

***An Imagist Perspective in the Modern Classical Voice:
Performance of Aida Shirazi's A Girl, and James May's Sea Gods.***

My artistic practice and research revolve around the modern classical voice - specifically, ways in which the voice can be utilized as a physical and dynamic instrument, engaging with varieties of timbres, articulations, and extended techniques in classical performance. Key questions my work asks time and time again are: How can the voice communicate as an instrument within and beyond the bel canto technique? And how can the vocalist use various vocal timbres and modernist philosophies to become a mediator and present participant in performance with the broader material world?

One of the lenses through which I curate and engage with these questions is that of imagist poetry and modern eco-materialist philosophy. This L&nite performance will feature two contemporary works for soprano voice and piano - Aida Shirazi's A Girl, and James May's Sea Gods - which set imagist nature poems by Pound and H.D. 20th and 21st century art song has turned to post-Romantic poetic traditions such as Imagist poetry, which contrasts with Romanticism in its depiction of nature and human emotion, as well as in its embrace of syntactical disruption, and has been in recent years an important resource for contemporary vocal music. While Romanticism - a wellspring of text for classical art song in the 19th century - reveres the creative ego, nature, and emotional expressivity, Imagism (an influential Anglo-American poetic tradition alive in the early 1910s) attempts to create an "intellectual and emotional complex[es] in an instant of time..." For Ezra Pound, imagism is the "presentation of [a] 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation, that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits...."

In this framework, Imagism revises the relationship of art song to emotional expressivity by demonstrating expressions that are complex, multidimensional, and in more ambivalent communication with the environment. This allows the vocalist, and composers writing for the voice, multiple interpretations of text through multidimensional use of the vocal apparatus. In A Girl and Sea Gods, Shirazi and May use complex harmonic languages, contrasting vocal timbres within and beyond the bel canto technique (such as sprechstimme, straight-tone, breathiness, and operatic vocalises) as more literal approaches to text-painting and emotion, extended piano techniques, and free song structure in line with the free verse tendencies of the imagist poetic tradition. The set poems by H.D. and Pound conjure classical figures and proto-surrealist images of nature in modern fashion, placing the reader and characters in weird perceptual and corporeal relationships with their surroundings.

Through modern perspectives in text and composition, we can now see a redefinition of the voice and the role of the vocalist through the lens of modernism, and I argue that this vision of the voice is an important step to realizing its fullest expressive potential. In recognizing the voice as a physical and dynamic instrument, one can see that the use of the singing voice is dynamic too and can create sounds beyond the specific timbre of the bel canto tradition. Furthermore, in re-defining the bodily relationship of the voice to nature, the vocalist transcends the role of narrator in art song, becoming a mediator and participant in the experience of nature and poetry, and expressing ideas and emotions that are dynamic, corporeal, and transformative.



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Colombian-American soprano Stephanie Lamprea is an architect of new sounds and expressions as a performer, recitalist, curator, and improviser, specializing in contemporary classical repertoire. Trained as an operatic coloratura, Stephanie uses her voice as a mechanism of avant-garde performance art, creating “maniacal shifts of vocal production and character... like an icepick through the skull” (Jason Eckardt). She has received awards from the Concert Artist Guild, St. Botolph Club Foundation, the John Cage Orgel Stiftung in Germany, and the Puffin Foundation. Stephanie has performed solo recitals for Sound Scotland, Roulette Intermedium, Constellation Chicago, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She has presented artistic research for the 2021 Young Women Composers Conference (USA), the 2021 Shared Narratives Conference (UK), and she was a TEDx Speaker for TEDxWaltham. Stephanie is a doctoral candidate at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, supervised by Dr. Emily Doolittle, Dr. Laura Gonzalez, and Jean Sangster. www.stephanielamprea.com

Please also find this YouTube link (<https://youtu.be/igMkFza69W8>) to a performance of one of the performed works as part of my application. I additionally would like to indicate that I wish to participate in a facilitated session with respondent.

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