

The Call from the Deep

"Them that live in the water, they have ways of calling people." —John Masefield, *A Mainsail Haul*

Chantel Lawrence, Soprano

Esmer Fan, piano

March 14, 2012

The Call

The theme of this section is the mermaid's fabled ability to call from the depths and lure men to their deaths. In this section we will see the mermaid's gift of fatal song and her ability to change the passage of time, to keep her victim with her for years on end.

The Mermaid's Song

Joseph Haydn (1794)

Der Fischerknabe

Franz Liszt (1845)

ПѢСНЬ РЫБКИ.

Anton Arensky (1891)

Arensky's song references the supernatural abilities of the merfolk, in this case the ability to alter the passage of time.

Wohin?

Franz Schubert (1823)

This song is from a larger cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin*, that is not principally about mermaids or any other water-spirits. It is a love story; however, the reference to nixies, German water-spirits, merits its inclusion.

Romantic Tragedy

Mermaids do not merely lure their victims to death by drowning; in many stories the merfolk form relationships with human beings, and even marry them. Mermaids have a magic garment, such as a cap or shawl; when they discard their garment, they can appear as humans to dance on the shore. If one were to take their cap, the mermaid would be in that person's power. The same principle applies to selkies, or sealmen; they can cast off their skins to become as humans, and those who take their skins have the selkie in their thrall. In these songs, however, the merfolk are still in control.

Hertig Magnus

Jean Sibelius (1909)

In an alternate telling of this Scandinavian ballad the Duke never succumbs to the enticement of the sea-nymph even though she threatens him with insanity. The real Duke Magnus did indeed die out of his mind, and insanity pervaded the family for several generations.

Silkie

Child ballad no. 113
Music by Dr. James Waters

This folk song is also about a selkie union with a woman. It also touches on the selkies' ability to prophesy.

The Seal Man

Rebecca Clarke (1924)

This song takes its text from a short story by John Masefield. It is based on the Celtic myth of selkies, or seals who can cast off their skins and walk on land as men. The seal man in the story is a second-generation seal man, born of a selkie and a human woman.

Intermission

Shipwreck

The mermaids' ancestors, the Greek Sirens, were well known for their ability to lure sailors to their destruction. All of these songs deal with the destruction of sailing vessels at the hands of mermaids, either by storms or due to the sailors' distraction.

The Mermaid Niles ballad no. 62 A

This folksong reflects the belief of sailors that it is bad luck to sail on a Friday, and that the appearance of a mermaid portends a storm. The comb and glass are traditionally associated with the mermaid, signifying vanity; one speculation as to their origin is that the mirror used to be a moon-disc and the comb a plectrum for plucking a harp.

Сирена (The Siren) Aleksandr Gretchaninov (1919)

This Russian song is in fact based on the ancient Greek myth of the Sirens, bringing ships to their destruction.

Die Loreley Franz Liszt (1843)

The witch Loreley is thought by the German people to sit on a cliff at a certain bend in the Rhine river, combing her golden hair and singing like a mermaid, distracting sailors to their destruction.

Soullessness

The Church encouraged belief in fantastic creatures such as mermaids through the copying of Bestiaries, or books of fantastic creatures, in which they interpreted these creatures' existences through the lens of Christian morality. Mermaids

were portrayed as symbols of the seduction of the worlds' pleasures. Around this time monks began circulating stories about mermaids who longed to acquire an immortal soul so that they could achieve salvation.

Нимфа Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1898)

Sirens and water-spirits are sometimes portrayed in an attitude of mourning. This nymph is a far cry from the powerful, seductive creature we have seen so far; perhaps she is weeping for want of a soul.

Näcken Jean Sibelius (1909)

This song is about a Neck, or Nixie, a Scandinavian water spirit who sits on top of the river and plays a fiddle or a harp. Necks do not have immortal souls, but it is believed in Scandinavia that one day they will be saved. The Neck can appear as a little boy, a young man or an old bearded man.

Nøkken Agathe Backer-Grøndahl (1881)

This song is also about a Neck playing his harp in the river.

Die Meerfee Robert Schumann (1851)

Trois Chansons:

Arthur Honegger (1926)

Extraites de "La Petite Sirène" d'Andersen

I. Chanson des Sirènes

These songs are based on *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen (1836). In the original story, the Little Mermaid wants to marry the prince so that she can gain an immortal soul. She fails, and faces her fate to dissolve into sea-foam. However, because of her virtue and self-sacrifice, she instead is made into a wind, with another chance of acquiring a soul after 300 years.

II. Berceuse de la Sirène

This is the voices of the Little Mermaid's sisters, begging her to come back into the sea so that she will live instead of dissolving into sea-foam.

III. Chanson de la Poire

This "Song of the Pear" shows Honegger's Dadaist influence. It has nothing to do with the previous two songs, but I hope you enjoy it.

Three songs by Shel Silverstein;
with guest guitarist, Austin Krause.

The Whale

Shel Silverstein (1968)

The Slitheree-Dee

Shel Silverstein (1962)

The Mermaid

Jim Friedman, Shel Silverstein (1965)

Thank you for coming!