic settings of the texts are intended to be reflective of how those words would be inflected in conversation between Calamity Jane and her daughter. Larsen employs text painting using western idioms throughout the piece. In fact, her directive on "He Never Misses" is that the accompaniment should be played "as if shooting a Colt 45." In addition, she gives creative direction to the singer even in the form of gestures, for example "fling your arms as if toting six-shooters."

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.: 108.

¹⁸⁹ Secrest: 5.

Larsen says of Calamity Jane:

She was also a true pioneer. She wasn't schooled in the eastern ways. She really grew up a daughter of the West and so whatever she did, she did naturally. She happened to be very good at mule skinning, mid-wifing, stage coach driving, gambling, and all those things because that was the world she lived in. She did them really well and felt the pain of the reality of who she was in relationship to the country that was the social mores that were developed around her.¹⁹⁰

There are, perhaps, correlations to be made between Calamity Jane's attitude towards her life and the mentality of many rural people. They don't need "fancy" things, and often prefer the practical and pragmatic to anything they perceive as "high brow." They are good at the things that they are good at because it is what they need to be good at. There is a natural suspicion, then, of anything that seems superfluous. As related to the arts, rural people seem to have a strong resistance to impertinence, keeping up appearances, and anything made purposely complicated. Larsen has honored this worldview with her approach to these songs that, while artistic, is also straightforward and true to the mood and the text.

In stark contrast to the prosody of Calamity Jane's letters is *Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers*. These settings of poems of Rilke, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning about mature love, nature, and flowers, are scored for mezzo-soprano, cello and piano. Returning to neo-Romantic idioms, Larsen has created rich colors evocative of the subject matter. The title piece, "Beloved, Thou has brought me many flowers" is set in 5/8 time. There is a continual conversation back and forth between the voice and instruments. The middle section includes an atmospheric and

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.: 13.

somewhat minimalistic feeling ostinato in the instruments. “Liebeslied” is written for only cello and voice, showing again how Larsen makes the color of a piece her first priority. This piece features the characteristic changing meter found in so many of Larsen’s works. In “White World” Larsen creates the feeling of falling snow and winter briskness with another ostinato figure in the accompaniment. Not coincidentally, the piece uses only the white keys of the piano. Much of the poetry makes reference to nature and its relationship to love.

Cowboy Songs for soprano and piano explores early American images and ideals. These three songs are not considered a song cycle but are instead a collection of songs on similar themes of the American West. They were written in 1979 for Larsen’s friend, Jeannie Brindley Barnett.¹⁹¹ Belle Starr is the heroine of the song “Bucking Bronco.” She was a western woman who lived the life of an outlaw and saw many different men pass her doorstep throughout her life, most of whom were also outlaws, and most of whom met unsavory ends.¹⁹² In “Bucking Bronco” Larsen again uses unaccompanied recitative in the vocal line. She chose to create rhythmic interest later in the piece by writing a horseback-riding motive in the accompaniment and the vocal line. Poet Robert Creeley (1926-2005) wrote “Sufi Sam Christian” while traveling in southeastern Asia. As a result, he believed it has a Sufi flavor. Despite the Asian influences in the work, the words and the atmosphere they evoke could certainly be said by a cowboy who is tired from his work and has been on his horse too long:

¹⁹¹ Secrest: 42.

¹⁹² Ibid.: 42-43.

Life me into heaven
Slowly 'cause my back's
Sore and my mind's too
Thoughtful, and I'm not
Even sure I want to go.¹⁹³

Larsen decided to title the work “Lift Me Into Heaven Slowly” rather than “Sufi Sam Christian.” The song is in the same time signature and key signature as the first piece; however, this piece is slow and more homophonic if not hymn-like at certain moments. A continual melodic arch is created in the voice, giving the impression of the singer reaching towards heaven.

“Billy the Kid,” with a text by an unknown author, is about another outlaw, a thief and murderer who was eventually sentenced to hanging in 1881. He escaped from the hanging, but was later shot by a friend. “Billy the Kid” shows the influence of jazz and blues on Larsen’s style. The accompaniment is reminiscent of a player piano in a dusty bar. While the key and time signature change, the subject matter remains consistent. In this song, which has the largest vocal range of the three pieces, Larsen creates a climax that includes parallel octaves in the piano accompaniment.

Larsen began to make a connection to the writings of author Willa Cather during a residency at the University of Nebraska, where she was invited to write an opera. While there, Larsen began probing Cather’s novels and short stories, with their obvious connection to the plains and to Nebraska, to see if they inspired her musically.¹⁹⁴ Larsen has identified her tendency to gravitate towards material about strong females or written by

¹⁹³ Libby Larsen. *Cowboy Songs* (Boston: ECS Publishing).

¹⁹⁴ Linell Gray Moss, “An Interview with Composer Libby Larsen,” *IAWN Journal* 5, no. 1 (1999):

female authors.¹⁹⁵ She has also made a correlation between strong texts written by women being easy to set to music.¹⁹⁶ Cather's work, written by a strong female character, seems to have been easy, indeed, for Larsen to set.

One of the results of her inspiration from Cather's work is the song cycle, *My Ántonia* for soprano and piano. The text for this cycle comes from Cather's well-known 1918 novel by the same name. The story is written from the point of view of Jim, a young boy growing up in a small town, who meets a Bohemian immigrant girl, Ántonia. Jim relates his experiences with her to a friend, including their childhood together, their burgeoning relationship, his admiration of her, and his final meeting with her many years later. Jim and Ántonia's story does not have the typical happy ending; he finds himself in an unhappy marriage, and Ántonia marries someone else. The yearning that Jim still feels for her even after many years is often depicted in the cycle by a wide octave leap in the melody when he sings her name.

Jim retells these memories as he is on a train on his way back to the small town in Nebraska where he grew up. Larsen unifies the cycle with accompaniments in the first and last pieces that are meant to imitate the rumble of the train moving down the tracks. The piano also paints the texts in the third piece, where it plays the part of the blizzard winds, and in the fourth piece, where it might be said to depict a rustic pump organ playing a country waltz.

Finally, another major work by Larsen worthy of mention within the context of this disquisition is her opera, *Eric Hermann-son's Soul*, based on a short story by Willa Cather.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

According to Larsen, the themes of the opera are “the individual as an outsider in his own community, the struggle to find a sense of self, the importance of selfless love, and the conflict between urban and rural life.”¹⁹⁷ The music is a combination of Norwegian fiddle tunes, folk songs, Romantic opera, and hymns. In one scene, one character is introduced to opera by hearing another play the intermezzo from *Cavalliera Rusticana*. “Motives interweave as country music and secular fiddle tunes meet the music of the church.”¹⁹⁸ From this opera are taken her *Margaret Songs—Three Songs from Willa Cather*. She contrasts the urban and rural lifestyles in one of these songs—“so little there.”

Lori Laitman was born in 1955, five years after Larsen. She studied flute performance at Yale and began composing halfway through her college career. Like Larsen, she has won many awards for her composition. Her original compositional impetus was to write music for film and theater. While she has composed music for a variety of ensembles, in 1991 after the birth of her first child, she made the decision to compose exclusively for voice, either in art song or in opera forms.

One of the primary reasons for the popularity of Laitman’s songs is her gift with text setting. For Laitman, the poetry comes first. She does not always write for commission, thereby she is free to choose her own texts. She feels she must choose and can only compose for poetry that moves her deeply or speaks to her in some new way. This is the basis of her artistic philosophy.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

When beginning a song, Laitman seeks to “capture the spirit of each poem and amplify its emotional content through music.¹⁹⁹” She writes the vocal line first and drafts and re-drafts it until it is well polished before she writes a note of accompaniment. She considers her expression markings to be strong suggestions rather than mandates and even goes so far as to encourage a performer to do otherwise, with the caveat that the performance must still be expressive. Laitman’s passion is the melodic line, and she is also imminently aware of tessitura. She makes a habit of singing through her compositions constantly as she writes them. She wants the poetry to be served first, but once that concern is dealt with, she prefers the singer to feel comfortable and happy.

Like Larsen, Laitman uses varying bar lengths and shifting meter to accommodate the natural stress of the poetic line. The neo-Romantic vein in which Laitman most frequently writes is able to encompass many different colors and textures. Since her first compositions were ragtime pieces, there will occasionally be some ragtime color in her work. She desires her music to appeal to the average, everyday kind of person. She describes her music as “timeless, beautiful, and lyric.”²⁰⁰

Laitman has written widely varied songs. In her more than one hundred fifty songs she has chosen to set texts by forty-five poets. Connection to the text is so important to her that she will often develop friendships with the poet. By doing, she hopes to glean even more insight into word stress and artistic concepts and completely embody them in her setting. Laitman imagines herself as the person in the poem. She feels her work is intuitive

¹⁹⁹ Lori Laitman, “Lori Laitman Composer” <http://www.artsongs.com/> (accessed December 12, 2007).

²⁰⁰ K. E. Watt, “Lori Laitman Large” [USOperaweb.com](http://www.kewatt.com/LoriLaitman.html). 2004 <http://www.kewatt.com/LoriLaitman.html> (accessed December 12, 2007).

rather than highly structured, and perhaps this feeling of ease is due to her strong connection to the poetic content with which she works.

Laitman divides her work into two groups: the Holocaust type and the non-Holocaust type. As an American Jew she feels a strong emotional connection between the poetry and prose written by survivors of the Holocaust. The non-Holocaust poets whose works she has set include Emily Dickinson, Mary Oliver (b. 1935), Thomas Lux (b. 1946), Paul Muldoon (b. 1951), Dana Gioia (b. 1950), Joyce Kilmer (b. 1949), Margaret Atwood (b. 1939), Toi Derricotte (b. 1941), Annie Finch (b. 1956), David Mason (b. 1954), John Wood (1926-2005), Jerzy Ficowski (1924-2006), and Sara Teasdale (1884-1933).

Laitman's connection to rural subject matter is far less direct than that of Larsen. Nonetheless, there are some songs in her catalogue that use natural images and even explicitly rural images.

Her cycle *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* sets six poems taken from the title of a chilling collection of poetry written by Jewish children in the concentration camp at Terazin published under the same title. Terazin, located in what is now the Czech Republic, was a concentration camp for professionals, scholars, artists and musicians, and was set up to appear humane by the incorporation of small parks, sculpture, and the performance of concerts within the camp. This was done to deceive the International Red Cross into believing that the Jewish people were being treated well, when in fact, the opposite was true. Most of the children whose poetry is collected in the book died before the war was over. The final piece of the cycle, "The Old House" tells the hollow truth about the waste of life the camp was for its inhabitants. While this set may seem to have the little

connection with rural themes, there are certain points of connection. Many of the children chose their memories of things in nature, for example, butterflies, flowers, birds and gardens, to help themselves cope with the horrors of their current condition. Returning to these universal experiences of nature in difficult times is, in this author's opinion, a large part of our humanity and something to which many people can relate.

Laitman's cycle of three songs for soprano and piano, *Sunflowers*, includes "The Sunflowers," "Dreams," and "Sunrise," poems by naturalist poet Mary Oliver. The text of the title song speaks of sunflowers as if they were people whom the poet would like everyone to get to know. The poet asks that we walk and talk with the sunflowers, asking them for stories about their lives.

Laitman has set six different cycles that use, either in part or exclusively, the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Of these, the cycle that most obviously features natural images and ideas is *On Bee and Revery* for soprano and piano. This is a set of three Dickinson poems: "The Butterfly upon," "Hope is a Strange Invention," and "To Make a Prairie." In these settings of Dickinson's poetry, Laitman has used several compositional techniques that, because of the frequency with which they are used, set the Dickinson settings apart from her other work. Some of these techniques include melisma, syncopated rhythms, and repetitions of the text.²⁰¹

Laitman's cycle *On the Green Trail* for soprano and piano comprises three poems by self-professed Mennonite poet, Jeff Gundy (b. 1952). The poet grew up in the country

²⁰¹ Carol Lines, "The Songs of Lori Laitman," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 1 (2007): 31+. Sourced in Educators Reference Complete.
http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=PROF&docId=A172012935&source=gale&sreprod=PROF&userGroupName=ndacad_58105ztrn&version=1.0 (accessed March 4, 2011).

near Flanagan, Illinois, the child of farmers.²⁰² His Midwestern upbringing is reflected in much of his writing,²⁰³ especially in its references to the natural world, small-town living, his Mennonite religious beliefs, and childhood school days. The poet explained the role of the natural world in his work:

I've always been interested in the natural world and felt a pretty close connection. . . . I believe poetry is an interchange with the world, of which the human is only a small part, and while a particular poem can do many different things, I can't imagine writing a series of poems without their being entangled with the physical world in substantial ways. To put this in other terms, it seems strange to me that so many poets write so much without there being any sense of inhabiting a world that has trees, animals, free water, and earth in it.²⁰⁴

The poems in the work are “On the Green Trail,” “Looking at my Hands,” and “Small Night Song from Oneonta.” This work was commissioned by soprano Michelle Latour as part of a year-long emphasis on environmental stewardship at Bluffton University in 2008.²⁰⁵

A few of Laitman's single songs deal with natural subject matter. Her “My Garden” for soprano and piano is a setting a text by Adelaide Ayer Kelley, about which Laitman has written, “sweet contemplation: life as a garden.”²⁰⁶ Laitman's song, “Snake Lake” has a dance-like accompaniment. There are extra “s” sounds written into the vocal part to imitate

²⁰² Ezra Shock and Anita Hooley, “Jeff Gundy,” Goshen College website, http://www.goshen.edu/mennonitepoetry/Poets/Jeff_Gundy (accessed March 4, 2011).

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Anita Hooley, Interview with Jeff Gundy via email correspondence, July, 2007. Goshen College website, http://www.goshen.edu/mennonitepoetry/Poets/Jeff_Gundy/Interview (accessed March 4, 2011).

²⁰⁵ Jenna Patty, “Bluffton University Music Department Faculty Debut Song Cycle,” Bluffton University website, http://www.bluffton.edu/about/news/newsreleases.asp?show=013108_04 (accessed March 4, 2011).

²⁰⁶ Lori Laitman, website, <http://www.artsongs.com/find/voicetype> (accessed March 4, 2011).

snake-like, aspirate noises. Text painting in the accompaniment such as trills and chromatic bass passages suggest the swirling movement of snakes in water while grace-note like passages in the vocal part near the end of the song resemble fearful trembling.

Jocelyn Hagen (b. 1980) was born in Valley City, North Dakota and now resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There she composes, performs, accompanies, and heads her own music publishing company for new music, Graphite Publishing, with fellow composer Timothy C. Takach (b.1978). She is the recipient of awards and grants from the ASCAP and the American Composers Forum.

Art song is not a large part of her output, and most of her art songs do not have rural and agricultural themes, with one exception. Her cycle, *Songs of Fields and Prairies*, depicts the broad, sweeping and open landscape of the prairie as well as the people, plants and animals living in it. The piano parts are thick, expansive, and colorful. The vocal lines often float above the landscape created by the piano texture. The poetry is taken from a variety of sources, including works by Walt Whitman, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Bible, Witter Bynner, and Anne Crichton Boise, Hagen's great grandmother, a poetess and the dedicatee of the cycle.

All of the poetry shares common imagery. The grass, the stillness and peace of the landscape, the common wisdom of the people, simple and true love, and the cycle of life and death are all represented throughout the cycle. "Call of the Open," with its overture filled with many of the musical themes of the cycle, creates a broad, sweeping musical atmosphere. This same musical picture can be found in the piano accompaniment and wide melodic lines in the final piece of the cycle, "Lullaby," in which a mother mourns for her son as she buries him on the prairie. The a cappella piece "The Endless Root," features

folk-like melodies, haunting in their simplicity. “The Prairie-Grass Dividing,” the most dissonant song of the cycle, punctuates Whitman’s poetry with dotted rhythms and jagged melodies. Composer Elizabeth Brown’s²⁰⁷ catalogue has several major works that center completely on rural and agricultural themes. The composer has personal experience with rural life since she grew up on an agricultural research station in Alabama.²⁰⁸ Brown’s chamber opera *Rural Electrification* is scored for soprano, theramin, and recorded sound. The work describes how small towns and the people in them had to acclimate to the electronic age as rural electric cooperatives brought them power. The work examines the issue of rural electrification to see if this new technology truly was an improvement in the quality of life for rural families. What began as an exciting and promising change ended up as a burden for some residents who were faced with an electrical bill they struggled to pay. However, the work does not wax too political, and Brown has been careful to lighten the mood of the piece through additions of humor.

The story unfolds through letters exchanged between a character named Mary Alice and her sister that detail how the family adjusts to electricity. Brown involved multimedia in the premiere of the work that took place at the Old American Can Factory in Brooklyn, New York in May, 2006.²⁰⁹ Somewhat ironic are the two electrical “instruments,” recorded sound and theramin, which accompany the singer. This use of electronic instrumentation was an intentional choice by Brown.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ The author was unable to find Elizabeth Brown's birthdate in any source.

²⁰⁸ Molly Sheridan, “New York: Bright Lights, Small Farm-Elizabeth *Brown's Rural Electrification*,” *Radar-Field Report* from *newmusicbox* (May 26, 2006).
<http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=4664> (accessed March 4, 2011).

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

As a self-taught composer, Brown tends to think “outside the box” in her approach to composition. In *Rural Electrification*, she uses the theramin as if it were a stringed instrument.²¹¹ She prefers instruments that can perform sounds with liquidity and perhaps a certain amount of non-specificity. She explained her tendency in a 2008 article: “It’s as if the ground is not really stable. I’ve been drawn to instruments because they slide and they have this aspect—this kind of inhuman vocal quality of bending and sliding. It’s just what I hear; I don’t know why. That’s what it’s like in my head.”²¹²

Seattle-based composer and conductor Karen P. Thomas²¹³ has written several works for voice that encompass rural and agricultural themes. Her 1985 cycle of e. e. cummings poetry, *cowboy songs*, comprises six poems: “sam was a man,” “eyes to no one,” “spoke joe to jack,” “nobody loses all the time,” “if you can’t eat,” and “buffalo bill’s defunct.” The songs can be sung by high, medium or low voice and are accompanied by piano. Humor is a major focus of the cycle; the composer has taken care with word setting and artistic directions to give the singer plenty of opportunity to act.²¹⁴ Thomas has also written an opera on rural subject matter called *Coyote’s Tail*. This is a one-act children’s opera with a chamber orchestra and nine characters.

Composer Michael Wittgraf²¹⁵ is a North Dakota-based composer and music professor working out of the University of North Dakota. His musical influences are broad; he has worked with rock and jazz musicians and also credits polka and country music

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Molly Sheridan, “Slipping Through Memory—the Music of Elizabeth Brown,” on [newmusicbox.com](http://www.newmusicbox.com), (February 19, 2008). <http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=5463> (accessed March 7, 2011).

²¹³ The author was unable to find Karen P. Thomas’ birthdate in any published source.

²¹⁴ Karen P. Thomas, “Composer Reviews” from Karen P. Thomas personal webpage, <http://www.karenpthomas.com/composerreviews.html> (accessed March 7, 2011).

²¹⁵ The author was unable to find Michael Wittgraf’s birthdate in any published source.

among genres that has informed his work.²¹⁶ Wittgraf has composed works in my different subgenres of classical music including works for choral ensemble, solo voice, orchestra and band, chamber ensembles, and even electronic ensembles. Wittgraf, in addition to the expected degrees in music theory and composition, also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics. He credits his mathematical talents with bringing to his musical composition the ability to “combine diverse musical styles with mathematical precision, while maintaining a keen overall musical sensibility.”²¹⁷

The composer has written a set called *Three Jacobson Songs* that address not only rural subject matter but also environmental issues related to agricultural practices. The work was written in 2000 and is scored for soprano and piano. Wittgraf wrote about the inspiration for the cycle:

I had the privilege of meeting Terry Jacobson, an organic farmer and sustainable agriculture advocate, in 1999 at the Grand Forks, North Dakota Unitarian Universalist Fellowship where he and his wife Janet spoke about organic farming. Their passion for the subject was overwhelming. When he read some of his poems, I was overcome with a tremendous desire to set them to music. His poetry is powerful, visceral, sonorous, and earthy. The organic farmer’s connection to the earth is at once intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and parental. It would serve us well to listen to the unaffected wisdom of Terry and those like him. The songs amplify and clarify the text by closely observing its meaning, meter, sentence structures, sounds, and phrasing. The music works carefully with the text, because poetry as powerful as Terry’s can only be diminished by careless musical composition.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Michael Wittgraf, “Biography,” University of North Dakota website, <http://www.und.edu/instruct/wittgraf/biography.html> (accessed October 13, 2011).

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ American Music Center webpage, Online Library s.v. “Three Jacobson Songs,” <http://amc.net/library/composition.aspx?CompositionID=345204> (accessed March 7, 2011).

Agricultural and rural themes continue to fascinate composers. The ones cited in this portion of this dissertation are just a small sample of those working today within these themes. Perhaps more performances of these types of works would only reinforce the popularity of these subjects as musical inspiration. It is also possible that these songs, with their particular images and with their ability to resonate with the lives and experiences of rural people, may have special application with regards to performances and recitals in rural areas. The next two chapters will explore those possibilities.

PART II. BRINGING VOCAL ART MUSIC TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

CHAPTER 7. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCAL ART MUSIC FOR A RURAL COMMUNITY

As interesting as the discussion of rural and agricultural themes in vocal art music may be on its own, it is important to note that this sub-group of music may have special applications in terms of reaching a specific target audience, in this case the rural one. Rural areas often experience greater barriers to the appreciation of art music than most urban areas, and are often dismissed as creative deserts. However, research is now showing that rural areas and individuals living within them may benefit from art music in different and vital ways.

In order to understand this audience, the specific barriers to their ability to experience and enjoy art music must be examined. In addition to identifying these barriers, this dissertation will discuss several reasons why reaching the rural audience is crucial and offer suggestions as to how that goal may be accomplished.

Several basic statistics pertaining to rural areas will inform this discussion. A rural area is one that is defined as containing less than one hundred-fifty residents per square mile.²¹⁹ According to the 2010 United States Census, 6.3% of the population of the United States is considered “rural,” living beyond the boundaries of metropolitan or micropolitan areas.²²⁰ This figure is down slightly from the 2000 Census in which 6.8% of the

²¹⁹ James Sheek, *Rural Students, Aspiration, Motivation, and Music Education: Why Don't More Rural Students Make It to College?* Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG, 2009: 4.

²²⁰ “Micropolitan” refers to the designation created by the Office of Management and Budget in 2009 to describe fringe areas where individuals live in rural situations but commute to an urban center for work.

population was rural.²²¹ However, the actual number of people living in rural areas has increased from 19,131,679 in the year 2000 to 19,484,223 in the year 2010.²²² An increase of 352,544 individuals living in rural areas suggests that these areas, while clearly not experiencing the massive population growth of cities are not entirely dead and stagnant areas. Furthermore, the need to create the term “micropolitan areas” further emphasizes that populations are not as easily divided between rural and urban designations as they once were. Many are choosing the benefits of rural lifestyle for their family life and free time and the benefits of an urban income for their professional life.

According to the former president of the Rural Sociological Society, Daniel T. Lichter, there is growing intersection and interaction between rural and urban cultures.²²³ Technology aids this trend, allowing individuals who work desk jobs to telecommute from anywhere in the world, even areas that are relatively unpopulated.

The population of rural areas has fluctuated significantly throughout United States history, often due to economic and environmental factors. During the Industrial Revolution, many rural dwellers moved from farms and small towns to larger cities where they believed they could make a better living working at factories. Then, during the Great Depression of the 1930’s, some people moved out of the cities and back to small towns where they felt they could better provide some of their own needs through growing and raising their own food.²²⁴ Difficult economic times and widespread drought causing major losses for

²²¹ US Census Bureau, “Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010,” 4, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf> (accessed April 25, 2011).

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Rural Sociological Society homepage, <http://ruralsociology.org/> (accessed April 26, 2011).

²²⁴ Kolb, J.H., “Agriculture and Rural Life,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 6 (May 1934): 787-799. From JSTOR, October 19, 2010.

agriculture in the 1980's led to another urban migration of rural people.²²⁵ While not yet seen in the statistics, anecdotally there are several rural areas in the United States where population has begun to increase. Some rural areas are experiencing unexpected economic growth due to sudden burst of industry. An example of this type of growth is happening in western North Dakota, eastern Montana, and western South Dakota where the discovery of the Bakken oil formation has attracted oil workers and their families to these remote areas.

Another group of individuals are moving to rural areas because their careers can be mobile or they have identified specialized industries that can operate on a small scale in a rural area. These independent, enterprising individuals often bring with them the experiences of education and urban living, and consequently, they often have differing appetites for entertainment and lifestyle choices than their rural neighbors. These demands are changing the cultural landscape of rural communities.

The third group of people who are choosing to move to rural areas in many ways echo their predecessors during the Great Depression. These are individuals who, due to current strained economic conditions, see sustaining life in an expensive urban center to be financially and emotionally draining and who also see the ability to provide their own food means as a major benefit of rural life. Some of these same individuals are relocating to less-populated areas based on the ideas of "green living," living off the land, living off-grid, and reducing their carbon footprints. Examples of this type of rural settlement are found in several places in the American Southwest where small communities of what are

²²⁵ Johnson, Kenneth M. and Calvin L. Beale, "The Continuing Population Rebound in Nonmetro America," *Rural Development Perspectives* 13, no. 3, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/rdp/rdp1098/rdp1098a.pdf> (accessed August 16, 2011).

known as “earth ships” have begun to rise.²²⁶

Despite these trends toward a more diverse population moving into rural or micropolitan areas, several writers have identified a negative cultural stereotype of rural people and culture that has long existed and that has not changed much over time. Author Barbara Kingsolver describes the gulf between urban and rural groups and the way that urbanites tend to stigmatize rural dwellers:

The antipathy in our culture between the urban and nonurban is so durable it has its own vocabulary: (A) city slicker, tenderfoot; (B) hick, redneck, hayseed, bumpkin, rube, yokel, clodhopper, hoecake, hillbilly, Dogpatch, Daisy Mae, farmer’s daughter, from the provinces, something out of Deliverance... The list is lopsided. I don’t think there’s much doubt, on either side, as to which class is winning the culture wars.²²⁷

Kingsolver believes that, at least in part, these negative rural stereotypes have led to a disproportionate lack of social representation for these already underserved areas. She goes on to state that “rural concerns are less covered by the mainstream media, and often considered intrinsically comic. . . . The policy of our nation is made in cities, controlled largely by urban voters who aren’t well informed about the changes on the face of our land, and the men and women who work it.”²²⁸ In addition, she identifies political circumstances that have furthered the perception of rural folk as uneducated or ill-informed:

²²⁶ Many communities of earth ships that have been built or are in process of being built can be found throughout Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada. A few examples are the Greater World Community in Taos, New Mexico (http://earthship.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=129&Itemid=37) and the R.E.A.C.H. community, also Taos, New Mexico.

²²⁷ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, New York: Harper Collins, 2007: 207.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

Symptomatic of this rural-urban identity crisis is our eager embrace of a recently imposed divide: the Red States and the Blue States. That color map comes to us with the suggestion that both coasts are populated by educated civil libertarians, while the vast middle and south are crisscrossed with the studded tracks of ATVs leaving a trail of flying beer cans and rebel yells.²²⁹

While Kingsolver's descriptions are entertaining, they hold a number of startling truths. Rural characters created for television and movies exhibit many of the negative stereotypes mentioned by Kingsolver. It seems that based on the popularity of these stereotypes within our cultural entertainment mediums, the vast majority of which are based in urban areas and run by city people, the general perception of rural people tends to be quite negative. This perception is not only unfair, but also often incorrect, as Kingsolver goes on to explain:

In fact, the politics of rural regions are no more predictable than those in cities. "Conservative" is a reasonable position for a farmer who can lose home and livelihood all in one year by taking a risk on a new crop. But that's *conservative* as in, 'eager to conserve what we have, reluctant to change the rules overnight,' and unrelated to how the term is currently (often incomprehensibly) applied in party politics.²³⁰

Beyond statistical information and stereotypes, many cultural characteristics have been identified that tend to be specific to rural areas. A 1998 study investigating the rate of college attendance in rural Maine was able to pinpoint several of these characteristics:

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 209.

Forged on the eastern frontier and isolated by geography, Maine's homogeneous 'Yankee' population created a culture valuing hard work, independence, pragmatism, family, community, tolerance of eccentricity, love of the land, abhorrence of debt, but a culture which also displayed some of the characteristics of isolated societies including fatalism, a sense of victimization, pettiness, and insularity.²³¹

This list contains many positive and several negative characteristics of this particular people. One additional characteristic identified by the individuals involved in the study was the feeling of being "second class citizens in their own state" due to the more affluent tourists coming to the area.²³² While these findings specifically pertained to one area in rural Maine, other sociologists, Ferdinand Toennies, George Foster and Robert Redfield among them, have found by several other sociologists that these same or similar characteristics tend to hallmark rural cultures.

Some researchers have adopted specific terms for rural communities including the designations "folk communities," "peasant cultures," or *Gemeinschaft* (literally translated as "mutual partnership" or "community") cultures. Combining several theories put forth by Ferdinand Toennies, Dr. Barbara Lawrence describes these cultures:

Life in a *Gemeinschaft* culture centers around the family and, through the family and/or clan, to other members of the village. Often the land itself binds the people through shared economic concerns. Statuses are ascribed at birth, and there is a fixed body of needs. Rarely, until introduced to them from the outside, do people crave goods they cannot provide for themselves, and having too much or 'getting ahead' goes against social norms. Because

²³¹ Lawrence, Dr. Barbara Kent, "Working Memory: The Influence of Culture on Aspirations," *Rural Educator* 20 (2) (1998): 31.

²³² Ibid.

there is a small number of people to draw upon, individuals often play many roles, further binding them together as a unit.²³³

In these cultures, the “primary group,” i.e. a person’s most direct influences early in life, plays a significant role in the life of that rural person. This primary group will often include immediate and extended family. The expectations of this primary group are largely the deciding factor in many of the person’s decisions throughout life. This group will exert varying amounts of influence as the individual ages. Anyone from family members to classmates to coworkers can be part of the primary group. Lawrence further notes that, “in a small community it is likely that people who are classmates may also be in the same extended family, may later work together, or may marry into each other’s families.”²³⁴ The subtext to this statement is that the primary group has a magnetic and sometimes nearly uncontrollable influence on an individual’s decisions in a rural community. If a person is to change course or try something new, the primary group must approve of such a course change or allow the new influence if the individual is to find any ease at all in making decisions or changes.

Other researchers cited by Lawrence, such as George Foster and Robert Redfield, describe these primary groups within rural communities as “peasant cultures.” Anthropologist and ethnolinguist Robert Redfield ascribed certain traits to these communities, including “an intense attachment to native soil, a reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways; a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community; a certain suspiciousness, mixed with appreciation, of town life; a sober and

²³³ Ibid., 60.

²³⁴ Ibid., 58.

earthy ethic.”²³⁵ The pull of these ancestral ways is strong. Outsiders and outside lifestyles are often distrusted innately. Lawrence interprets Redfield’s ideas further by saying, “most [peasants] respect hard work, particularly agricultural work, look distrustfully at commerce, and scorn people in towns as lazy and easily tired by physical work.”²³⁶

Bridging the divide between these peasant societies and urban culture can be difficult. Traditionally, the main contact these *Gemeinschaft* cultures have had with the outside world has been the community public school. Redfield explained this connection: “The peasant is affected by his or her proximity to the larger society and culture of town, city and nation. Institutions, including the school, may be intrusions into the village, originating outside of it but bound in varying degrees to the lie of the community.”²³⁷ The rural individual comes into contact with the larger society through the market place, as in the case of agricultural trade shows in larger cities, television and radio, through the Internet and various social networking sites, or by way of “a member of the local educated elite or ‘intelligentsia.’ This local elite may, in fact, mediate between the two societies.”²³⁸

Perhaps two of the most prominent characteristics of rural communities are their value of hard, physical work and their love of and tie to the land on which they work and live. These cultures make a distinction regarding what they consider to be “real” work. Lawrence explains that “working outside at something practical is more highly valued than working inside.”²³⁹ Being a hard worker is very important to rural communities, especially since an eight-hour work day is the exception rather than the rule. What is more, work that

²³⁵ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: Phoenix Books: University of Chicago Press: 1960) 38-41.

²³⁶ Lawrence, 63.

²³⁷ Redfield, 38-41.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Lawrence, 92.

takes place indoors is rarely seen as “work.” If desk jobs and non-physical labor are acknowledged to be work, they are considered less difficult and challenging and thereby less valuable. Lumberjacking, mining, and farming are professions that fit the qualifications of outdoor work that is practical as well as physically difficult. All three exemplify the types of work that are venerated within rural cultures.

This type of work is in sharp contrast to work in the financial sector that tends to support the economy of urban areas in that, while it may be considered practical in some senses and can be intellectually challenging, a banking job is not particularly physically taxing, nor can it be performed outdoors. Therefore, the example of working at a bank versus being a coal miner illustrates the contrast between rural and urban mindsets towards work as well as the types of work that tend to be valued within each respective culture.

The lack of value that rural people tend to put in so-called “desk jobs” makes more sense when one considers that for hundreds of years, these communities were sustainable only because of extremely difficult physical labor most often performed outdoors. Often, these types of work have been performed at grave danger to the worker, and many lives were lost in order to forge the new frontiers. Therefore, a connection to the land itself, sometimes pragmatic, other times more esoteric, is prominent in these cultures. Lawrence explains this connection as it pertains to rural Maine communities:

There are some elements in Maine culture that work to narrow the perspective of its people, and others that countervail, helping the culture and its people keep in balance. Feeling a sense of stewardship to the land (and the continuity of family and history through that bond), is one such element. Rural Maine people feel a tremendous bond to the places they know and love. The beauty of nature and a feeling of communion with the natural

world on a daily basis are fundamentally important, often more important than finding a more highly paid job with greater status that would require leaving the land.²⁴⁰

When seen in conjunction with the concept of the rural person's primary group, and considering that the primary group is often made up of family, the connection to the land for the rural person becomes even stronger since land ownership and ties often tend to go back many generations within families. This further reinforces the bond not only to the land but also to the rural person's primary group, especially if the rural person uses this land for income and sustenance.

Lawrence points out that even those who have studied these cultures in some ways belittle them with descriptive terminology like "peasant" as well as with the hypotheses they present in their work:

Such theorists [Shils, Toennies and others she cites] seem to have seen *Gemeinschaft* communities as examples of arrested social development that would eventually vanish. Though under tremendous pressure in modern society, the 'primary group' in a small rural culture has not withered and died. Indeed the 'primary group' forms the basis of so many relationships in a small society that it is a powerful influence on behavior, values and beliefs.²⁴¹

From whence does the cultural bias against rural people and rural areas arise?

Perhaps certain elements of these stereotypes exist because, at least to some extent, they are true. For many years in our country, rural people, particularly those who subsisted via

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 96.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 61.

agricultural means, were not as highly educated as peers in the city. Depending on economic factors as well as family attitude towards education, many country children, for example, would complete school only to the eighth grade after which point their help on the farm was considered more necessary than furthering their education. Indeed, this mentality still prevails in remote agricultural communities that also have strong ties to extremely conservative sects such as the Amish.²⁴² In this sense, the images of the undereducated “bumpkin” prevalent in society have some basis in reality.²⁴³

It seems at least possible there may be other, less-expected reasons for a cultural bias against rural people. An interesting point to consider is that there may be a negative attitude in North America against certain types of landscapes. In this case, since the largest contiguous rural areas are not on either coast but rather on the Great Plains, the bias is against the prairie itself. This may seem an odd idea until prairie realism, an important literary movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is seen in its greater context. The movement, which gained prominence first in Canada with authors such as James Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, and Robert Kroetsch, features regional themes of the interior states and provinces. Later, authors in the United States began to write works that belong in this style, including Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis. To some extent, the children’s books of Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957) and the fiction works of Ole Edvart Rølvaag (1876-1931) such as *Giants in the Earth*, fall within the purview of this style.

²⁴² This attitude holds some similarities to the attitude of many of the urban poor towards education. However, the issues related to the urban poor encompass racial and socioeconomic constraints that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Resistance to education, in various forms and for various reasons, has been a part of many cultures throughout history.

²⁴³ Many rural people may argue the very definition of education, however, stating that education can take place on the job, outside of the traditional classroom, just as well as in the traditional setting. A liberal arts education, wherein the student is exposed to all areas of education for the purposes of well-roundedness and enlightenment, is a harder sell in a community where pragmatism takes precedence.

There often seems to be a negative portrayal of rural prairie places and people inherent within prairie realism. There are dark sides to the prairie in this literary genre, such as its isolation and harsh conditions. Researchers such as Ann Barnard see this literary portrayal of the prairie as a “signifier for human futility.”²⁴⁴ This same author explained that, “the prairie environment itself sends contradictory, often polarized, messages: on the one hand the nurturing earth mother and on the other, masculine power and distance.”²⁴⁵

Barnard believes that the drawback of this type of writing is that the characters’ actions are always seen as a product of this environment. This author shares her belief that these works often stereotype the prairie, its people, and its lifestyle into a common experience, when in fact, this is not often true. There are many other factors present in any geographic situation including those of gender, class, economy, and politics, which naturally influence all people. Prairie writers have tended to downplay these other factors in favor of an explanation of behavior that comes from a landscape they depict as sparse and hostile. The urban-rural as civilized-uncivilized mindset is present in the admitted thought processes of at least some the writers of prairie fiction,²⁴⁶ and this mindset may explain why this literature is often written with such a negative regard for the prairie and an implied superiority of the city. It is as if the writers are opposing the landscape in favor of an urban one. Even stranger is that this same tendency is not seen in works by authors writing about other landscapes such as forests and mountains.

Is there an inherent discrimination against the prairie landscape and its people?

²⁴⁴ Ann Barnard, “A North American Connection: Women in Prairie Novels” *Great Plains Quarterly* 14 (Winter 1994): 24.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 25.

²⁴⁶ Calder, Alison. “Reassessing Prairie Realism.” *Textual Studies of Canada* 9, no. 9 (Spring 1997): 57-58.

Alison Calder, a writer on Canadian prairie realism, seems to indicate there is. “But for some reason the prairie is thought of as particularly hard to civilize and articulate, and is continually cast as the hinterland to a central Canadian base land.”²⁴⁷ Calder quotes Laurence Ricou, a literary critic of Canadian regional fiction, who states that it is difficult to write about the prairie landscape because it is “a landscape that is without sounds and devoid of anything concrete to catch the eye and stimulate the imagination.”²⁴⁸

In response to Ricou’s sentiments Calder notes, “Again, we see the idea that prairie realism is not fiction but a reflection of a harsh reality; because the prairie is largely presented in these works as a sealed, lifeless, and inevitably doomed region, that is what, to critics, it becomes.”²⁴⁹ Calder quotes other comments by Ricou indicating he believes to some extent in the idea of this being a region of little hope. “In attempting to depict the universal meaninglessness posited by existentialism the western Canadian writer found an obvious metaphor in the prairie landscape.”²⁵⁰

In choosing to view the prairie only as silent and featureless, Ricou seems to exhibit the elitism of the urban, educated author who believes that meaninglessness is an “obvious” conclusion one may draw from this landscape. For her part, Calder holds a different viewpoint. She believes that these stereotypes of the prairie landscape are unjust and that some members of the academic and literary fields have done a fair amount of harm by believing in them so blindly. She speaks of the consequences of this stereotypical view of the prairie region in literature. “If the prairies are continually being reified as an area which is

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 57.

²⁴⁸ Laurence Ricou, *Vertical Man, Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1973), 76.

²⁴⁹ Calder, 58.

²⁵⁰ Ricou, 148.

unlivable...then the political forces that have been to an extent responsible for the continuing exploitation of that region are absolved of any responsibility for the region's decline."²⁵¹ This is a poignant statement that is related to Kingsolver's idea that urbanites see themselves as the "handlers" of the rural areas and people.

Calder goes a step further, however, in asserting that these urban dwellers have done a poor job of attempting to understand these regions, much less do anything to benefit them. She goes on to explain that, in regard to prairie realism, academics, a group that exerts some influence on the views of educated urbanites, need to be more accountable:

I am not suggesting that prairie realism is to blame. But I am suggesting that when we, as academics, teach works which we consider to be regional, we had better examine very carefully our presuppositions, our underlying definitions of regionalism and region—our own and those of other critics that we cite. At a time when we are being told that place and referentiality no longer matter, that there is no national literature, and that we are living in a world without boundaries, those of us who call the have-not political regions home are becoming aware that placing ourselves, and our literatures, is more important than ever."²⁵²

Calder has followed her own advice. Her book entitled *History, Literature and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* contains contributions from Canadian authors who defy this conventional view of the prairie, stating that the prairie is an evolving and vibrant landscape in the process of developing its own cultural identity.

As if external barriers such as a general misunderstanding and misrepresentation of

²⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

²⁵² Ibid.

rural people, a bias against rural culture, and a bias against the prairie landscape weren't sufficiently challenging, there are several barriers within rural culture itself that make reaching this culture with the arts more difficult. One of the most pragmatic barriers is that of the cost of arts events. In rural areas, where people often tend to focus on necessities first, they may not allocate remaining funds to activities and forms of entertainment that may seem frivolous or elitist to them. This judgment of frivolity may seem harsh at first until it is considered that for centuries, these rural cultures have spent the majority of their time working simply to survive. They have had little time, money, or energy left over for costly entertainment of a type that has less immediate application to rural life and takes more effort to understand and enjoy.

Rural people who make time for musical pursuits often do so in the name of church worship or social functions, and indeed, they often show marvelous ability and aptitude despite a lack of an extensive formal music education. Such musical aptitude and activity were especially common prior to the Second World War when the proportion between leisure time and work time for rural peoples was even less favorable than they are today. In 1934 an Extension Service agent said,

Farm people have shown a greater capacity to provide their own entertainment than any other group. Cut off by economic conditions from commercialized entertainment, often sordid or unenlightening, rural people have proved their capacity to enrich their own leisure hours by music and songs and plays and games of an elevating order. The countryside has proved that it can provide its own entertainment."²⁵³

²⁵³ J.H. Kolb, "Agriculture and Rural Life," *The American Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 6 (May 1934): 796. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2767424> (accessed October 19, 2010).

The type of music this agent spoke of was of a lighter quality, something akin to simple folk music and in some ways the social equivalent to the nineteenth century parlor song. The ability to perform more complex music of the type referred to as “classical” music requires a higher level of musical education, as well as a large amount of time for practice. When the constraints of time are compared against the time normally required to prepare and perform music of high quality, the rural attitude towards such pursuits makes more sense. Two researchers of economics and music explain this type of situation:

In most nomadic, hunter-gatherer or agrarian cultures, the cliché that ‘time is money’ is a stark reality; discretionary time is often severely restricted by subsistence requirements. The task of maintaining music therefore can rarely be undertaken by an individual, since no individual has enough time or money to spare. Individual efforts, like most individual efforts in a nontechnical society, will meet with only limited success. The solution, as in many other human endeavors, is collective, cooperative action. Thus, only music that meets the approval (i.e. is understood and valued by) the group and is maintainable by the group (without training or extensive specialization) will survive.²⁵⁴

A farming family, scraping by, spending enormous time in their fields and with their livestock, has little flexibility, freedom, and energy for other pursuits that require a large amount of education and time commitment. Merchants within rural communities may have more disposable time; however, since they are also dependent on the rural economic conditions, their disposable income is subject to the fluctuations of good and bad harvests and up-and-down markets, since their primary customers are from the agricultural sector.

²⁵⁴ Gregory D. Booth and Terry Lee Kuhn, “Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art and Pop Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (1990): 416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741939> (accessed October 19, 2010).

Many rural children may receive their first musical lessons at school. Those who continue on to college to a classical music education rarely return to rural areas because of lack of opportunity for employment. Consequently, the styles of music that tend to be favored within these cultures are usually folk or popular genres.

An additional point can be made that music is not usually an endeavor in and of itself taken part in intentionally but is rather part of a larger activity, for example at weddings and funerals.²⁵⁵ Much music in rural cultures is based in an oral tradition where the entire group uses the music (as opposed to solo performance)²⁵⁶ and may relate back to the idea of the primary group's influence on the social structure. Trained performers or "specialists" and the audience of the type found in Western art music are therefore rare.²⁵⁷

The opposite situation is found in urban cultures that have an art music tradition. Funds are funneled to a few talented and trained individuals, and more complex and intellectual music tends to be the result of these efforts. These cultures have the economic and educational structures in place to be able to support the requirements of an art music tradition.²⁵⁸ The implication is that cultures with an art music tradition, in this case urban cultures, have the tools and resources at their disposal for this music that rural cultures inherently do not. Therefore, these urban cultures have the opportunity to benefit rural cultures by spreading art music traditions to these areas.

There are additional internal barriers within rural cultures to new experiences, including types of music that are unfamiliar to these cultures. Many of these barriers have to do with the primary groups within these cultures. While the primary group can be seen

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 416.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 417.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 418.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

as having many positive attributes, they have a few powerful negative attributes as well. The primary group usually reinforces shared traditions and creates a sense of security for its members. A rural community is made up of many interlocking primary groups. These interlocking primary groups (interlocking due to marriage and family relations) reinforce shared values for the entire community. The oldest generations in the primary group are often most concerned with maintaining this sense of security. The result is that the older generation works to maintain the status quo for themselves and enforce the same within the younger generations. The younger generation to some extent will accept the status quo in order to maintain equilibrium with the primary group. At the same time, the younger generation will fight against the immovability of the older generation.

When the entire primary group is in equilibrium, this is referred to as “consonance.”²⁵⁹ Consonance is based on the shared cultural traditions and history referred to as the “knowledges” of the group.²⁶⁰ This consonance is fulfilling and satisfying to the individuals within the group. When the primary group comes into contact with new experiences or information that challenge long-held beliefs or traditions, for example “new ideas, values, attitudes, beliefs, economic and political realities and behaviors,”²⁶¹ the group experiences “cognitive dissonance.” This occurs not only because of discomfort with the unknown but also because of the difference in which the older generation and younger generation relate to these new experiences, creating internal and generational friction.

Barbara Lawrence explains cognitive dissonance as an experience that “arises when

²⁵⁹ Lawrence, 54.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

'past experiences' are invalid due to a change in the environment."²⁶² Individuals, then, are motivated by their uncomfortable reaction to this dissonance to bring their experience back into equilibrium and consonance.²⁶³ This may be achieved through rejection and avoidance behaviors. Lawrence notes that "the actions the individual takes may even seem illogical to an outsider, but they will be attempts to reduce or avoid dissonance."²⁶⁴ Avoidance behaviors in rural cultures run the gamut from shunning and non-support of new activities and ideas to verbally maligning such activities publicly within the community to lack of follow through on commitment to these activities. In the worst circumstances, avoidance behaviors may even go as far as vandalism and physical harm to individuals presenting new ideas if their ideas are considered particularly radical.

Dealing with this hostile environment becomes even more complex when the older and the younger generations of the primary groups within a rural community view the new experience differently. Lawrence makes this point with regard to rural Maine:

Cultures have different ways of feeding the ego, which may be a source of conflict when they come into contact through individuals who are acting as intermediaries. Even in a small town in Maine, each member of the community experiences a slightly different environment. Each member of a family changes the environment for other members, and each cohort is born into a context affected by different social and historical influences. The difference between generations in norms and values (which contribute to the ideal self and the real self) inevitably leads to conflict between people of different ages who are dealing with a different reality and to what is called 'cognitive dissonance'.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., 55.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 45.

Lawrence uses the “social learning theory” developed by behavioral scientist Albert Bandura to reinforce her argument:

Although personal agency is socially rooted and influenced by culture, individuals act within a ‘triadic reciprocity’ with their environment and personalities. Bandura adds that people also act on their environments and that there is a constant interaction between the individual, his or her behavior, and the environment in which he or she lives.²⁶⁶

Practically speaking, these theories play out in rural communities when the older generations seek to influence the aspirations and choices of the younger generation, especially in regards to college attendance, career choices, and leaving the family and community. The result is that some children who might choose to leave the community to attend college will feel pressured to remain in the community to maintain close ties to the family, the family business or farm, and the particular way of life. Adding to this pressure is the fact that, as stated previously, there is a strong fatalistic and victim mentality in many rural communities where individuals feel out of control of their fate.

In regard to introducing art music to a rural community, the control of the primary group over younger individuals is a particularly strong barrier. If the primary group does not see the value of art music, it will put pressure on the younger generation, which generally is more open to new experiences, not to support such artistic endeavors. For the younger generation in a rural community to overcome the influence of the older generation, younger individuals must have an understanding of why is it important to take the effort to

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 48.

upset the social balance along with the individual initiative to pursue the arts. However, as has previously been noted at several points in this dissertation, individuals in rural communities may experience more discouragement and fatalism than many of their peers in urban areas, especially as related to trying new things and their own academic abilities. Barbara Lawrence explains that, “we should understand that a person may hold himself in high regard in some areas of his life, for example as a loyal friend, or a hard worker in his family business, and yet, feel inadequate in an academic setting.”²⁶⁷

In order for younger people to overcome their social barriers to new experiences and ideas, they must have a lot of aspiration. Aspiration comprises three components: inspiration, ambition and separation, i.e. the amount to which individuals are moved or alienated from that aspiration.²⁶⁸ Even if rural young adults have a strong inspiration towards the arts, can overcome the mentality of the primary group, and can build up a fair amount of ambition to experience or become involved in the arts, the physical separation from arts centers, academic institutions, and artistic experiences creates additional problems for expanding this particular area of their lives.

In addition, it has been found that, according to a NCSA research project, students with high ambition (the second component of aspiration) tend to have eight qualities: belonging, achievement, curiosity, mentoring, self-confidence, empowerment, risk-taking and excitement.²⁶⁹ When we compare this list of qualities to those that are generally found in rural communities,²⁷⁰ mentoring is replaced by insularity, empowerment is replaced by

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 46.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

²⁷⁰ As previously noted, rural communities have been identified as having the positive qualities of hard work, independence, pragmatism, family, community, tolerance of eccentricity, love of the land and abhorrence of debt as well as the negative qualities of fatalism, victim mentality, pettiness and insularity.

pettiness and fatalism, and achievement is replaced with the need to maintain consonance in the primary group. Clearly, the younger generations who are more open to new ideas in these communities and might be most easily reached by the arts have more to overcome than many of their urban counterparts.

With so many barriers to the arts being present in rural communities, many urban artists may feel that these communities are not worth the bother of trying to overcome all of the internal and external difficulties associated with reaching them with high art. However, it bears emphasizing that the arts, especially vocal art music, are uniquely positioned to strengthen rural communities and the individuals within them for several reasons.

First, experience with the arts increases academic success for rural students.

Students, urban or rural, who participate in art-related activities achieve more academic success. Researchers in President Clinton's "Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning" reached this conclusion after an in-depth examination of 88 government databases related to education and academic performance.²⁷¹

Certain theories reinforce the findings of this study. The theory of multiple intelligences, for example, has a bearing on why music education and exposure is important. Of the nine intelligences defined by Howard Gardner (spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential), only the intelligence of music is holistic, due to the fact that music is the only intelligence that uses the entire brain at once during its execution. Music, therefore, is an

²⁷¹ James Sheek, *Rural Students, Aspiration, Motivation, and Music Education: Why Don't More Rural Students Make It to College?* Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG, 2009: 20.

integrative act for all of the other eight intelligences. What is more, it has been documented that students who are taught music tend to excel in other areas of academics.²⁷²

Since the older generation of the primary group in a rural culture tends to be less open to new experiences, reaching the younger generation in a rural community through music education, music programs, musical mentorship, and high quality performances may be the proverbial “foot-in-the-door” to introduce high quality music into the community.

In any group, especially those in rural communities, individuals must understand why this music is important and how it relates to them before they will give it credence. This principle applies both to students as well as to community members. As James Sheek puts it:

The arts have been ignored in education because historically they have been seen as dealing with the affective, rather than the cognitive, they cannot be measured, and they are not viewed as essential or an important part of students’ educations. Many arts programs are perceived as lacking substance, holding no benefit to being included in the vital curriculum.²⁷³

This phenomenon relates directly to rural areas where the high school is often the highest level of education within the community and the source of greatest potential for artistic outreach. If children are not educated in the arts at school, those who stay in the community may not educate themselves about the arts or see them as important. Sheek writes that, “This idea [education in music and the arts] is especially important for those

²⁷² Ibid., 18.

²⁷³ Ibid., 19.

who live in more isolated rural areas and have limited access to opportunities. Exposure to the performing arts and the aesthetic potential provides the opportunity to experience what can be.”²⁷⁴

The arts offer a broader perspective, fresh inspiration, and greater cognition of the world as a whole. These three things are sorely needed in rural communities that so often overvalue the necessities and all but despise anything viewed as frivolous or impractical. Art music introduces rural individuals to new aesthetics that may allow them to begin to overcome their fatalism by broadening their perspectives. This music allows the imagination of these people to be stretched. It directly confronts and has the potential to address many of the negative cultural aspects of rural culture (pettiness, insularity, fatalism, and the overbearing primary group) if ways can be found of realistically introducing this music to these communities. Sheek writes:

When one attends to the arts, he or she begins to develop the capacity to see beyond the colors on the canvas, to hear beyond the notes being played, to begin to perceive the harmonies and dissonances that exist in everyday life. Aesthetics offer the opportunity for learners to become emancipated, to know and understand.²⁷⁵

Maxine Greene, an expert on aesthetics education, has much to say on this subject. Greene states that the arts “offer perspectives that keep us from forever coinciding with our ordinary selves, that allow us to see and deal with even the ordinary differently, that offer

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 31.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

alternative ways of viewing and listening to and being in the world.”²⁷⁶ She goes on to note that through the arts we experience “an acute sense that things may look otherwise, feel otherwise, be otherwise than we have assumed—and suddenly the world seems new with possibilities still to be explored.”²⁷⁷

The hopefulness that the arts can impart could truly be liberating for rural individuals who sense they are stuck in a rut. Using the perspective of the arts to look at their routines differently, as Greene suggests, may help them overcome their “victim mentality” and realize they are not powerless over their situations if they can imagine re-imagine them.

Greene further expands her ideas:

It seems obvious to me that shocks of awareness of that sort can be of great significance for learning in a world so characterized by routines, by a kind of drab everydayness. I quoted Mary Warnock saying that the greatest obstacle to the kind of education we seek is boredom. Boredom comes, she says, when people feel they have come to the end of what is worth having.²⁷⁸

Ultimately, boredom may indeed be the culprit in much of the sense of discontent experienced in small communities. If the arts can alleviate this boredom while instilling a sense of imagination, liberation and new hope, these, then, are all significant reasons to bring the arts to these communities.

²⁷⁶ Greene, Maxine. *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001: 87.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 116.

Finally, it is important to bring the high arts to rural communities, due to the changing boundaries between rural and urban areas that cause rural areas to have more of a direct impact on urban dwellers than before. This blurring of boundaries is seen in the development of the “micropolitan” distinction for geographical margins between rural and urban areas. Urban dwellers are purposely choosing to spend more time in rural or micropolitan areas, both for vacation and for a permanent lifestyle change. The mainstream, modern American culture, which appears to be based on professional and personal drive, individualism, public achievement and increasing of one’s own social and financial position, fails to meet the expectations of many, and others find it untenable.

Barbara Lawrence explains this urban lifestyle as “decreasingly able to satisfy emotional and intellectual needs.”²⁷⁹ She goes on to describe the situation:

Having more things may be only marginally satisfying at best, and those margins can only fray when the economy fails to offer means to achieve these goals. As Americans have sacrificed the social needs to the primary group for material goods—the American economy has relentlessly moved those fruits of labor further and further across the table until they seem unreachable to many who assumed they would feast if they just worked hard enough.²⁸⁰

For these reasons, many urban workers are choosing rural places to dwell. There is currently a trend towards rural in-migration, including a large amount of telecommuters as well as those who move to rural areas hoping to improve their quality of life. This trend is evident in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and parts of Europe, Latin

²⁷⁹ Lawrence, 69.

²⁸⁰ Lawrence, 69-70.

America, Asia, Africa, and Australasia.²⁸¹ The charms of the idealized simplicity of rural life are resonating true and becoming more attractive to stressed out and maxed out urban dwellers. As Lawrence writes:

To some, the psychic and social rewards of a 'slower' lifestyle, such as Maine seems to offer in 'vacationland: the way life is supposed to be,' seem increasingly alluring and they question their aspirations to professional and managerial careers based on long hours away from their families. If we value ourselves based on what we have achieved, we run the risk of devaluing ourselves when we do not think we have achieved enough. In a *Gemeinschaft* culture based on ascribed status and the performance of relatively stable roles, rewards come to people because of the way they perform, not so much from what they perform. In other words, how someone does a job is critical; the job itself and status attached to that job is of less consequence to the individual and the community.²⁸²

Therefore, if they will be spending more time in rural communities, either for permanent living or for vacation, it follows that they should want to improve these communities even if only for their own well-being and enjoyment.

Western rural areas such as Montana and Colorado show increased population density near protected lands, recreational areas like ski hills, and centers of post-secondary education. This trend may show that people living in these areas would like to have many of the amenities that a larger metropolitan area would offer, but do not want the congestion

²⁸¹ Paul Robbins, et al., "Writing the New West: A Critical Review," *Rural Sociology*, September 2009: 359.

<http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.ndsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=22&sid=3c9295a4-7f5e-4ffe-841d-438dd1b83179%40sessionmgr13&vid=3> (accessed December 23, 2010).

360.

²⁸² Lawrence, 70.

and resultant stress, higher costs, and higher crime rates which naturally go along with living in a metropolitan area.²⁸³

In addition, those questioned about recent relocations to these areas indicate that cultural and natural resources, not job opportunities, provided more motivation in the decision to relocate to these areas.²⁸⁴ These two facts would seem to indicate that a strong artistic presence in a community could go a long way towards helping improve prospects for population growth in rural areas as well as retaining the new and often art-savvy inhabitants in these areas.

Music programs of various types, including chamber orchestras, community choirs, strong school music programs, recitals, and musico-dramatic productions would potentially be strong attractants for individuals looking to relocate to rural areas. Expanding arts opportunities, building and improving performance venues, and encouraging arts education in these communities are important ways that urban people could bring some of the “best” of the city to the smaller towns while giving themselves a multi-dimensional environment in which to vacation or to live.

Thus may be seen the beginnings of a positive, symbiotic relationship existing between urbanites and their rural counterparts. The rural people help the urban dwellers to let go of some of their hectic lifestyle and allow them to see value in simple work done well. At the same time, urban dwellers bringing the arts to a smaller community help the rural community to see new ways of viewing their own lives as well as relief from boredom and monotony that, in turn relieve fatalism and isolation.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

In the following chapter, suggestions are given as to how the barriers to bringing art music to a rural community may be addressed through various approaches to overcoming those barriers.

CHAPTER 8. SUGGESTIONS FOR INTRODUCING VOCAL ART MUSIC TO A RURAL COMMUNITY

Having identified the particular barriers to bringing art music to rural communities and enumerated the reasons for attempting to do so, this dissertation will conclude with more specific suggestions for ways in which rural communities may be approached with vocal art music.

Before deciding to bring a concert or recital program to a rural community, artists would do well to first understand the type of “resistance” their work may encounter in this community in order to circumvent it. Resistance is found in subordinate cultures, such as rural cultures and ethnic and racial minorities, or any other groups that do not have the social or political ability to assert their own will, rights, or values. These subordinate cultures find several ways to force their own will that may not even be recognizable to an outsider. Examples of “peasant resistance: foot dragging, dissimulation, feigned ignorance, false compliance, manipulation, flight, slander, theft, arson, sabotage, and isolated incidents of violence”²⁸⁵ may be found in small communities.

This above list enumerates several extreme ways that rural communities may attempt to resist change or unfamiliar experiences. It is more likely that an artist will encounter milder reactions like foot dragging, feigned ignorance and false compliance. For example, individuals may commit to attending a performance and even seem interested in it but will surprise the performer by not showing up to the performance. A community

²⁸⁵ Forrest D. Colburn. *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), ix.

member may pretend to be uneducated about a specific type of music with which they may, in reality, have some experience. They may also use their true ignorance of a certain style of music as the primary reason not to attend a performance.

False compliance may be seen when community members who may be involved in putting on the recital or concert as liaisons from community groups and organizations or as a facility coordinator purposefully or inadvertently negate the performer's efforts. They may, for example, fail to ensure that the venue meets the stated needs of the performance.

The artist should also be aware that some forms of manipulation and even slander may occur post-performance, especially from community members who feel insecure in the performance environment as an audience member or threatened by some aspect of the performance. The performer may be the target of attacks by these individuals that may take the form of direct criticism, complaints to event organizers or negative comments to other community members.

If a performer understands these complexities and works to anticipate negative reactions by aiding the audience to feel less intimidated and more a part of the performance, the performance will be more successful. The audience will be able to relax when its members feel less threatened or uncomfortable.

How may this best be accomplished? As performers of art music, singers need to be aware that the level of complexity inherent in this music can be intimidating for anyone, much less for people who have had little or no exposure to such music. Anything artists can do to anticipate the often immediate distaste of this style of music by some of these individuals, while at the same time not sabotaging the quality of the music or undermining

the recital experience, would be helpful not only for the audience but also for the performer who will have to deal with less negative feedback and audience reaction. As shall be seen in the remainder of this chapter, making the audience feel more comfortable within a rural setting can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as making the performance affordable, choosing more easily understood music, and explaining certain aspects of the performance verbally from the stage. Barriers between the artist and the audience can be broken down further by the performer having additional community involvement through school in-services and workshops, as shall also be discussed.

Ticket prices are an area of concern when dealing with rural audiences. As stated previously, if rural audience members do not see inherent value in attending a performance, they will by no means be willing to pay for it even if they do attend it. Conversely, if the performer charges no admission at the door and the audience has a positive and inspiring experience with the performance, the audience members may begin to see value in these types of performances.

While rural audiences are not accustomed to ticketing for local performances, many communities follow the practice of a “free-will offering” at various social events. Again, if the audience has a positive experience with the performance, they may be generous with a free will offering. This generosity may be further magnified if the performer decides to allocate funds above the costs of production to a local charity or identified need. This is a wonderful way to engender respect and mutual consideration with an audience and with a larger community, and it may also open the door to future performances.

In the Western art song tradition, one of the major issues with which performers must deal is that of language. Opera and art song are performed in all of the major European languages, as well as Russian and several Slavic and Nordic languages. In rural areas where individuals lack familiarity with the medium itself, putting up the secondary barrier of language makes the form more difficult to accept for this audience. Removing the barrier of language by singing in English and using supertitles would be an easy step to take to reduce the intimidation factor and allow the music more understandable and relatable.

Preparing recitals and concerts that contain music in the English language would be an obvious first step towards reaching this particular audience. In cases where pieces are used from a foreign language work, a high-quality English translation could be used and supertitles could be projected so the audience could more easily follow along with the text. In recognition of the fact that English can be difficult to understand in a classical singing style, especially for ears not accustomed to this particular aesthetic, supertitles may be helpful even for English-language pieces. In addition, a tangible program to read that contains text and, if needed, translations, gives the audience one more concrete item to attach to the performance.

Often, when faced with a new style of music, the initial reaction many audience-goers have is to reject it. For instance, Baroque music was considered to be rather *gauche* in its first stages of development and was not readily accepted by audiences at that time. The same has been true for every new wave of musical stylistic development in Western art music. This phenomenon is even truer with audiences who have little to no exposure to art music in general. Several writers have made suggestions for how to deal with this problem,

such as performing a less-accessible piece of music more than once during a performance.

Researcher and music educator Keith Swanwick makes the analogy of the initial hearing of a piece to be something like meeting someone for the first time:

As with performers so with audience-listeners; getting to know music is essentially acquaintance knowledge, though on acquaintance we may decide not to engage further. There are some important practical consequences here, especially for those involved in education at any level. It is hard to imagine that we would play a piece just once, unless it is extremely easy, but as listeners we often hear performances or overhear only a part of performances for the first and last time.²⁸⁶

Repeating a piece during performance, especially a piece that employs less traditional elements such as non-functional harmony, serial techniques or unusual vocal and instrumental techniques, will allow the audience to go beyond a brief introduction to its uniqueness. Even for a seasoned classical musician, extended techniques can sometimes be a barrier to connection with a piece. Swanwick relates an interesting story regarding this concept:

A colleague—a member of a prestigious choir—described his changing relationship with a large-scale choral work over several weeks of rehearsal. At the early sessions he found the piece fairly tedious and uneventful, heavy going and lacking in significance, except for a couple of moments here and there. The experience was, he said, a bit like travelling through an arid desert, now and then coming across an occasional oasis of interest. But as rehearsals passed and with growing familiarity, more watering places were discovered, more pages contained moments of interest and significance. By

²⁸⁶ Keith Swanwick, *Musical Knowledge: Intuition, Analysis, and Music Education*. London: Routledge, 1994: 45.

the time of the performance the desert had become a lake. His first intuitive response had been superseded—informed—by further acquaintance and analysis—for in music rehearsals a good deal of detailed analysis is bound to take place, including attention to expressive detail, practicing passages in different ways, singing, playing and listening to parts in isolation, and so on. A growing knowledge of the work from the inside had given him new perspectives. The Sahara had receded.²⁸⁷

Many classical performers will admit that unusual and avant-garde styles can be challenging even for those who are most educated in the vocal arts. This fact should give performers more empathy for audiences who resist such music. An opportunity for more familiarity with these types of pieces may allow an audience to hear it with less judgment on the second hearing.

Another way to approach a tentative audience, disarming their objections, is to use music that speaks to them of their own experiences. Any of the music mentioned in the first portion of this dissertation would have the potential to do so for a rural audience. More to the point, some of the richest fodder for recitals in rural locations would include folk songs and art songs written by American composers. This music, often reflecting the pioneering spirit of Americans, also includes many images of rural life. A performer looking to find acceptance from a rural community might incorporate at least some of these pieces into a larger recital or may opt to perform a program designed specifically to feature this particular subject matter throughout the recital.

The converse principle is that an initial recital or concert program should avoid too many pieces that are either on subject matter that is far-removed from the rural experience or controversial in subject matter. A performance of *La Bohème*, for example, although it

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

would be aesthetically pleasing, may be harder for the rural mentality to grasp because of the Bohemian lifestyle of the performers (and, in fact, many rural people may resent them, thinking they should get “real” jobs).

An opera like Carlisle Floyd’s *Susannah* on the other hand, in which the heroine lives in an isolated rural community, struggles with the community’s prejudices, and longs to go to the city, has a plot line that would likely resonate with the real-life experiences of many rural audience members. However, the scope of operas such as these makes their production in small communities, with limited financial and musical resources, very challenging. Recitals or chamber operas would be more appropriately sized stage works to perform in such places.

With their opportunity to focus on particular subject matter or to perform a wide range of music of a variety of subjects, recitals are well-suited to a small venue. It may be tempting for a performer to use this platform to explore controversial subject matter such as race relations, gay and lesbian composers, or non-mainstream religious views, and in fact, in urban areas, these types of recitals can be found with some frequency. However, with its often more socially-conservative audience, the rural community is perhaps not the best venue for exploring overtly sexual material or examining social issues through potentially upsetting themes and lyrics. Being provocative with this type of music may cause the audience to set up forms of resistance immediately in addition to those which will inherently be present in an artistic performance as previously explained. They may also interpret the views expressed in the music to be the same as those of the performer and make judgments about the performer’s character, increasing the chance of bad press for the performer throughout the community.

This does not mean, however, that a performer cannot explore controversial subjects within the recital venue, but rather that these types of pieces might well be kept as only a small percentage of the total music of the recital. If the artists chooses a piece that may be either be pre-judged or misinterpreted as pertains to social issues, this would be the perfect opportunity for the performer to explain the piece not only in program notes, but also in verbal comments from the stage, so as to give the audience a context with which to hear the piece with more open minds. Overall, the music chosen for the recital should mostly be that of a nature understandable and relatable to a rural audience, disarming their objections, allowing them to be more open to a small amount of unusual styles of music or music on topics that some may find difficult to discuss or explore through the performance.

Along with using music with lyrics on rural and agricultural themes, vocal professionals might consider using props and costumes on stage that correspond to the subject matter of the music. Old plows, cream cans, pioneer clothing, and even arrangements of prairie plants or harvested crops like wheat or corn, would serve to reinforce the subject matter if the music chosen is of an explicitly rural subject matter. Partial or full staging of the songs within this setting would further the creation of the suspension of disbelief for a generally disbelieving audience. Using objects with which the community is familiar will not only give a concrete visual aspect to illustrate the music but also further break down barriers to the music by using objects that make sense in the rural lifestyle.

The use of props would not need to be limited to music of rural and agricultural themes, and in fact, props may be useful to make music more concrete for the audience, especially if the style of the piece is more foreign to the average recital attendee. For

instance, if a performer chose to sing a piece exhibiting twelve-tone, serial techniques, or extended vocal techniques, adding in visual elements, either with backdrops, costumes, or props can help give the audience a sense of familiarity they may not otherwise have. If a performer chooses to perform Arnold Schoenberg's (1874-1951) *Pierrot Lunaire*, for example, wearing a costume reflective of a clown or projecting appropriate photographs or paintings during the performance may enhance the emotional accessibility of the piece for the audience. The same principle would apply to a humorous work, for example, Leonard Bernstein's (1918-1990) *La bonne cuisine*, a grouping of four musical recipes. These may be a bit obscure for a rural audience to understand if the performer does the typical stand-and-sing approach for them. However, if the performer wears an apron and stages the four pieces, making the recipes with ingredients, bowls, spoons, etc. as he or she sings, this will bring the pieces to life in a way that will help a rural audience to understand why a composer would ever set four recipes to music.

An additional way that performers can reduce the amount of perceived "distance" between themselves and the audience is to speak from the recital stage about the music being performed, the composer, or personal reasons they have chosen certain pieces. By speaking during the performance, the recitalist can reduce the amount of formality of the performance, helping to set the audience more at ease. This is an opportunity for the performer to educate the audience on various aspects of the music, particularly any that may be more obscure, such as special compositional techniques, complex texts, or subject matter that is more foreign to the particular audience.

Speaking about the music should not be limited to the stage, however. If a performer greets his or her audience post-performance, perhaps in a greeting line, many

conversational openings may occur through questions that audience members may have for the performer. For instance, if the audience member is praising the performer, sometimes that audience member will ask how the performer prepares for such a performance. The performer should be open about the amount of practice time and preparation required for the recital. This can help to defray the idea that music is not considered “work” in the rural culture. Often, audience members whose primary connection to music has been that of an extra-curricular activity in the local school, and who primarily view music as a recreational endeavor, will be surprised to learn the amount of hours that go into preparation for a large musical performance of a more professional nature.

The same principle applies for educating the audience members about the costs associated with the performance. Most do not understand that an accompanist must be paid, the recital hall must be rented, and music and costuming must be purchased. While it should not be the intent of the performer to make a point of these costs to the audience members, it can, however, be instructive to explain these types of costs one-on-one to audience members if audience members inquire. Again, many will be surprised to hear that the accompanist is not just playing “for fun.” The concept of musical performance as a paying job is one that will help to further the validity of musical performance and preparation as work. By doing so, the credence for art music and the respect for such undertakings like concerts and recitals will slowly increase in the rural community in which these works are performed as the audience better understands the time and expense that go into them.

Whatever the particular styles of music chosen or the subject matter of the texts, the performer must remember the make-up of his or her audience, and that the program should

be entertaining as well as enlightening to that audience. Shirlee Emmons and Stanley

Sonntag write:

In any case, whatever the terms in which the idea is couched, the audience wishes to enjoy its sojourn in the hall—in diverse ways and at various musical levels to be sure. The enthusiast, whose musical background and appreciation is superior, will particularly enjoy new and unusual programming drawn from past or avant-garde sources. The connoisseur, who tends to go with prevailing tastes and fashions in music, will enjoy hearing the up-to-date, the newest, the freshly discovered, the resurrected-after-long-years-of-neglect, and the innovative currently being celebrated in the press. The majority will enjoy an evocative and moving experience (which demands superb interpretations) and titillating programming with much variety. When we have proven to the typical audience member that a recital can be an entertainment, he will soon be his own man, emancipated from enjoying only what he is told to enjoy, and most important, he will return again!²⁸⁸

The rural audience, whose members are most likely to be typical, in Emmons and Sonntag's opinion, will need to be approached with understanding. In fact, what the recitalist champions in a rural community is art music itself.

In addition to cultural barriers to the success of a performance of art music already discussed in this dissertation, there are practical concerns for a performer in a small community that need to be anticipated. For example, pianos are often in short supply in small towns, and those that do exist are not of the high quality normally found in typical urban recital halls. Many will not have been tuned properly for some time and may need

²⁸⁸ Shirlee Emmons and Stanley Sonntag. *The Art of the Song Recital*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1979: 282-283.

additional repair. A singer thinking of putting on a recital in a small town will need to anticipate the need for piano tuning and repair as a part of recital preparation.

Recital halls, if any exist, will likely be multi-use types of spaces, and therefore, may not have the best of acoustical properties for singing. A performer, if at all possible, should plan to practice at minimum one or two times in the performance space prior to the performance so as to become accustomed to the acoustics as well as to anticipate any other difficulties to the performance not usually inherent within recital halls.

Some of the difficulties may include the need to erect and remove seating, inadequate lighting, lack of electric outlets for piano lamps and other technological devices, poor sight lines between the performer and accompanying instruments, especially the piano, and poor visibility of the performer from the audience. In many cases, adjustments will need to be made to the space to accommodate the performer and the audience. These multi-use spaces are often not equipped with recording equipment, so if that is an expectation of the performer, the performer will often need to make special arrangements for recording of the performance.

In addition, many building facilitators will automatically expect that the singer will be using amplification of some kind. It is important to clarify with the event coordinator or building facilitator exactly what the performer will need and will not need in a performance situation so that the facilitators do not also work to set up a sound system the performer will not use.

Even promotion of the event will need foresight on the part of the performer. Small communities rarely have their own radio or television stations and are instead used to

hearing community news through some other venue. The performer will need to publicize the event to the community in its familiar venues in order to get the best return on their investment of funds and time for event promotion. Many small towns take a very old-fashioned approach to event advertising, using community advertising flyers, event posters at cafes and stores, and even placards placed on main thoroughfares in the town itself. A performer should investigate these with community facilitators and, if approved, use all of these ways of communicating with the community in order to reach them in ways that are most natural for them.

A performer may gain insight into his or her audience by understanding more about how rural communities function. In small communities, most members fill multiple roles. The mayor may also be a school bus driver and serve on the board at a local church, for example. It is because of the fact that community members take on more than one major responsibility that small towns are able to offer the few amenities they do have. This is an important aspect to be considered when a recital or concert program is proposed.

The community must, on some level, have identified its own need for arts through initiatives such as starting community choirs, supporting local school music and arts programs, and maintaining public concert venues. Communities may also play a role in identifying specific performers who are asked to perform and the types of works that those performers present. They may specifically seek out artists who are willing to tailor their programs, at least in part, to be relatable to the community and meet the communities' own identified needs. If this happens, the people within the community feel that they have not only had some measure of control, but they may also feel that they have helped to contribute to defined needs within the community. Barbara Lawrence explains:

It is vitally important to look at the history and culture of Maine, or of any other state, in designing a program for change, particularly one to change attitudes about education that affect so many people in a community. Local people must take an active part in designing these programs, as ideas imposed by outside experts are more likely to be ignored or subverted. Programs that grow from needs communities have identified are more likely to succeed and to be empowering; however, we must recognize that it takes time to build trust and lines of honest communication to identify real needs.²⁸⁹

In order to identify specific needs or desires from within the community for artistic performances, the community can undertake what is called “action research.” According to researchers Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen, action research is “a process whereby people can develop their own diagnosis and prescription, thereby acting out their self-interest and gaining a sense of power.”²⁹⁰ Barbara Lawrence expands on their idea of action research:

Parker Palmer and Elden Jacobsen, who helped create the concept and process of action research, divided action research into stages in which a group of people representing all constituencies in a school identify a central issue, form a hypothesis to investigate, gather pertinent literature, design research instruments, collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions, as any researcher would do.²⁹¹

Many small towns have “vision groups” that look for ways to build community ties and draw more people to the community. These groups, along with local economic

²⁸⁹ Lawrence: 305.

²⁹⁰ Lawrence: 307.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

development organizations, could spearhead this action research, with the economic development organizations providing support and resources. Once conclusions are drawn from the research, arts programs and performances specifically tailored to the community can be organized.

There are other ways in which the community can be incorporated into the decision-making process regarding arts programs. One way to bridge the gap and benefit everyone in the community is to reach out to the older generation in the community. This will be pivotal to the success of any recital or concert program, since the older generation of the primary groups often sets the tone for what is acceptable change. If this older generation can feel they are part of any changes or new experiences the community would take part in, those endeavors are likely to be more successful, as Barbara Lawrence has written with regard to obtaining education beyond the high school level:

The idea that what worked in the past will work for the present and future is a recurrent theme in the conversation of parents and grandparents, and can be an attempt to curtail change—perhaps a symptom of their own cognitive dissonance. An outreach to parents and grandparents that emphasizes the value of their knowledge and its application to today’s world might deter them from counseling youngsters away from further education.²⁹²

The idea of integrating community input and feedback into the production of performances can be done on a variety of levels within the community. In addition to involving older generations and their ideas and preferences, the creative energy and ideas of children may also be harnessed. Dr. Susan Hove-Pabst used the concept of discovery

²⁹² Lawrence, 309.

learning and the integration of subject matter with music to inspire the writing and production of a student opera in a one-room, rural Wyoming schoolhouse. Students wrote the music, the libretto, did the staging and completed all the pertinent tasks related to the production of the opera. They chose subject matter that was relevant to them. Hove-Pabst's idea was that the arts, specifically music through the medium of opera, could be used to integrate other subject matter from other areas of curriculum as well as help students creatively to produce something that was pertinent to their own life experiences.²⁹³ As she explains her impetus behind the project:

I grew up in a setting similar to that of my students. Although my home was very musical, opera was, as [Keith] Swanwick said, 'strongly identified with another culture,' and not part of my life. Until I personally experienced opera in a real, hands-on setting, as an undergraduate music student taking part in a university performance, I did not value it and considered it unimportant to my life.²⁹⁴

Opera, being the purview of urban areas and those who can afford to attend it, may seem especially unrelated to rural communities. When the opera experience can be made relevant to rural children, suddenly the elitist illusion is stripped off the form, and it becomes an important mode of communication and expression for the community and its concerns.

If creating a child-centric opera experience seems an impossible task in a rural area, it is heartening to know that many opera organizations, the Metropolitan Opera Guild,

²⁹³ Susan Claire Hove-Pabst, "Creating Original Opera in a Rural School: Integration and Relevance in Discovery Learning Music Education," DMA diss., Montana State University, 1994: 1-2.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

Opera America and Houston Grand Opera's "Opera to Go" program, for example, already have programs geared towards children. University and college opera workshops and productions could take their productions to rural communities in similar ways. Graduate students with emphases in music, as well as related fields such as music therapy and sociology, may consider undertaking a rural opera or art song outreach as part of their own original research projects. In reaching out to rural communities, especially to those most remote from access to opera and art song, universities and students would not only be reaching an underserved area, but they would be helping those communities to view their own lifestyle in a fresh way.

In addition to urban arts organizations, there are other organizations that may be suitable conduits for the delivery of art music to rural areas. One such conduit may be the land grant university systems. These universities, originally created to be centers of higher education for agriculturalists and engineers, have over time added a core education from the Classical subjects, including visual and performing arts. At the same time, many of these land grant universities have maintained ties to agriculture, often serving rural areas through scientific study and advances that are then employed in the agricultural sector. These universities, having these unique bonds with rural industry, along with an ability to provide connection and education in artistic areas, are uniquely positioned to create programs that would be interesting and relevant to rural individuals.

Some universities are already doing so. For instance, the University of Oregon has developed "Art about Agriculture,"²⁹⁵ a program directed from their College of

²⁹⁵ Arts about Agriculture homepage, Oregon State University website, <http://agsci.oregonstate.edu/art> (accessed May 11, 2011).

Agricultural Sciences that seeks out artists willing to explore the subjects of agriculture and food production through the visual arts. As such, this is an outreach to artists from the agricultural sector. Similar projects could be undertaken in the opposite direction, connecting art and music departments and the professionals within them to the agricultural sector.

The agricultural extension services of land grant universities provide an excellent vehicle for delivering visual and performing arts to rural community. Originally designed as farmer education programs directed from the universities to rural areas, extension services have significantly expanded their subject matter for education since their inception. Kentucky Extension Services has developed fine arts programs by instituting four units in the state that focus solely on visual arts, music and theatre.²⁹⁶ These units are specifically placed in areas that are the furthest from geographic arts centers. It is the first United States extension service to do this type of outreach.²⁹⁷

Efforts of this kind are not isolated to the United States. Extension services now exist all over the world, and some of the international organizations provide models for how artistic outreach can be accomplished. One extension service in rural India is working to preserve Indian folk songs about rural subjects such as harvesting, specific crops, and animal husbandry.²⁹⁸ Further intent of this extension program includes communication to

²⁹⁶ Samantha Swindler, "Whitley Extension to tackle fine arts, community theater," *Time-Tribune*, Corbin, KY, May 3, 2010. <http://thetimestribune.com/local/x1271728482/Whitley-Extension-to-tackle-fine-arts-community-theater> (accessed May 11, 2011).

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Mohamed Nazeer, "Friday Review Thiruvananthapuram: Preserving Songs of the Soil," *The Hindu, India's National Newspaper*, online edition, May 26, 2006. <http://www.hindu.com/fr/2006/05/26/stories/2006052601020300.htm> (accessed May 11, 2011).

farmers and agricultural workers about various aspects of their work through forms of entertainment including music and cinema.²⁹⁹

One government outreach program that has long been on the cutting edge of education to rural youth, and thereby rural adults in the United States is the national 4-H program administered by the national cooperative extension service. Originally designed as a way to introduce new agricultural technology and innovations to rural communities by educating youth, 4-H has now expanded its programs to both urban and rural areas. In addition, the organization has expanded its programming to include subjects beyond agriculture, and the arts are among the areas the organization has chosen to explore in recent years.

Photography and literature are two areas of the fine arts that are being targeted for development by the organization,³⁰⁰ but the organization does not limit itself to these areas. For example, New Jersey 4-H has developed an Expressive Arts program. The goal of this program is to make the arts accessible to everything child in grades K-13 in every county in New Jersey.³⁰¹ This program incorporates a wide array of fine arts, including performing arts such as dance and music, visual arts such as painting and drawing, and even “media arts” such as filmmaking.³⁰²

Extension programs and 4-H programs in every state in the United States could use these as models for what they might accomplish in regards to the arts. Music would

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ 4-H website, Programs: Citizenship. <http://www.4-h.org/youth-development-programs/citizenship-youth-engagement/communication-expressive-arts/> (accessed May 11, 2011).

³⁰¹ Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station website, “Each Community a Place for Arts and Youth to Grow: Expressive Arts 4-H Program.” <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/spotlight/expressive-arts.asp> (accessed May 11, 2011).

³⁰² Ibid.

naturally be a part of this outreach. Partnering with land grant universities, these organizations could introduce vocal art music to rural communities in fresh and relevant ways.

Finally, artists must be able to see and then to use the particular strengths that rural communities provide to their inhabitants. Artists who were originally from a rural town or have some kind of ties to such a community may act as cultural liaisons to these communities. These liaisons, having some understanding of the community, can move more easily among its members, being sensitive to the particular idiosyncrasies of the community while at the same time having enough clout to be able to push the community in new directions. Even those artists who do not have personal ties to a rural town may find points of connection by using the strong points of the community to their advantage when introducing a recital or concert program. Major strengths of the rural community can often be found in its school system, especially in the nurturing and individual attention that these schools afford their students. Barbara Lawrence explains:

Those of us interested in rural education think an anti-rural bias still prevails in an education policy which only recently has acknowledged that small schools can offer advantages to students, particularly those from low SES [socioeconomic status] homes, and which still actively promotes consolidation. The intimate scale of rural schools enhances the development of close bonds between students and teachers and between the school and its community, and the central problems of urban schooling are related to the extent to which we have forgotten the strengths of primary groups in *Gemeinschaft* cultures.³⁰³

³⁰³ Lawrence: 61-62.

As has already been discussed, reaching the youth of the community is often a way to bridge the gap to the rest of the community's inhabitants as younger learners are often more open to new experiences. Therefore, using the setting of the small town school, performing artists may find a platform whereby they can promote their craft and various performing literatures through lyceums and artist-in-residence programs. With the opportunity to invest time and effort with a small group of students, perhaps even with the opportunity for one-on-one teaching experiences, the artist not only educates but also breaks down social barriers.

Singers, when scheduling recitals in a community, may also chose to offer private voice lessons to high school students at no cost while they are there. They may also offer to work with the high school choir groups as a way to build trust between themselves and the community. In this setting, performers have an opportunity to influence and disarm potentially obstructive rural attributes such as negativity, passive aggressive behavior and fatalism while further developing imagination, hope, and the sense of opportunity for rural students:

As the formal barriers to equal opportunity have been steadily removed over the past forty years, there has been a growing interest among social scientists and policy-makers in the role of informal barriers to opportunities. Cultural norms that define as appropriate aspirations limited to traditional ways of earning a living may be barriers to further education. Traits and behavior promoted by a culture may, unintentionally, curtail a student's success throughout school. However, in a small community these same informal barriers may provide nurturing that students from less tightly-knit societies rarely enjoy.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Lawrence:18.

In dealing with this tightly knit society, the artist may find that the older generations are more open to understanding and appreciating the artist's work when they see how the artist is investing in the youth of the community. Even though rural communities may suffer from internal sabotage towards their own youth seeking education beyond the community, they often nonetheless wish their youth did have more opportunities within the community itself. This is exactly what an artist-in-residence program provides. Maxine Green expands on these ideas, pointing out that the artist his or herself must first be open to new experiences:

Of course we know that a continuing presence of art forms can enhance visual perception, but we also know (and too seldom act upon the idea) that we can, in our developing role as aesthetic educator, cultivate and stimulate the sensory life, the embodied life, the perceptual life of the young if we ourselves are open and adventurous enough to notice what is there to be noticed, to listen, to see.³⁰⁵

The artist who is open to performances and service programs like these in rural communities has, in being open, already expanded his or her perceptions. In taking these risks, the artist may be better able to help the rural community members take their own risks in experiencing the arts. As pertains to the artist-in-residence programs, once the artist has been accepted by the youth and the older generations, the artist is in the greatest position to influence the rural culture as a whole towards greater expansion of ideas and openness to new opportunities. This may, more than anything, help the rural culture to begin to overcome its negative cultural characteristics. It will give the rural culture better

³⁰⁵ Greene: 71.

ways of describing and expressing their own life experiences and at the same time alleviate boredom, provide entertainment, and allow them to “uncouple” from the mundane. Keith Swanwick describes it this way:

It is essentially human to be at once an inheritor, part of a culture, and an innovator, creatively striving within or against tradition. How is it that we can step outside ourselves and our environment and at least appear to be able to contemplate the past, present and future, thinking not only about what we can actually see but also about what we saw yesterday, and—most remarkable of all—about what we have never seen and perhaps never will, perhaps the inhabitants of Jupiter or a unicorn? All this is possible because we are able to learn, share and develop systems of representation. These systems allow us to form images of the world—to imagine—and they rely on a two-way process. We can assimilate the world to our own perspective, interpreting it in accustomed ways; but we also accommodate to new realities, changing facets of the representational system itself. We can see this process at work in social interaction. Each of us is moulded to some extent by the society in which we find ourselves but we also shape that culture through our individual actions.³⁰⁶

The performing artist can have an immense role to play in helping rural communities learn and experience life and improve their morale. Vocal artists are especially in a unique position to do so, as their craft involves the use of text. When this text makes reference to relatable elements to the rural community, and when the vocal performer is willing to use other techniques to break down various rural audience objections, they will find not only success in their own work but the gratification of bringing genuine hope and perspective to the rural community.

³⁰⁶ Swanwick: 37.

AFTERWORD

Rural and agricultural themes in vocal art music and the issue of bringing vocal art music to rural communities are both very important to me. I grew up on a working small grains farm in rural North Dakota outside a town of less than a thousand people. I was fortunate that our small school had an excellent music program. Not inclined towards farm work or, at that time, small town life, I was inspired by my positive experience with music to pursue it in college. I decided to move to Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN, the largest metropolitan area in our region, for my post-secondary education. There I was exposed to as many types and styles of music, visual, and performing arts as can be imagined. I learned to open my mind as well as my heart as I struggled as a young performer. Despite the new experiences, I found myself drawing upon many things that had been impressed upon me as a young girl, especially the concepts of hard work and discipline.

Now, as I complete my terminal degree, my husband and I, surprisingly and for unforeseen reasons, have returned to our hometown. Many vocal artists would be surprised to know how much artistic work there is to be done here. It is not the glamorous Hollywood or Broadway type of work. It is the type of work that plants seeds of courage in community members to try something new, to listen to a style of music they have not heard before, and to be open to unfamiliar settings and experiences. It is a setting that causes me to find patience and understanding for the rural mindset while at the same time using this setting and its inherent beauty and particular strengths to expand that very mindset through high art.

Anecdotally, as a vocal artist who has put on recitals of the type described in this dissertation, I can relate that the rural audience can be a difficult and critical audience. This is not the place where performers will find themselves giving multiple encores to loud applause. A performer needs to be very careful about how he or she will define success in a rural setting.

At the same time, I have found that on an individual level audience members will discuss various aspects of the performance they found moving or interesting. Many will express an interest in discovering more about this type of music or other forms of high art. Many will even express awareness that they need more of this type of art in their lives. They begin to realize that the arts are not extraneous but are, in fact, a human need fulfilling various roles, including entertainment, soul searching, intellectual stimulation, and emotional fulfillment.

Americans have always been credited with a pioneering spirit, and much of the music in the American songs portion of this dissertation attests to this fact. That spirit continues as we explore other new frontiers in technology and the arts. As artists, it may be that rural communities represent our last geographic frontier—one that in some ways remains untamed but is at the same time fertile and full of possibilities. It can be intimidating for urban artists to consider performing for rural communities if they have no experience with them. My deepest hope is that the music presented in this dissertation, as well as the suggestions for the application of this music, will give vocal artists inspiration and ideas for how to approach this part of our society that often seems not worth the effort. By reaching rural audiences with our craft, we affirm the beauty and strength of the rural communities along with the music most representative of these communities, while at the

same time giving them a new way to use their own voices to combat the anti-rural bias our society exhibits, however unknowingly. Our work can bridge this gap and begin to do away with the stereotypes so common in our culture and allow both urban and rural areas to learn from one another through the beauty and inspiration of great singing and vocal art music.

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**APPENDIX 1. FOUR SUGGESTED RECITAL PROGRAMS FOR RURAL
COMMUNITY RECITALS**

Program A:

My Antonia.....Libby Larsen (b. 1950)

I. Landscape I: From the Train

II. *Á*ntonia

III. Landscape II: Winter

IV. The Hired Girls

V. Landscape III: Prairie Spring

VI. *Á*ntonia in the Field

VII. Landscape IV-Sunset

I Never Saw Another

Butterfly.....Lori Laitman (b. 1955)

1. The Butterfly

2. Yes, That's the Way Things Are

3. Birdsong

4. The Garden

5. Man Proposes, God Disposes

Songs of Fields and

Prairies.....Jocelyn Hagen (b. 1980)

I. Call of the Open

II. Fall Fields

III. Silent Noon

IV. The Prairie-Grass Dividing

V. The Endless Root

VI. The Flower of the Field

VII. Lullaby

Program A consists of three large-scale song cycles appropriate for soprano. The music is complex, especially in regards to ensemble with the piano player and saxophonist. Therefore, this program would be most appropriate for a graduate level or professional singer. This program could be viewed as three vignettes suitable for staging and which could each incorporate their own costuming and props. It may be interesting to emphasize the fact that all three pieces are written by women and all the composers are currently living. The program length, assuming a short intermission, is one hour.

This program has been performed in an urban center and in a small, rural town. The reaction to the recital in the urban center was typical; the audience appreciated the complexity of the music and was open to the added elements of props and costuming as well as photo projections. The performance in the rural town was undertaken as part of the larger festivities of the county fair. The recital was well-attended; roughly ten percent of the population of the town attended the performance. The added elements of photo projections, costumes, and props were all credited by audience members with helping them understand the music more. The audience was able to name specific pieces they particularly found emotionally moving. The length of the program was not an issue for audience members based on audience feedback; in fact, many said that they thought the program was too short.

Program B:

A Green Lowland of Pianos.....Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

The Monk and His Cat from *Hermit Songs*.....Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

“Barnyard Suite”.....Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894)

I. Villanelle des petits canards

II. Ballade des gros dindons

III. Les Cigales

Les Bestiaire.....Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

I. Le Dromadaire

II. La Chèvre du Thibet

III. La Sauterelle

IV. Le Dauphin

V. L'Écrevisse

VI. La Carpe

Snake from *Eight Poems of Theodore*

Roethke.....Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

The Serpent.....Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

Snake Lake.....Lori Laitman (b. 1955)

Program B consists of pieces suitable for male voice. This program is of moderate difficulty and would be suitable for upper-level college performances. This program contains foreign language works; however, the subject matter is relatable, engaging, and often humorous. The program is based on the subject of animals. Since this is a program constructed on individual songs and on song groupings rather than on song cycles, staging would be less appropriate. Instead of staging, a recitalist may consider incorporating projected images of the animals. Supertitles and written program translations should be used for the foreign language pieces. This program is approximately 30-40 minutes long without intermission.

Program C:

Four Poems of Fredegond Shove.....Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

I. Motion and Stillness

II. Four Nights

III. The New Ghost

IV. The Water Mill

Ha'nacker Mill.....Ivor Gurney (1890-1937)

Ha'nacker Mill.....Peter Warlock (1894-1930)

[Intermission]

Die Schöne Müllerin.....Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

I. Das Wandern

II. Wohin?

III. Halt!

IV. Danksagung an den Bach

V. Am Feierabend

VI. Der Neugierige

VII. Ungeduld

VIII. Morgengruss

IX. Des Müllers Blumen

X. Tränenregen

XI. Mein!

XII. Pause

XII. Mit dem grünen Lautenbände

XIII. Der Jäger

XIV. Eifersucht und Stolz

XV. Die liebe Farbe

XVI. Die böse Farbe

XVII. Trockne Blumen

XVIII. Der Müller und der Bach

XIX. Das Baches Wiegenlied

Program C is a serious recital program suitable for male voice. This program contains works of greater difficulty than Program B. It is an example of how foreign language works may be incorporated with English works to create a cohesive program on rural and agricultural themes. In this case the theme is that of the water mill, a rural image throughout history, explored through the works of these particular composers. Translations for foreign language works should be included in the recital program, and ideally, supertitles would be projected with the English translation during the performance of foreign-language works. Due to the length of *Die schöne Mullerin*, the singer may want to consider using a high-quality English translation. The two treatments of “Ha’nacker Mill” will show the audience how two different composers approach the same text. *Die schöne Mullerin* could be made more engaging through staging and costuming, especially because of its length. An intermission is recommended after the two settings of “Ha’nacker Mill.”

Program D:

Blue Mountain Ballads.....Paul Bowles (1910-1999)

I. Heavenly Grass

II. Lonesome Man

III. Cabin

IV. Sugar in the Cane

Machines agricoles.....Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

I. La Moissonneuse Espigadora

II. La Faucheuse

III. La Lieuse

IV. La Dechaumeuse-semeuse-encouisseuse

V. La Fouilleuse-draineuse

VI. La Faneuse

cowboy songs.....Karen P. Thomas

- I. sam was a man
- II. eyes to no one
- III. spoke joe to jack
- IV. nobody loses all the time
- V. if you can't eat
- VI. buffalo bill's defunct

Program D is designed for an advanced mezzo-soprano singer. The program has several advantages for rural performance. First, all of the music is very pictorial and evocative of rural life. Therefore, photographic projections, staging, props and costumes would be appropriate for any or all of the three sets. Second, the recital offers a chance to introduce a piece with a less-familiar polytonal musical idiom, the Milhaud, in the context of two other sets of diatonic music. This piece, with its explicitly technical descriptions of agricultural equipment, would give the performer a chance to experiment with various stage mediums such as photos of antique farm implements, to enhance the performance. Third, it allows the performer to introduce other instrumentation than piano. Fourth, both the Milhaud pieces and the Thomas pieces include elements of humor that will make a complex and technically challenging performance more relatable to a rural audience.