**Between tradition and contemporaneity. Issues related to vocal interpretation of English renaissance poetry in selected series of songs by 20th century composers: *Seven Elizabethan Lyrics* by Roger Quilter**

**and *Six Elizabethan Songs* by Dominick Argento.**

A summary

This thesis illustrates studies and research I have done looking for my own way to interpret selected songs by composers who have been barely known in Poland thus far – Roger Quilter (an English composer) and Dominick Argento (an American composer). In both cycles of songs the tradition of the English renaissance confronts the sonic language of the 20th century – perhaps not the most avant-garde and modern one but rich in harmony and variety of composing means. The further chapters of my thesis contain information essential to interweaving poetic words with sounds consistent with composers’ contrivance while interpreting *Seven Elizabethan Lyrics* by Roger Quilter and *Six Elizabethan Songs* by Dominick Argento.

**The first chapter** is a description of cultural phenomena of English Renaissance, of literary and musical achievements of the period called the ‘Elizabethan era’ (in recognition of merits of the notable Queen Elizabeth I) – the era, whose rich, vigorously developing poetry and drama (with William Shakespeare’s work in the lead) would often become a canvas for musical compositions by many different composers, not only the Anglo-Saxon ones.

**In the second chapter** I am introducing a profile of **Roger Quilter,** a composer whose debut took place on the threshold of the 20th century - in London, in March of 1990. An alumnus of the Conservatory in Frankfurt, a member of the Frankfurt Group, associating five English-speaking composers, searching for their own musical language without stepping in solutions alternative to major/minor system. Quilter devoted himself mainly to composing songs (he composed over a hundred of them) and achieved a matchless symbiosis of a poetic word with a vocal line and a structure of a piano part, which – thanks to the harmony – adds colour to his songs and strengthens the emotional load.

***Seven Elizabethan Lyrics op.12,*** first published in 1908 is a cycle of carefully chosen renaissance love lyrics with a musical setting allowing the maximum variety of ambiances and keys. Moving on to the analysis of these songs **in the third chapter** of my thesis I emphasize a problem that is extremely important from the point of view of a singer interpreting songs in a foreign language – the problem of translating poetry. What is essential for a singer-interpreter is a perfect understanding of the lyrics, of every single word – without it the interpretation lacks assurance and truth. He, therefore, should make a philologically accurate interpretation. However, by doing so, he is dealing only with the layer of significance – and what about the spirit of poetry, its elusive aura, nimbleness and ambiguity? Here comes to his aid knowledge of the period in which the lyrics were written and, above all, his talent and the musical language of the composer: the beauty of the lyrics, the spirit, the emotions – they are all depicted by music: the beauty of the melodies, the aura and atmosphere of the piano accompaniment. In my analysis of the *Elizabethan Lyrics* I explain the origin of the lyrics, the structure of each poem and its influence on the musical means through which the composer has “sounded” the chosen poems.

In a similar way I present the second cycle of songs, based on the lyrics by the Elizabethan poets: ***Six Elizabethan Songs*** by Dominick Argento – one of the earliest pieces of this composer, connected with the Minneapolis University in the United States, an author of 11 operas, numerous cycles of songs, choral and orchestral pieces, a laureate of Grammy Award (in 2004) for the best modern composition. I discuss his artistic biography, based on the autobiography *”Catalogue Raisonne As Memoir. A Composer's Life”*, published by his home university. Depicting his work, I also present a broad panorama of currents and influences in the European music as well as modern sonic experiments, clashing with each other in the American music of the 20th century.

The analysis of other songs, which comprises **the fifth chapter** of my thesis, contains (as in the case of the Quilter’s songs) literal translations of the Renaissance poems, with one exception: *Dirge* – an excerpt from ‘*Twelfth Night’* by William Shakespeare, translated by Maciej Słomczyński who tries to illustrate the atmosphere of this singing in Polish. This translation, however, does not serve the musical analysis.

*‘Six Elizabethan Songs’* by Dominick Argento is a composition fifty years younger than the Roger Quilter’s cycle (it was written in 1958) and its musical language seems to be much more modern but also in this case ‘*The main concern is the paramount importance of the poetry and the primacy of the vocal line over a relatively simple and supportive accompaniment.’ –* in such words the composer describes his work.

**The ending** of my thesis comprises a following conclusion: having analyzed both cycles, I have strengthened my belief that with their performance values, the beauty of the melody, lyrical aura and riches of emotions, not only are they an attractive enhancement of my repertoire but may also become an excellent material for my pedagogical work, an inspiration for young singers, an introduction to the vocal literature, so far known mainly in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

The thesis is complemented with the bibliography, featured at the end and my recording of the described songs with the accompaniment of a pianist, Marta Ożelska-Kurzawa, performed on the 21st of May, 2015 in Gorzów Filharmony.

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