LEE ZALZALAHS GRAD RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

APRIL 28TH 2024, 8PM

Audience Copy:

Song 1: Caravan – Duke Ellington and Juan Tizol

Known for its unique sound inspired by music of the middle east and for its appearance in the 2014 drama film “Whiplash”, Caravan was a song I had worked on over the span of my third year in the program and had performed as my last recital preceding my fall 2023 Jury. The decision to include it in the graduate recital was made due to my love of the performance of the song by the great baritone saxophonist, Ronnie Cuber. This classic Duke Ellington tune sets the scene for tonight’s show and features solos from myself and Nic Code on piano.

Song 2: Moose The Mooche – Charlie Parker

This song was created by Charlie Parker in 1946, and is a “Rhythm Changes” contrafact, which makes it a song based upon the chord changes of George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm.” Many historians believe this song was named after Emry “Moose the Mooche” Byrd, who was at one point a heroin dealer for Parker during the later years of his addiction. I have a complex relationship with Charlie Parker tunes due to the extra effort I’ve put in to be able to play them well and become a better bebop musician. This performance will feature a full solo from myself, as well as trading 8 bar phrases with all the musicians in the quartet, including Jack Charles Hui Litster on drums, Sage Reynolds on bass, and Nic Code on piano.

Song 3: In a Sentimental Mood – Duke Ellington

The second of two Duke Ellington tunes tonight, In a Sentimental Mood was written in 1935 and has become one of the most widely played jazz ballads around the world. The song is beautifully written for the introductory riff to be played in the lower register of the baritone saxophone, making it a personal favourite to perform on all my gigs when a ballad is needed. The bridge of the song is a beautiful highlight that allows a solo to reach a romantic climax with emotion, power, and range, as well as providing some excellent moments to use a bluesy sound on top of the dominant 7ths progression. The only solo on this song will be from myself, which will last for a whole run of the chord progression and the “A” section of a second chorus, to return to the melody in the bridge.

Song 4: Maria – Lee Zalzalah

An original waltz tune I wrote in the fall of 2023, the song was a contrafact created for a class I took with Carleton University’s own Mark Ferguson. Based upon the chord progression of Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “How Insensitive”, the melody to this song stuck with me enough to revise and refurbish it from what was once an assignment to a tune I would like to carry with me and perform throughout my career. A name is life’s greatest gift, and Maria was chosen for this composition, with no special meaning to it aside from what the music had whispered to me while writing it. This debut performance of the song in front of a true audience will feature a solo from myself as well as Sage Reynolds on bass.

Song 5: I’ll Remember April – Gene De Paul

I’ll Remember April is a song that I picked up back in my first year as a Carleton student while isolated due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The song’s lyrics represent the birth, life, and death of a romance. This song holds special meaning to me for the connections I have to its message, as well as it being the song I performed for my first recital online, and its role it played in helping make some very special memories as an undergraduate student. I picked the song up again once more this year while working on a transcription of a solo performed by Ronnie Cuber, and the decision to include it in the set is to reflect on how I’ve grown and changed over the years. I decided to dedicate this song to my private instructor, mentor, and someone I consider family, Mike Tremblay, who will be featured on this song as a soloist alongside myself.

Song 6: Lady Bird – Tad Dameron

While having a lesson with Mike Tremblay recently, we decided that the graduate recital needed to feature a song that was extremely special, intimate, and beautiful to highlight myself in the most vulnerable way. The result was to pick a song to play acapella. Lady Bird’s short form is deceptively difficult to play well, and its chords are something I have only now been able to successfully navigate at a point where I can feel comfortable playing it. This song was the first one I worked on with Mike back when I started my degree, and the ultimate results of my efforts lead to me cutting it from my first year Jury selection for tunes. Starting with an open introduction, I wanted to bring this tune to the stage properly and use it as a benchmark for my strengths and weaknesses as an individual player. This song is performed by me alone.

Song 7: A Night in Tunisia – Dizzy Gillespie

The final song I performed as part of the Friday Performance Class series before my grad recital, A Night in Tunisia is the song I used to leave the strongest impression of myself on Carleton’s Music program to date, with an upbeat tempo, two extra horn soloists, and a final cadenza that used a four octave altissimo register tag as performed by the legendary Arturo Sandoval on trumpet, done on baritone saxophone instead. This performance of the song will be slightly less dramatic than the past, instead focusing on the fundamental strengths of my musicianship to effortlessly switch between the Latin and swing feels, as well as bring out the most in the chord progressions of the song. This song will feature a solo from myself, as well as a guest solo from my brother Ramsey Zalzalah on trumpet.

Song 8: Moanin’ – Charles Mingus

Written by Mingus in the 1950s and released on “Blues N’ Roots” in 1959, Moanin’ has become one of his most well-known compositions and perhaps the most iconic baritone saxophone feature in all of jazz. The song’s rerecording by the Mingus Big Band in 1993 on “Nostalgia in Times Square” is the most iconic version thanks to Ronnie Cuber’s iconic introductory segment. I consider Moanin’ to be my rite of passage as a baritone saxophonist, especially since I heard the live BBC Proms version of the song performed by my first baritone saxophone idol, Leo Pellegrino back in high school. Hearing Leo’s performance and solo on Moanin’ is what made me decide to move from tenor saxophone to baritone, and kickstarted what would end up shaping the past 6 years of my musical journey up to this moment. This arrangement of Moanin’ is based off the legendary proms recording, written by my talented little brother and trumpet soloist on the song, Ramsey Zalzalah. The big band features some of Ottawa’s finest musicians, young and old, with alto saxophonists Mike Tremblay and An Bui, tenor saxophonists Catherine Gendron, Abdiaziz Nur, and Rowan Bell-Petrusic, trumpeters Ed Lister and Bekah Wadell, and trombonists Mark Ferguson and Thomas Hamilton.

Song 9: A mysterious encore?