

Program Notes

“Quia ergo femina” and “O quam magnum miraculum” speak to the power of femininity and the inseparability of masculine and feminine energy. As someone who often struggles to balance masculine and feminine in their presentation, I find these pieces normalizing and comforting. They remind me that the sacred feminine is a beautiful thing that goes beyond gender assignment and the rules and roles we learn in society.

Quia ergo femina by Hildegard von Bingen

Quia ergo femina mortem instruxit,
clara virgo illam interemit,
et ideo est summa benediction
in feminea forma
pre omni creatura,
quia Deus factus est homo
in dulcissima et beata virgine.

For since a woman drew up death,
a virgin gleaming dashed it down,
and therefore is the highest blessing found
in woman’s form
before all other creatures,
for God was made a human
in the blessed Virgin sweet.

Translated by Nathaniel M. Campbell

O quam magnum miraculum

O quam magnum miraculum est
quod in subditam femineam
formam rex
introivit.
Hoc Deus fecit quia humilitas
super omnia ascendit.
Et o quam magna felicitas
est in ista forma,
quia malicia,
que de femina fluxit hanc
femina postea detersit
et omnem suavissimum
odorem virtutum edificavit
ac celum ornavit
plus quam terram prius
turbavit.

How great the wonder is!
into the female form subdued
the King
has come.
This God has done, for humility
mounts o’er all.
And O how great the happiness
is in that form,
for malice,
which from a woman flowed—
a woman then this malice wiped away,
and ev’ry sweet
perfume of virtues she has raised—
the heavens graced
far more than e’er the Earth
in chaos cast.

Translated by Nathaniel M. Campbell

While I didn't have the vocabulary, I knew I was queer from a very young age. Starting in preschool, I regularly had crushes on boys and girls. All the while, the representation and social reinforcement around me pushed the heteronormative narrative: you will grow up, marry a man, and have babies. It seemed inevitable and, in some ways, I took comfort in the surety. "Aura soave" is the narrative I felt in my body, even when I was hearing the opposite: that I exist and thrive outside the general narrative.

Aura soave by Luzzasco Luzzaschi

Aura soave di segreti accenti
che penetrando per l'orecchie al core
svegliasti le dove dormiva Amore.
Per te respire e vivo
da che nel petto mio
spirasti tu d'Amor vital desio.
Vissi di vita privo
mentre amorosa cura in me fu spenta.
Hor vien che l'alma senta
virtú di quel tuo spirito gentile
felice vita oltre l'usato stile.

Gentle breeze of secret words,
penetrating the ears of my heart
you roused Cupid, sleeping there.
For you I breathe and live,
ever since into my breast
you wafted Cupid's vital desire.
I lived of life deprived
while love's care was extinguished in me.
Now come, and let me soul feel
the virtue of your kind spirit
and a life happier than to which it was
accustomed.

Barbara Strozzi's "L'amante segreto" can easily be compared to the well-known experience of being closeted. Like many others in the queer community, I was terrified that if people found out I liked girls, that I would be "othered" and lose my friends. But this piece goes far beyond this narrative. It represents falling in love for the first time; the desire to be seen for who we truly are while also wanting to stay hidden; and recognizing, honoring, and loving our current state of being.

L'amante segreto by Barabara Strozzi

Voglio, voglio morire,
piuttosto ch'il mio mal venga a scoprire.
Oh, disgrazia fatale!
Quanto più miran gl'occhi il suo bel volto
più tien la bocca il mio desir sepolto;
chi rimedio non ha taccia il suo male.

Non resti di mirar chi non ha sorte,
né può da sì bel ciel venir la morte.
La bella donna mia sovente miro
ed ella a me volge pietoso il guardo,
quasi che voglia dire:
"Palesa il tuo martire"
ché ben s'accorge che mi struggo e ardo.

Ma io voglio morire

I just want to die,
rather than let my weakness be discovered.
Oh, inevitable misfortune!
The more my eyes gaze on that beautiful face
the more my mouth will hold desire entombed;
one who has no remedy stays silent about his
pains.
One who has no luck can only look,
accepting his death coming from such a heaven.
I often look at my beloved
who returns a pitying look,
as if she would say,
"Disclose your torment,"
for she is well aware that I am consumed with
passion.
But I would rather die

piuttosto ch'il mio mal venga a scoprire.
L'erbetta, ch'al cader di fredda brina

languida il capo inchina,
all'apparir del sole
lieta verdeggia più di quell che suole:
tal io, s'alcun timor mi gela il core,
all'apparir di lei prendo vigore.
Ma io voglio morire
piuttosto ch'il mio mal venga a scoprire.
Deh, getta l'arco poderoso e l'armi,

Amor, e lascia omai di saettarmi!
Se non per amor mio
fallo per onor tuo, superbo dio,
perché gloria non è d'un Guerrier forte
uccider un che sta vicino a morte.

than let my pain be discovered.
The tender grasses which bow their languishing
heads
with the fall of the cold frost,
then when the sun appears
they happily revive from the soil;
just as I, when fear freezes my heart,
become revived when I see her.
But I would rather die
than have my hurt revealed.
Cupid, throw down your mighty bow and
weapons,
and finally stop shooting at me!
If not for the love of me,
then do it for your own honor, great God,
because there is no glory for the mighty warrior
to kill one who is already so close to death.

Translated by Candace Magner

One of the hardest parts of growing up is the disillusionment of life as we knew it. Whether that's learning the true history of the US, realizing our parents are human, or heartbreak, we all know this pain. And we all know that these growing pains can actually bring unexpected joy as we develop into our next stage of life. As the flames increase around us, the pain may increase, but hopefully we are left stronger and more resilient.

Occhi del piano by Luzzasco Luzzaschi

Occhi del pianto mio,
cagione è del mio duro empio martire,
lasciatemi vi prego ormai morire.
E con morte finir mio stato rio,
che'l vostro darmi aita,

talor con dolce ed amoroso sguardo,
più dogliosa mia vita
rende e cresce la fiamma onde sempr'ardo.

Eyes, cause of my weeping,
and of my harsh and merciless torment,
allow me, I beseech you, now to die.
And with my death end my unfortunate state,
for with the assistance that you sometimes
provide me,
of sweet and amorous glances,
my life becomes more distressing
and the flame with which I ever burn is
increased.

Monteverdi's "Zefiro torna" beautifully depicts queer joy. It's an unforgettable feeling for many queer folk, and it's one that can be taken for granted by those outside the queer community. It is often mislabeled as "flaunting" our identities. But when your existence is debated, questioned, and seen as disposable day after day, those moments of queer joy are priceless and undiminishable. If there's one thing I have learned over the last three years, it's to honor and value my own queer joy and never let the discomfort of others inhibit its expression.

Zefiro torna by Claudio Monteverdi

Zefiro torna e di soave accenti
l'aer fa grato e' il pié discioglie a l'onde

e, mormoranda tra le Verdi fronde,
fa danzar al bel suon su'l prato i fiori.

Inghirlandato il crin Fillide e Clori

note temprando lor care e giodonde;
a da monti e da valli ime e profonde
raddoppian l'armonia gli antri canori.
Sorge più vaga in ciel l'aurora, e'l sole,

sparge più luci d'or; più puro argento
fregia di Teti il bel ceruleo manto.

Sol io, per selve abbandonate e sole.
L'ardor di due begli occhi e'l mio tormento,
come vuol mia ventura, hor piango hor canto.

Return O Zephyr, and with gentle motion
make pleasant the air and scatter the grasses in
waves
and murmuring among the green branches,
make the flowers in the field dance to your
sweet sound;
Crown with a garland the heads of Phylla and
Chloris
with notes tempered by love and joy,
from mountains and valleys high and deep
and sonorous caves that echo in harmony.
The dawn rises eagerly into the heavens and the
sun
scatters rays of gold, and of the purest silver,
like embroidery on the cerulean mantle of
Thetis.
But I, in abandoned forests, am alone.
The ardour of two beautiful eyes is my torment;
as my Fate wills it, now I weep, now I sing.

"O dolcezze amarissime" is about love's cruel companion: heartbreak. As a queer person, I have felt societal pressure to make my relationships last. When queer relationships end badly, some conservative or "traditional" people will use our pain as an example of why our relationships are less valuable or are more doomed to fail. This energy is infectious and encourages people, both within and without the LGBTQIA+ community, to stay in harmful, toxic, or dysfunctional relationships rather than make the best choice for their highest good.

O dolcezze amarissime by Luzzasco Luzzaschi

O dolcezz'amarissime d'amore,
quest'è put il mio core
quest'è pur il mio ben che più languisco.
Che fa meco il dolor se ne gioisco.

Oh, bitter sweetness of love,
is this indeed for my heart,
is it really for my good that I must waste away.
What does anguish become if it does not give
me pleasure?

Fuggite Amor amanti, amore amico,
o che fiero nemico,
allor che vi lusinga, allor che ride,
condisce i vostri pianti
con quell velen che dolcemente ancide.
Non credete ai sembianti
che par soave ed è pungente e crudo.

Flee from Cupid you lovers, that loving friend,
oh, what a fierce enemy!
While he flatters you, whilst he is smiling,
he seasons your weeping
with venom which sweetly kills.
Do not trust in his countenance
for he seems gentle but is bitter and cruel.

Love is not just for romantic partners. It's for friends, family (chosen and blood), and, most importantly, for ourselves. Falling in love with yourself can yield radical results. The more I learn how to love myself and my queerness, the more the world I knew as a child seems to crumble. The expectations of those around me matter less and less, and instead I am left with joy and the desire to make meaningful connections and form community. In a society that thrives on individualism, self-love that is fostered and then shared within larger communities has the potential to break down barriers and cultivate a deeper, more fulfilling way of living.

Pur ti miro by Monteverdi/Benedetto

Pur ti miro, pur ti godo,
pur ti stringo, pur t'annodo;
più non peno, più non moro,
O mia vita, o mio Tesoro.
Io son tua, tuo son io,
speme mia, dillo di.
Tu sei pur l'idolo mio,
si, mio ben, si, mio cor, mia vita, si.

I gaze upon you, I desire you,
I embrace you, I enchain you;
no more grieving, no more dying,
o my life o my beloved.
I am yours, yours am I,
my hope, tell it.
You are truly my idol,
yes, my love, yes, my heart, my life, yes

Bottesini's pieces remind us of the inevitable cycles of life and, therefore, the infinite possibilities that exist in the world. While endings are inevitable, so then are beginnings as one flows into the other in an infinite loop. It's this knowledge that makes life more beautiful and eases the anxiety that comes with change.

Une bouche aimée by Giovanni Bottesini

Une bouche aimée a dit a mon Coeur
viens, mon amour,
toi mon seul bonheur,
viens mon Coeur, mon seul bonheur.
Adieu les tristes automnes

Beloved lips told my heart:
come, my love,
you are my only happiness,
come my heart, my only happiness.
Farewell sad autumns

voici venir le printemps,
la terre se couvre de fleurs,
les rayons dorés ont tari ses pleurs.
Dans la feuille nouvelle
chante la tourterelle,
la sève des bourgeons entrouverts
du parfum des bois,
des près verts remplit les airs.
Mon cher amour, ma vie,
viens mon seul bonheur,
mon amour, mon bonheur.

here comes the spring,
the Earth is covered by flowers,
the golden rays have dried their tears.
Amongst the new leaves
the turtle-dove sings,
the sap of the buds just open
fills the air of the green fields,
with the scent of the forests.
My dear love, my life,
come my only happiness,
my love, my happiness

Tutto il mondo by Giovanni Bottesini

Tutte che il mondo serra di piu caro per me
da me s'invola.
Oggi per sempre ed ogni gaudio, ogni gaudio
perdo,
ogni Speranza, che l'amara terra dell'esiglio
feconda esser non puote se non d'affanno.

All that is dearest to me in this world
flies away from me.
Today I lose forever every joy.
I lose all hope as the bitter Earth of exile
can only produce anxiety.