



SPOTLIGHT

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NEWSLETTER

Ukrainian Art Song Project



Lysenko's Art Songs Previewed at Toronto Event

Earlier this year, classical music lovers had the unprecedented pleasure of attending an evening promoting the art songs of Mykola Lysenko, a prolific and fervently patriotic 19th-century composer who is regarded as the founder of the genre in Ukraine. The sold-out May 2008 event, "An Evening with Pavlo Hunka and Friends: Discovering the Art Songs of Mykola Lysenko," was organized under the auspices of the Ukrainian Art Song Project (UASP) and the Canadian Ukrainian Opera Association, and held in the Richard Bradshaw Auditorium at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The evening featured a preview of Lysenko's beautiful and compelling songs, which are being recorded as part of the UASP's anthology of art songs by prominent Ukrainian composers.

Guests were greeted by the internationally renowned bass-baritone Pavlo Hunka, his dedicated wife and partner Larysa, and by members of the UASP committee. After a brief reception, the evening program commenced, hosted by the well-known and ever gracious Catherine Belyea, classical music host on CBC Radio.

Hunka spoke passionately and eloquently about the art song genre and its significance for Ukraine's ascent to its proper place on the world cultural stage. He further explained that Lysenko (1842–1912) composed over 130 art songs in all, many of them to texts by Ukrainian poets such as Taras Shevchenko, Oleksander Oles, and Panteleimon Kulish. Lysenko also wrote songs for voice and piano to the poems of Heinrich Heine, Adam Mickiewicz, and Semen Nadson. Taken as a whole, Lysenko's art songs are unique in their time for eloquently expressing a Ukrainian national identity (under repressive Russian colonial rule). Musically, they have already won popularity among the Canadian artists engaged in the recording project, and have begun to take their place among the great bodies of work that other nations have produced in this genre.

Hunka has dedicated the recording of Mykola Lysenko's art songs to the memory of his dearly departed friend and mentor Richard Bradshaw, whose widow Diana was present that evening. Another special guest was the granddaughter of Kyrilo Stetsenko (1882–1922),

whose art songs were recorded for the first release of the UASP anthology, and received high praise from Bradshaw.

The beauty of Lysenko's intimate compositions became evident during the recital that followed. Hunka performed "The Boundless Plain," "The Raging River Dnipro," "A Dream," and "The Passing of Time," captivating the audience with his superb voice and masterly interpretation. Monica Whicher and Krisztina Szabo, two Canadian opera stars who have collaborated on the UASP, performed the Lysenko duets "A Beck Beneath the Sycamore Tree" and "Ukrainian Melody." Whicher also recited "The Tall Poplar." Both artists moved the audience with their lovely and emotionally evocative performances.

Albert Krywolt, one of Canada's foremost collaborative pianists, accompanied the singers. He also took a few moments to explain to the audience his involvement with the UASP. He delighted those present with his passionate explanation of Lysenko's subtle composer's talent, and his enthusiasm for the UASP was especially warmly received.

Lesia Babiak and William Zyla spoke on behalf of the UASP committee. They emphasized the vast scope of the project and its importance in bringing to light the high artistic value of Ukrainian art songs. To do them justice, Hunka and some of Canada's finest opera singers are recording them at the world-famous Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto. Such an undertaking would not be possible without the financial support of generous benefactors, including Marijka and Moko Wynnyckyj, the Hon. John Yaremko, the Ukrainian Credit Union Ltd., the Onyschuk family, and Eugene Roman. Indeed, further financial support is necessary in order to assure the completion of recordings of the highest quality, and the UASP committee leaders appealed to all music lovers to donate generously.

The guests lingered during the post-performance reception, not wanting this enchanting evening to end. As a parting gift, everyone received a preview CD with six of the newly recorded Lysenko art songs, which have since also been posted at www.uasp.ca. The complete six-CD set is expected to be released in early 2010.

An Interview with Pavlo Hunka

International opera star Pavlo Hunka is a visionary who is committed to bringing the beauty of the Ukrainian art song to the world stage.

“For some 30 years, I have been aware that almost all types of Ukrainian classical music have been and are still being performed on stage to an ever-growing and more enthusiastic public. Furthermore, many operas, symphonies and ballets are being or already have been recorded for posterity,” explains Hunka.

“Almost all types...except for the Ukrainian art song, where our most eminent Ukrainian composers have set fine poetry to music. In fact, the composition of some 700 Ukrainian art songs means that a significant part of our composers’ creative life was dedicated to this art form. Someone somewhere had to take on the responsibility of bringing the Ukrainian art song to the notice of the world. “

Once Hunka established himself in the world of opera, he was able to turn his attention to this long-standing desire to use his talents to bring Ukrainian classical music into the mainstream classical repertoire. And, he is certain that music-loving audiences worldwide are ready for this genre.

“The music world is crying out for new representations of culture and is already welcoming the Ukrainian art song into its repertoire,” Hunka expressed. “The Ukrainian art song paints a picture of a nation having received a rich array of influences from many distant corners of the world. Shades of colour from the Orient, Turkey, Russia, Germany, France and Poland are present in Ukrainian music, and yet this nation is firmly situated in Europe. The world welcomes such rich cultures.”

Hunka hopes that with the recording of the complete art songs of Ukraine’s 18 most eminent composers, the publication on the website of the music scores, and the dissemination of the recordings to all major conservatories and libraries in the world, Ukraine’s rich heritage will be brought to the fore. In turn, in his view, “A greater respect for Ukraine’s culture will promote a greater respect for the Ukrainian people.”

As the artistic director of the Ukrainian Art Song Project, Hunka aims to compile a comprehensive anthology of close to 700 Ukrainian art songs in the form of CD recordings, with a translation of all songs into English, French and German. He also plans to create a world library by publishing the music scores on the Ukrainian Art Song Project website for all to download. The scores will be in Cyrillic text and transliterated into English text, in any key. They will be available to the public free of charge. The project began in 2004 with a CD of 42 art songs of Kyrylo Stetsenko. Hunka completed the recording of Mykola Lysenko’s 124 art songs in the summer and is beginning the recording of Yakiv Stepovyi’s art songs in the summer of 2009.

For Hunka, the best part of the project is the discovery and preparation of the songs. “Through [the art songs], I acquaint myself still further with the spirit of the composer. I inevitably gain a deeper understanding of what being Ukrainian really means; this wonderful music gives me cause for great pride, which I try to pass on to all who love classical music,” he enthused. “It’s delightful to witness the enthusiasm and appreciation for our music by other great singers. They hold our music in high esteem. It is quite simply ‘great music.’”

There are also challenges to the project. Indeed, the hardest part for Hunka is finding sufficient time outside his very busy operatic schedule to help bring this project to its conclusion. He has set the



year 2020 as the date by which all the Ukrainian art songs will be recorded: “I am ever impatient to reach this end, and yet, I do not want time to pass too quickly.”



The Ukrainian Art Song Project

The Ukrainian Art Song Project (UASP) is a ground-breaking project that aims to record a comprehensive series of Ukrainian art songs in CD format for distribution to the music world. Through his passion for Ukrainian music, Pavlo Hunka, the world-famous bass-baritone and artistic director of the UASP, embarked on this project in 2004 and quickly engaged a core committee of dedicated supporters in Toronto. The UASP exists under the auspices of the Canadian Ukrainian Opera Association (a registered charitable foundation), which has lent its full support to this endeavour.

The goal of the UASP is the documentation of all the Ukrainian art songs composed to date by foremost Ukrainian composers. Many of these classical songs have never been previously recorded and offer an undiscovered treasure trove of classical music. Through his stature in the world of opera, Pavlo Hunka has enlisted the collaboration of outstanding artists, such as Albert Krywolt, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Russell Braun, Monica Whicher, Benjamin Butterfield, Allyson McHardy, Krisztina Szabo, Elizabeth Turnbull, Michael Colvin and Robert Gleadow. Other collaborators include: cellist Roman Borys, flutist Douglas Stewart, and pianists Serouj Kradjian and Mia Bach. The well-known composer of sacred music, Roman Hurko is the UASP's producer. Hurko lends to this project his "finely tuned ear," his organizational expertise and experience in the recording of his own works. All aspects of the UASP are supported by a number of dedicated volunteers.

In 2006, the first set of CDs—*The Art Songs of Kyrylo Stetsenko*—was launched to critical acclaim. This CD set and the whole project were endorsed by the Canadian Opera Company and its then Artistic and General Director, the late Richard Bradshaw. Current Toronto efforts are focused on Mykola Lysenko. This CD release will be the biggest in the UASP series, requiring a six-CD set—almost six hours of music. Recording started in 2007 and was completed in the summer of 2008. Recording of the art songs of Yakiv Stepovyi will begin in the summer of 2009 with the support of the newly formed UASP committee under the patronage of the Ukrainian Music Society of Alberta (umsa_artsongs@shaw.ca).

What is an art song?

How does it differ from a folk song?

An art song is a poem of high literary quality set to music specified by the composer. It is usually performed by one singer and accompanied by a pianist. The piano score, however, has an expressive rather than merely an accompaniment role. Unlike the folk song, the art song is intended to be performed at a recital or in another formal concert setting. A folk song, on the other hand, usually describes something about a way of life or about traditions. It is usually improvised or arranged by or for the performer.

In Western Europe, the genre of the art song was conceived at the beginning of the 19th century, by which time composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven had incorporated such songs in their musical output as essential elements of their own emotional and artistic development. Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Hugo Wolf further developed this art form, setting music to the poems of some of Germany's greatest poets, Heinrich Heine and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Mykola Lysenko was the most committed of all Ukrainian composers to the art song genre. His 133 art songs relate a wonderfully descriptive and passionate story of life in 19th- and early 20th-century Europe. He composed art songs to texts by Ukrainian poets such as Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, Lesia Ukrainka, Oleksander Oles, Panteleimon Kulish, Volodymyr Samiilenko, Dniprova Chaika, but also to the poems of Germany's Heine, Poland's Adam Mickiewicz and Russia's Semen Nadson.

In addition to the art songs of Lysenko, the Ukrainian Art Song Project plans to record the art songs of the following eminent Ukrainian composers: Yakiv Stepovyi, Borys Liatoshynsky, Yuli Meitus, Heorhi Maiboroda, Yaroslav Lopatynsky, Stanyslav Liudkevych, Valentyn Sylvestrov, Dmytro Klebaniv, Vasyly Barvinsky, Ihor Sonevskytsky, Mykola Dremliuha, Petro Haidamaka, Nestor Nyzhankivsky, and Mykola Fomenko. It has already produced a CD compilation of the art songs of Kyrylo Stetsenko.

Further updates about the Ukrainian Art Song Project are available through www.uasp.ca.





More about Pavlo Hunka

Born in England in 1959 to a Ukrainian father and an English mother, Hunka qualified as a linguist and practised as a lawyer in the United Kingdom before embarking on an operatic career. After graduating with distinction from the Royal Northern College of Music in the UK, Pavlo began a three-year contract at the Basel Opera House in Switzerland.

There, he continued his studies with the distinguished singing teacher Kammersängerin Maria Sandulescu and soon afterwards embarked on a stellar international singing career.

To date, the renowned bass-baritone has sung in more than 70 operas, including 45 major operatic roles in many of the world's leading opera houses—Paris, Vienna, Munich, Florence, London and Salzburg—under the baton of such eminent conductors as Claudio Abbado, Jeffrey Tate, Zubin Mehta and Richard Bradshaw. Recently, he appeared in the award winning production of Janacek's *From the House of the Dead* at the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto and also in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. He has also performed to world-acclaim in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* for Teatro Real Madrid; in Zemlinsky's *Die Florentinische Tragödie* for Opera National de Montpellier; in Wagner's *Siegfried* for Opera National de Lyon, and in Wagner's *Parsifal* for Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, Italy. He has also recently recorded Beethoven's *Fidelio* for Chandos Records.

This fall Hunka again performed the role of Shiskov in Janacek's *From the House of the Dead* in Palermo, Sicily at the Teatro Massimo. In the beginning of 2009, Hunka will be starring once again in Italy as Balstrode in Britten's *Peter Grimes* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples. In the Spring of 2009, Hunka will be back in Belgium to perform in Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* as Nekrotzar at Place de la Monnaie in Brussels. Thereafter, he will take this role to Rome, Italy and London, England.



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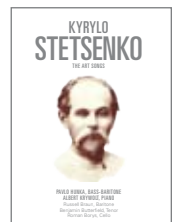
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Canadian Ukrainian Opera Association (UASP)
620 Spadina Ave. Toronto, ON M5H 2H4

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The Art Songs of Kyrylo Stetsenko are available for purchase at www.uasp.ca



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