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THE BOOK OF WOMAN

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WITH AN ADDED FOREWORD

by Sandra Siniväli

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*My name is
Woman. Age: still
young. Colour of
hair: Gray...*

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Chapter 1 M a n i p u l a t e d	7
❖ Bedřich Smetana – Tys jaksi nesmělý, Jeničku... Kdybych se co takoveho from The Bartered Bride	
❖ Anton Rubinstein – Warm night, quiet night from The Demon	
Chapter 2 S u f f e r i n g	11
❖ Johann Sebastian Bach – Blute nur from St. Matthew Passion	
❖ Hugo Wolf – Mignon III from Goethe-Lieder	
Chapter 3 H o p e f u l	15
❖ Samuel Barber – St. Ita's Vision from Hermit Songs	
❖ Antonin Dvořák – Song to the Moon from Rusalka	
❖ Gian Carlo Menotti – To this we've come... Papers Papers from The Consul	
Chapter 4 D o m i n a n t	21
❖ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Ci siamo intesi... Si promette facilmente from La finta giardiniera	
Afterword	24

FOREWORD

This final presentation was born through a long process of self-reflection, re-evaluation, and elimination. My original idea was full of technical requirements, various props and extra people on stage. Bit by bit, whether due to corona measurements or other uncertainties, I decided not to include any of these elements and came up with a simpler solution. Thus, today, you will see only myself and Carolien Drewes on stage, and in this presentation, there will be only one prop: a book.

I have chosen repertoire that I connect with on a deeper emotional level and which I believe represents best my vocal and artistic development during my four years of Bachelor studies. There are pieces in this programme that I was not able to sing a year, or in some cases, even six months ago, but now feel most comfortable and natural on my voice. I clearly feel that my voice wants to move towards slightly heavier repertoire, and it is comfortable with singing longer lines which require more stamina and breath support. With this exam I wish to show all these developments and give an idea of which kind of repertoire I would further explore when entering the Master studies.

My choice of repertoire led me to the idea of combining the pieces into a book, a set of stories of different women as they experience various emotions in life. In opera, lied and oratory, an emotion or a moment in time is often stretched out and observed in detail, much like they would be written in a novel. And so, I offer you, not written but sung, the new bestseller about feminine happiness and grief, love and hate, fear, and hope, that is almost always inspired by a masculine factor. This book tells the story of all these different, yet at the same time, very similar women. This book tells my story, for I am a woman.

CHAPTER 1 Manipulated

Mařenka and Tamara are both women who are not in control of their own lives. Instead, their path is blindly guided by the hands of men.

For Mařenka, it is her father and her beloved Jeníček who decide her future and keep secrets from her. She does not understand what is happening and why people who should care about her are constantly lying to her.

For Tamara, it is the vile Demon that has fallen in love with her and is determined to guide her soul into damnation. Tamara cannot decide whether she should feel love or disgust towards her powerful suitor, and thus, she struggles with sleepless nights.

Mařenka

[...] They decided to walk further from the village, hand in hand, as the birds sang and the flowers bloomed brighter than ever. Mařenka felt as if the forest was mocking her.

„It will then happen like I have been told!“ she said. „Oh, I am unhappy!“ Jeníček stopped and looked at her: „Mařenka! What made you so unhappy? What has happened?“ „Do not wonder, Jeníček! Farmer Mícha will come today with his son to ask for my hand. They'll be here soon.“ „And you, what will you tell them?“

She could not believe what she was hearing. „What shall I tell them?“ she replied with anger, „Can you still ask me such a question? Do you think that I could ever belong to another man? But my parents! My father has promised.“

„Yes, that is sad news, indeed!“ he replied.

Mařenka felt her heart about to burst. Why was he behaving like he did not care? He seemed so distant and unapproachable, and it was tearing her apart. She decided to confront him...

*Tys jaksi nesmělý, Jeníčku, a
ostýchavý.
Jako by ses něčeho bál, či snad
někoho.*

*Jeníčku, přísahej mi, že nemáš jiné
lásky, jiného závazku.*

*Věř, že mi už nejednou napadlo, že
truchlíš pro nějakou milenku*

*Kdybych se co takového
o tobě dověděla,
krutou pomstychtivou zlobou na
tě bych zanevřela.
Tedy pověz mi, Jeníčku,
proč jsi se tak rozhněval,
že jsi domov svůj opustil
a milence výhost dal?
Pověz mi Jeníčku.*

You seem to be so restless and so uncertain, Jeníček. As if you were afraid of something or someone.

Swear to me now, Jeníčku, that there's no other girl, no other pledge or vow.

You know, the thought occurred to me already that you are mourning for another lover.

Should I ever happen to learn something like that about you, I would into fiercest hatred turn my present love of you. Confide then in me, Jeníček, why did you become estranged, why did you leave your home, left a sweetheart there? Tell me, Jeníček.

Tamara

*Ночь тепла, ночь тиха,
Не могу Я уснуть,
неотвязной мечтой занята:
кто б он был?*

Warm night, quiet night,
I cannot fall asleep,
one thought keeps bothering me:
Who is he?

*Захочуль в храме я помолиться
святым,
Я молюся ему
Кто б он был?*

If I want to pray to the saints in the
temple,
I can only pray to him.
Who is he?

*и он там предо мной в
фимиамеостит,
иль скользит без следа.
Кто б он был?*

Suddenly he appears before me in the
mist, then again disappears without a
trace.
Who is he?

ночь тепла, ночь тиха...

Warm night, quiet night...

*и всегда слышу я голос сладких
речей
и зовёт он меня.... Но куда?
Кто б он был?*

I hear his sweet voice ringing all the time,
and he keeps calling me away... but
where?
Who is he?

*шепчет он говорит: „Подожди, я
приду!“
И я жду, уж давно!
Кто б он был?
ночь тепла, ночь тиха...*

In a whisper he says: „Wait for me, I will
come!“
And I keep waiting for so long!
Who is he?
Warm night, quiet night...



CHAPTER 2 Suffering

These next two pieces tell a darker story of sadness and pain. In *Blute nur* it is not the woman who is suffering, but rather it is the story of Jesus' suffering seen through a woman's perspective, possibly through the eyes of Mary. A woman is more compassionate, more tender, and so it makes this moment of betrayal utterly painful when we hear it told by the voice of a soprano.

Mignon is just a girl, yet she feels the pain of an old woman. She has suffered through the hands of men, she has been abused and manipulated, up to a point that she no longer wishes to be seen as feminine. She has aged prematurely through her suffering and now wishes to leave this world so that she would suffer no longer.

Blute nur

[...] And Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said: „What are you willing to give me? I shall betray him to you.“ And they offered him 30 pieces of silver. And from that moment on he sought an opportunity, so that he might betray him.

*Blute nur, du liebes Herz!
Ach! ein Kind, das du erzogen,
Das an deiner Brust gesogen,
Droht den Pfleger zu
ermorden,
Denn es ist zur Schlange
worden.*

Bleed only, loving heart!
Ah! A child, whom you raised,
That sucked at your breast,
Is threatening to murder its
guardian
For that child has become a
serpent.

Mignon

I had chosen Mignon for the part; and accordingly, at the appointed day, I had her suitably dressed in a long light snow white dress. [...] She was, of course, provided with a golden girdle round her waist, and a golden fillet on her hair.

[...] “What wings are these?” asked the children. “Let us see them!” “They represent far finer ones, which are not yet unfolded,” said Mignon.

[...] The little party having satisfied their curiosity, and as the show was beginning to abate, we proceeded to undress the little angel. This, however, she resisted. She took her cithern, she seated herself on this high writing table, and sang a little song with touching grace:

*So lasst mich scheinen, bis ich werde,
Zieht mir das weisse Kleid nicht aus!
Ich eile von der schönen Erde
Hinab in jenes dunkle Haus.*

*Dort ruh' ich eine kleine Stille,
Dann öffnet sich der frische Blick;
Ich lasse dann die reine Hülle,
Den Gürtel und den Kranz zurück.*

So let me seem, until I become so;
Do not take off my white dress!
From the beautiful earth I hasten
Down into that solid house.

There I will repose a moment in peace,
until I open my eyes afresh. Then I
will leave behind the spotless garment,
the girdle and the wreath.

*Und jene himmlischen Gestalten
Sie fragen nicht nach Mann und Weib,
Und keine Kleider, keine Falten
Umgeben den verklärten Leib.*

*Zwar lebt' ich ohne Sorg' und Mühe,
Doch fühlt' ich tiefen Schmerz genug.
Vor Kummer altert' ich zu frühe;
Macht mich auf ewig wieder jung!*

And those spirits of heaven do not ask
if one is 'man' or 'woman',
and no clothes, no robes
will cover my transfigured body.

Although I have lived without trouble
and toil, I have still felt deep pain.
Through sorrow I have aged too soon;
Make me forever young again!

CHAPTER 3 Hopeful

St. Ita's Vision tells the story of Mother Mary, who would call herself the handmaid of the lord. In her deep devotion to God, she prays for a miracle and is chosen as the earthly mother to Jesus, whom she then loves and nurses as her own child.

Rusalka is a water-nymph who dreams of love. She is willing to sacrifice her eternal life for one lifetime with a human prince. In her song, she prays to the moon and charms the mortal man to love her back.

Magda Sorel is a woman who has suffered through the death of her child and has waited patiently for the men in power to help her in her need. In this moment of despair, she has grown tired of waiting and she decides to act out to save her family.

Mary

„I will take nothing from my Lord,“ said she, „unless He gives me His Son from Heaven in the form of a Baby that I may nurse Him.“ So that Christ came down to her in the form of a Baby, and then she said:

„Infant Jesus, at my breast, nothing in this world is true
save, O tiny nursling, You.

Infant Jesus at my breast, by my heart every night,
You I nurse are not a churl, but were begot on Mary the
Jewess by Heaven's light.

Infant Jesus at my breast, what King is there but You who
could give everlasting good? Wherefore I give my food.
Sing to Him, maidens, sing your best! There is none that
has such right to your song as Heaven's King who every
night is Infant Jesus at my breast.“

Rusalka

Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém
Světlo tvé daleko vidí,
Po světě bloudíš širokém,
Díváš se v příbytky lidí.

Moon in the deep sky,
Your light sees far,
You wander around the wide
world,
You look into people's homes.

Měsíčku, postůj chvíli
Řekni mi, kde je můj milý

Moon, stay for a bit,
Tell me, where is my love?

Řekni mu, stříbrný
měsíčku,
mé že jej objímá rámě,
aby si alespoň chvíličku
vzpomenul ve snění na mě.

Tell him, silvery moon,
That I hold him in my arms,
So that, if only for a moment,
He will remember dreaming about
me.

Zasvit' mu do daleka,
řekni mu, řekni, kdo tu naň
čeká!

Light his way,
Tell him who is waiting for him!

O mne-li duše lidská sní,
ať se tou vzpomínkou
vzbudí!
Měsíčku, nezhasni!

Human soul, if it dreams of me,
May he wake up with that
memory!
Moon, do not fade!

Magda

“To this we’ve come: that men withhold the world from
men. No ship nor shore for him who drowns at sea. No
home nor grave for him who dies on land.

To this we’ve come: that man be born a stranger up on
God’s earth, that he be chosen without a chance for
choice, that he be hunted without a hope for refuge.

To this we’ve come, to this we’ve come; and you, you
too, shall weep.

If to men, not to God, we now must pray, tell me,
Secretary, tell me, who are these men?

If to them, not to God, we now must pray, tell me,
Secretary tell me.

Who are these dark archangels? Will they be conquered?
Will they be doomed?

Is there one, anyone behind those doors to whom the
heart can still be explained?

Is there one, anyone who still may care?


Tell me, Secretary, tell me. Have you ever seen the
Consul? Does he speak, does he breathe? Have you ever
spoken to him?

[...]

Papers! Papers! Papers!
But don't you understand? What shall I tell you to make
you understand?
My child is dead... John's mother is dying... My own
life is in danger.
I ask you for help, and all you give me is... papers.
What is your name? Magda Sorel.
Age? Thirty-three.
Colour of eyes? Colour of hair?
Single or married? Religion and race?
Place of birth, father's name, mother's name?
Papers! Papers! Papers! Papers, papers, papers! Papers,
papers, papers!
Look at my eyes, they are afraid to sleep.
Look at my hands, at these old woman's hands.
Why don't you say something? Aren't you secretaries
human beings like us?..
What is your name? Magda Sorel.
Age? Thirty-three.
What will your papers do?
They cannot stop the clock. They are too thin an armour
against a bullet.
What is your name? Magda Sorel.
Age? Thirty-three.
What does that matter?
All that matters is that the time is late, that I'm afraid and
I need your help.
What is your name? What is your name? What is your
name?

This is my answer:
My name is woman.
Age: Still young.
Colour of hair: Gray.
Colour of eyes: The colour of tears.
Occupation: Waiting. Waiting. Waiting, waiting, waiting,
waiting, waiting.
Oh! The day will come, I know, when our hearts aflame
will burn your paper chains.
Warn the consul, Secretary, warn him.
That day neither ink nor seal shall cage our souls.
That day will come, that day will come!

CHAPTER 4 Dominant



Arminda is a symbol of female empowerment. She is a woman who knows exactly what she wants and will take every step necessary in order to get it. She lets no man define her fate or stand in the way of her happiness.

Arminda

„And you seem to me like a sunflower,“ said Arminda, “That constantly turns hither and thither, Or rather a weathercock spinning in the four winds.”

“Why, why, my dear, do you speak to me thus?” replied the count.

“Because I perceive you to be changeable and inconstant. What do you say, Uncle?”

The Podestà replied: “Let me observe him. From his physiognomy, he seems . . . Hmm . . . I am not wrong. Niece, he is a constant man.”

“Oh, most constant!” the count confirmed.

“And Faithful!” her uncle continued.

“Most faithful! I am like a firm rock, or rather the ship that, in the midst of the treacherous sea, breaks up . . . no, shatters – oh dear, stands still; Well, you get the point of the comparison.”

“Well, I’ll see about that.” said Arminda, “But say, do you love me?”

“Do I love you? At the first gleam of those lovely sparkling eyes, I was thunderstruck. What grace, what a prodigy, what fluency! I feel myself enraptured!”

Arminda replied decisively:

Ci siamo intesi.
Io v'amerò;
ma guai se vi scopro
incostante;
anche se foste in mezzo della
via
io vi do quattro schiaffi, anima
mia.

Si promette facilmente
dagl'amanti d'oggi
e la semplice zitella
se lo crede, poverella
e si fida a dir di sì.
Io però non fo così.
Patti chiari e patti schietti
pria di dirvi sì o no.
Voi sarete l'idol mio,
il mio ben, la mia speranza;
ma se mai, com'è l'usanza,
mi mancaste, m'ingannaste,
io le mani adoprerò.

We understand each other.
I will love you;
but trouble, if I find you
unfaithful;
Even if you are in the middle of
the street,
I will give you four slaps, my
dear.

Promises are easily made
By lovers nowadays;
And a simple maid
Will believe, poor thing,
And trustingly say yes.
I however do not act that way:
Clear and honest agreements
Before saying yes or no.
You will be my idol,
My dear, my hope;
But if ever, as is the custom,
You fail me, you deceive me,
I will resort to my hands.

AFTERWORD

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to The Royal Conservatoire for the chance to perform my final exam live in the Arnold Schönberg hall. It really makes me happy to be able to sing on this beautiful stage, even if it is only for a small audience.

I would like to thank Monica Damen and Ruth Fraser for their extremely hard work organizing everything and fighting for the vocal department. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

I am grateful for my fellow students and all the teachers who have been part of my journey for the last four years. They have been extremely inspiring and open, and they have helped me grow both as a person and as an artist.

I owe so much to my family and friends, but especially to my dear-dear boyfriend. They have always believed in me and had my back, even when I did not believe in myself.

Most of all, I would like to thank my lovely singing teacher Catrin Wyn-Davies and coach pianist Carolien Drewes. They have both put in so much hard work and they have been so patient with me. Their guidance and dedication have made me see music in a different way and made me into the artist and singer that I am today.