



Prohibition & Censorship

Liz Lang, *soprano*
James Bassi, *piano*

Sunday, March 10 | 2:30 PM



THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Prohibition

the action of forbidding something, especially by law



Every piece on this recital has gone through some sort of censorship, either because of the race, religion or sexual orientation of the poet, composer, or performers who popularized a piece, the content of the poetry, etc. This program showcases some of the smokey, sumptuous melodies and secret speakeasy vibes of the Jazz Age. Nearly one hundred years after Prohibition, do some of these themes still make us feel uncomfortable? Offended? Curious? From the controversial racial and feminist agenda of jazz singer Bessie Smith who popularized many of these jazz tunes, to the widely condemned explicit poetry of Charles Baudelaire and the Brettli-Lieder collection, to the banning of several compositions of Erich Korngold due to his Jewish heritage, there's sure to be something here to thrill and tantalize.

Program

There'll Be a Hot Time in Old Town Tonight

Theodore August Metz

Métamorphoses

Francis Poulenc

Reine des mouettes

C'est ainsi que tu es

Paganini

Me and My Gin

J.C. Johnson

Poetry of Charles Baudelaire

L'Invitation au voyage

Harmonie du soir

La Mort des Amants

La vie antérieure

Henri Duparc

Claude Debussy

C. Debussy

H. Duparc



Goodbye

Gordan Jenkins

Lieder des Abschieds

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Sterbelied

Dies eine kann mein Sehnen nimmer fassen

Mond, so gehst du wieder auf

Gefaßter Abschied

Treat Me Rough

George Gershwin

Brettli-Lieder selections

Arnold Schoenberg

Gigerlette

Der genügsame Liebhaber

Arie aus dem Spiegel von Arcadien

Program Notes

Jazz Pieces

It's thought that Metz first heard the tune for "Hot Time" in a brothel in Missouri. In any case, Bessie Smith who popularized this and "Me and My Gin" was famous for sneaking double entendre into many of her songs. This dirty blues trick got her banned from radio stations and clubs across the country. The notorious Bad Girl of Blues also beat a rival unconscious, slept with her music director, seduced her female backup singers, and frequented live sex shows in New York.

Two singers have been largely credited with popularizing "Goodbye" – Ella Fitzgerald, who included this piece in many of her shows was banned from several clubs due to her race, and Frank Sinatra, who was the first to record the song, was censored and banned from...a lot of places. "Treat Me Rough" composer George Gershwin had his own set of struggles with censorship – historically, he insisted his opera *Porgy and Bess* only be performed by a black cast, not singers in blackface. His Jewish heritage, and his encouragement to integrate audiences among other things made him a very controversial figure.



Métamorphoses

During the war, Poulenc remained in German-occupied France, writing music of an antiwar or defiantly anti-Nazi bent, sometimes composing songs on texts by banned authors. Many of his works were banned or censored due to their content or his own queer sexuality.



Poetry of Charles Baudelaire

Charles Baudelaire, famous poet of the widely condemned "Les Fleurs du mal" (Flowers of Evil), extensively studied the effects of alcohol vs. opium or hashish on the writing process, using himself as a test subject. His poetry is some of the most contentiously censored in modern history, and the results of his inebriated study are clearly audible in many of the texts.

Program Notes

Lieder des Abschieds

The Nazis' ban on music, including Jewish composer Erich Korngold, largely eradicated him from the European canon. Only in the past few decades have many of his works made a resurgence. Had he not fled to Hollywood just prior to the Holocaust and composed Oscar-winning scores for film, we might have lost the bulk of his works from the suppression of the Nazis – pieces like “Lieder des Abschieds,” achingly written from the first-person perspective of someone coming to terms with their own death, were only a few signatures and a match away from falling into complete obscurity.



Brettl-Lieder selections

Frank Wedekind, the playwright of the aggressively banned play *Spring Awakening*, didn't even pen the most scandalous text in Schoenberg's Cabaret Songs. The collected poets include a librettist for Mozart, a humor columnist, and a gynecologist. To understand why these pieces were censored, all you have to do...is read.

Translations

Métamorphoses | Transformation

(Louise de Vilmorin)

1. Queen of the seagulls

Queen of seagulls, my little orphan,
I recall you blushing pink,
Beneath the muslin mists
Of your ancient sorrow.

Blushing pink at the kiss which
provokes you,
You surrendered to my hands
Beneath the muslin mists,
Veils of bond between us.

Blush, blush, my kiss finds you out,
Seagull caught where great highways meet.

Queen of seagulls, my little orphan,
You blushed pink, surrendered to my hands,
Pink beneath the muslin
And I recall the moment.

2. That is how you are

Your flesh, mingled with soul,
Your tangled hair,
Your feet pursuing time,
Your shadow which stretches
And whispers close to my temple.
There, that is your portrait,
That is how you are,
And I shall write it down for you
So that when night comes,
You may believe and say
That I knew you well.

3. Paganini

Violin sea-horse and siren,
Cradle of hearts heart and cradle
Tears of Mary Magdalene
A queen's sigh
Echo

Violin pride of delicate hands
Departure on horseback over the waters
Love astride mystery
Thief at prayer
Bird

Violin morganatic wife
Puss-in-Boots ranging the forest
Well of capricious truths
Public confession
Corset
Violin alcohol of the troubled soul
Preference muscle of the evening
Shoulders of sudden seasons
Oak-leaf
Mirror
Violin knight of silence
Toy escaped from happiness,
Breast of a thousand presences
Pleasure-boat
Hunter.

L'Invitation au voyage | Invitation to Journey *(Charles Baudelaire)*

My child, my sister,
Think how sweet
To journey there and live together!
To love as we please,
To love and die
In the land that is like you!
The watery suns
Of those hazy skies
Hold for my spirit
The same mysterious charms
As your treacherous eyes
Shining through their tears.

There - nothing but order and beauty dwell,
Abundance, calm, and sensuous delight.

See on those canals
Those vessels sleeping,
Vessels with a restless soul;
To satisfy
Your slightest desire
They come from the ends of the earth.
The setting suns
Clothe the fields,
Canals and all the town
With hyacinth and gold;
The world falls asleep
In a warm light.

There - nothing but order and beauty dwell,
Abundance, calm, and sensuous delight.

Harmonie du soir | Evening harmony

Now comes the time when, quivering on
its stem,
Each flower sheds perfume like a censer;
Sounds and scents turn in the evening air;
Melancholy waltz and reeling languor!

Each flower sheds perfume like a censer;
The violin throbs like a wounded heart,
Melancholy waltz and reeling languor!
The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar.
The violin throbs like a wounded heart,
A fond heart that loathes the vast black void!
The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar.
The sun has drowned in its congealing blood.

A fond heart that loathes the vast black void
And garners in all the luminous past!
The sun has drowned in its congealing blood...
Your memory within me shines like a
monstrance!

La Mort des Amants | The death of lovers

We shall have beds drenched in light scents,
Divans as deep as tombs,
And displays of exotic flowers

That bloomed for us beneath fairer skies.

Outdoing even their most recent passions
Our two hearts will be two mighty torches,
Reflecting their twin lights
In our two twin-mirrored souls.

On an evening of pink and mystic blue,
We shall exchange a single radiant glance,
Like a long sob laden with farewells;

And later an Angel, pushing the portals ajar,
Will come, faithful and joyous, to revive
The tarnished mirrors and lifeless flames.

La vie antérieure | A previous life

For long I lived beneath vast colonnades
Tinged with a thousand fires by ocean suns,
Whose giant pillars, straight and majestic,
Made them look, at evening, like basalt caves.
The sea-swells, mingling the mirrored skies,
Solemnly and mystically interwove
The mighty chords of their mellow music
With the colours of sunset reflected in my
eyes.

It is there that I have lived in sensuous repose,
With blue sky about me and brightness
and waves
And naked slaves all drenched in perfume.

Who fanned my brow with fronds of palm,
And whose only care was to fathom
The secret grief which made me languish.

Lieder des Abschieds | Songs of Farewell

For dad and Rita

1. Requiem

When I am dead, my dearest,
Do not lament.
Instead of roses and cypress,
Grass shall cover my grave.

I shall sleep quietly in the twilight,
In the heavy dusk.
And if you will, remember,
And if you will, forget.

I shall not feel the rain,
I shall not see the dawn,
I shall not hear the nightingale
Lamenting in the trees.

No one shall ever wake me,
All the world has vanished.
Perhaps I shall remember you,
Perhaps I'll have forgotten you.
(*Rosetti-Kerr*)

2. *This one thing my longing can never grasp*
This one thing my longing can never grasp,
That now no path leads me to you,
That you walk past my door
Into distant, silent, unknown streets.

Could it be my wish that you should
fade away,
Like the sun's brilliance engulfed in mist,
Like a landscape's happy reflection,
Sunk in the smooth mirror of evening ponds?

The rain falls. The tired trees drip.
Many hours of sun fade like withered leaves.
I have not yet come to term with my fate
And the boundless depths of its darkness.
(*Edith Ronsperger*)

3. *Moon, thus you rise once more*
Moon, thus you rise once more
Over the dark valley of unwept tears!
Teach, teach me not to yearn for her,
To make my blood run pale,
Not to suffer this sorrow,
Caused when two souls part.

See, you shroud yourself in mist.
Yet you cannot darken the bright images
That the night arouses in me with wilder
and fiercer pain.

Ah! I feel in the depths of my being:
The heart that has suffered separation
Will burn eternally.
(*Ernst Lothar*)

4. *Resigned farewell*
Do not weep that I am now going,
Be cheerful and let me kiss you.
If joy does not bloom when we are near,
It will greet you more chastely from afar.
Take these flowers that I have picked,
Red China roses and carnations,
Shake off the sorrow that oppressed you,
The heart's blossom cannot wither.

Do not smile a bitter smile,
Do not push me aside in silence.
A soft breeze will soon fan you once more,
Love will soon escort you!

Give me your hand without trembling,
Give me all your rapture to this last kiss.
Be not afraid of tempests: after storms
The sun rises more resplendently.

So, take one last look at the lovely lime-tree,
Beneath which no eye ever saw us.
Believe, O believe, I shall find you again,
For they who sowed love with a smile shall
reap its harvest.
(*Ernst Lothar*)

Brettl-Lieder | Cabaret Songs

1. *Gigerlette*
Miss Gigerlette invited me to tea.
Her evening gown was as white as snow;
She was done up exactly like a Pierrot.
I'd wager that even a Monk would look
upon Gigerlette with pleasure.

A red room it was, in which she received me.
Yellow candlelight shimmered in the space,
And as always, she was full of life and esprit.
Never can I forget it;

The room was red as wine, she white as
a blossom.

And in a trot on all fours the two of us went
For a ride in that land called happiness.
That we not lose rein on the course of
our destination,
In the background, near the journeying of
our ardent limbs,
Perched Cupid.
(*Otto Julius Bierbaum*)

2. The contented suitor

My girlfriend has a black cat
With a softly rippling velvet hide,
And I, I have a bald, shiny head
Smooth and shiny and silvery bright

My girlfriend is a voluptuous woman,
She lies upon the couch all year long,
Busily stoking the fur of her cat
My god, she loves to touch that velvety fur.

In the evening, when I come to visit,
The kitty lies in her lap,
And eats honeyed cookies with her
And shudders when I gently ruffle its fur.

So when I wish, one day, to be tender with
my sweet,
And so that she would cuddle with me, too –
I'll put the cat upon my bald pate.
Then she'll pet the cat and laugh.
(*Hugo Salus*)

3. Slow waltz

Since seeing so many women,
My heart beats so ardently,
It hums and buzzes here and there,
Just like a swarm of bees.

And if her ardour resembles mine,
And her eyes are lovely and limpid,
Then my heart, like a hammer,
Beats on and on.
Boom, boom, boom, etc.

I wish I could have a thousand women,
If it so pleased the gods,
I'd dance like a marmot
In every direction.
That would be a life worth living,
Then I'd have joy and fun,
I'd hop like a hare through the field,
And my heart would skip along.
Boom, boom, boom, etc.

A man who does not value women
Is neither cold nor warm,
And lies like a block of ice
In a young girl's arms.

I'm a different sort of man,
I circle women in a dance;
My heart beats happily against hers,
Going boom, boom, boom, etc.
(*Emanuel Schikaneder*)

About the Artists



JAMES BASSI, PIANO

James Bassi is a composer, pianist and music director. His compositions have been performed at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. His *Petrarch Dances* was commissioned and premiered by the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Commissioned works for Voices of Ascension include: *Quem Pastores Laudavere*, which was sung for Midnight Mass at the Vatican, and *Dialogue: Angel of Peace, Angel of War*, featuring a text by poet Dean Kostos. Mr. Bassi's sacred works are heard in services at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. His oratorio *Five Prayers*, written to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz, was premiered in St. Paul by the Apollo Club. Other commissions include works for Western Wind and Stonewall Chorale. He is currently writing a music theatre work in collaboration with playwright Jared Eberlein. Mr. Bassi has received composition grants from the NEA, Meet the Composer, and New York Foundation for the Arts. His music publisher is Oxford University Press.

In concerts, James has collaborated as pianist/arranger with Deborah Voigt, Ute Lemper, Jesse Norman, Judy Kaye, and Tovah Feldshuh. He has worked as music director at Lincoln Center Theater, The York Theatre, numerous Off-Broadway and regional theaters, Vital Opera, and Bard Summerscape. Recently he was music director for a critically-acclaimed revival of *Ragtime* at Bay Street Theater. He is frequently engaged as rehearsal pianist for the New York Philharmonic, having collaborated with five of its music directors: Maestri Gilbert, Mehta, Maazel, Masur, and van Zweden. He has served as Chorus Master for the Lincoln Center Festival. www.JamesBassi.com



LIZ LANG, SOPRANO

Opera News has applauded American soprano Liz Lang for her “comedic timing and clear resonant tone.” The 23/24 season brings some exciting new opportunities including a salon night hosted by opera great James Morris, and an evening with the Equinox Orchestra singing swing standards in iconic historical Savannah venues. Ms. Lang appears as a soloist with Voices of Ascension in their Gala at New York’s fabulous Fabbri Mansion and as the soprano soloist in their winter concert featuring operatic selections from Joseph de Bologne’s *L’Amant Anonyme* and Mozart’s Requiem. She travels to Venice, Italy for an artist residency and

writing retreat to begin work on her newest show and brings her acclaimed recital *Prohibition* to New York. Liz is delighted to make her repertoire debut singing Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with Riverside Orchestra and her company debut with MasterVoices for the NYC premiere of Doug Varone’s *To My Arms / Restore*, led by Ted Sperling.

Known for her crossover abilities throughout multiple genres, recently Liz was delighted to make her Off-Broadway debut as Glinda in *Wicked/Wasted* with Drunk Musicals and her role debut as Mimì in *La Bohème* with The Savannah Voice Festival. She appeared as the soprano soloist in Haydn’s *Lord Nelson Mass* with Voices of Ascension, an anniversary party for Coca-Cola at the Statue of Liberty with her jazz-fusion band, a masterclass with Frederica von Stade, a multi-genre recital entitled *I’m not mad* exploring the psychology of Ophelia, and covered a performance of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* at Carnegie Hall with the Oratorio Society of New York.

Ms. Lang made her Lincoln Center debut in March 2018 in a new production of *La Traviata* with the Philharmonic Orchestra of New York as Annina and the Violetta cover, following her professional debut and highly acclaimed interpretation of Iris in Handel’s *Semele* with Opera Omaha. In this new production directed by James Darrah and conducted by Grammy award winner Stephen Stubbs, “Liz Lang stole her scenes as a spritely Iris with her iridescent soprano” (*Omaha World Herald*) and “provided some much welcome comic relief” (*Wall Street Journal*). She has been a recitalist and soloist at Carnegie Hall, the Juilliard School, with Grammy award winner Paul O’Dette, The New American Songbook Orchestra, Kollektive366, Stonington Opera House, Bard Summerscape, the Salzburg Festival in Austria, and throughout Italy. lizlangsoprano.com



THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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