2000

"Shadow of the Blues" and "Dove Sta Amore": Selected Songs of John Musto.

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UMI
SHADOW OF THE BLUES
AND
DOVE STA AMORE
SELECTED SONGS OF
JOHN MUSTO

A Monograph
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical arts

in
The School of Music

by
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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects my research and synthesis of the songs of Shadow of the Blues and Dove Sta Amore, and my direct work with the composer, John Musto. I find his music to be intriguing, and feel this guide to his music will be of value to singers and educators. My preliminary research revealed that little had been written about Musto. I contacted the composer, interviewed and studied the repertoire with him in New York City, prepared this guide and performed the songs in recital. The quality of John Musto's songs secures for him a place in the top rank of living American song composers.
INTRODUCTION

While considering possible composers for my final project, a colleague at Southeastern Louisiana State University acquainted me with the music of John Musto. Musto and his wife, the soprano Amy Burton, recently had given a performance of his songs at the university. Like the audience, I was drawn to the music and determined that I would learn more about the music of this composer.

After reviewing all of Musto’s published solo vocal works, I decided to focus on *Shadow of the Blues* and a group of three *Canzonettas*. When I subsequently proposed this program to Musto, his response was mixed. “*Canzonettas* were very early songs and I don’t really have much to say about them... *Shadow of the Blues* is a much more interesting set.”¹ Musto then suggested he would send a copy of his latest work, *Dove Sta Amore*. He was proud of this work, suggesting it was the best cycle he had written to date. Having agreed on these choices, Musto and I began our collaboration for the purposes of this document.

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¹Musto, John. E-mail to the author. October 3, 1998
CHAPTER 1. THE COMPOSER

John Musto was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1954, and was raised in a middle class Jewish home. A bright and solitary child, he was surrounded by the music of his father, Vincent Musto, a jazz/popular guitarist. Musto began to study the piano at the age of four. Many afternoons Musto and his father would pass the time by improvising together, hence a frequent jazz flare is heard in his songs. Musto also spent significant time on classical repertoire.

After graduating from high school, Musto attended the Manhattan School of Music where he majored in piano performance. There he studied with Seymour Lipkin, who had been a student of Rudolf Serkin. Soon after, he met the pianist Paul Jacobs, who became his mentor. Jacobs, who died in 1983, was the staff pianist for the New York Philharmonic, and was well regarded for his performances of Debussy’s Preli Des and Etudes. Throughout his classical music education, Musto continued to perform with popular bands, playing either the guitar or the piano. Musto admired the music of George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, William Bolcom, John Corigliano, and Randy Newman. His compositions reveal a stylistic versatility which can be linked to these compositional influences. Musto’s first love was the piano, and his extensive

2Lipkin is currently a faculty member at Julliard School of Music, and the artistic director of the Kneisel Hall Summer Chamber Music School and Festival.
background as a concert pianist is quite apparent in his compositional style. While much of his writing is vocal, the composer is emphatic about “not being a singer.” Musto also jokes, “I’m quite unschooled at the guitar, banjo, upright bass, and accordion. I’m also known to play champagne bottles after I’ve drained them.”

Other than general composition courses at the Manhattan School of Music, Musto is self-taught as a composer, learning by trial and error. Musto had already begun composing music in his mid-twenties (he could not remember the exact year). His first compositions were some “piano rags”, as he calls them, and later a Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. His first works that addressed the voice were “Calypso”, a piece for a vocal ensemble and four hands at the piano, “Starsong” for mixed chorus, with two horns, harp, and four hands at the piano, and several scores for film.

When Musto was in his mid-twenties, he met the soprano Amy Burton. This relationship first inspired Musto to write songs. Amy Burton was born in New York City (Burton has requested the author not to print her age). Ms. Burton spent her youth in Teaneck, New Jersey, and attended high school in New York City. She pursued collegiate voice training at Northwestern University, where she studied with Patricia O’Neill, now a member of the Louisiana State University faculty. After Northwestern, Burton studied with Eric Thorenahl, and now

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studies with Ruth Falcon. Musto and Burton were married on December 28, 1984 in New York City. Wishing to further their careers they traveled, usually together, throughout the world. Burton's career has taken her to Zurick, the Wexford Festival Opera in Ireland, Scotland, L’Opera de Nice, and Le Theater des Champs Elysees. During these tours to other countries, Musto found inspiration for many of his songs. Initially unschooled about singing, Musto turned to his wife for advice while writing many of his songs.4

In 1982, Musto composed two settings of the poetry of Robert Frost: “Nothing Gold Can Stay”, and “The Rose Family”, both of which he dedicated to Burton. Thus began his vocal compositions which today number twenty-eight. In my interview with Musto, I asked him what is the first step in his writing process. He replied “I usually do a lot of reading.”5 He begins by going to the library to find a poem. After finding the right poem, the music usually comes naturally. The words are very meaningful to him. Musto says he has found many poems he would like to set to music, but he did not “feel the music” as he read the poem.

Currently John Musto is writing a piano trio and a piano quartet. His largest work, a comic opera entitled Pope Joan, is also in progress. Two scenes were premiered on May 4, 1999 at the New York City Opera. As its title reveals, the

5Ibid.
opera is based on the life of one of the most extraordinary women in Western History. Pope Joan was a controversial figure of historical record who, disguised as a man, rose to rule Christianity in the 9th century as the first and only woman to sit on the throne on St. Peter. Musto is not sure when the opera will be completed. He has been commissioned by Carnegie Hall to write a work for four singers and piano as a part of the hall’s millennial concert celebrations. During the summer of 1999, Musto was composer in residence at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival in Colorado.

Musto has received several prestigious awards for his music. In 1996 he won an Emmy for scoring the 1995 documentary film Into the Light, which chronicles Thomas Edison and the beginning of the film industry. The film makers wanted a "ragtime feel" in the score to compliment the turn of the century footage.6 Into the Light was also recognized at the First Run film Festival at New York University in 1996. In 1997, Musto was named as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for his cycle Dove Sta Amore. Originally, Dove Sta Amore was scored for full orchestra and soprano. Later, Musto wrote another version for soprano and piano. This second version, according to Musto is not a "piano reduction", but rather a version of the cycle, rescored for the piano and voice.7

6Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
7Ibid.
Composing music has not always been easy for Musto, especially when it comes to vocal repertoire. Musto laughed while he talked about his first songs, which he said that he has “since burned.” He suggests that these early works did not reflect his fully developed style. As Musto continued to write vocal pieces he often consult his wife. “Amy has sung all of my songs at one time or another, and she loves them all.” If one surveys Musto’s songs, one can see that the range of his vocal music is, with few exceptions, actually not that wide. Generally, his pieces are confined to a mid-range. His desire is to write music that is “singable yet challenging”. Musto feels that many of the composers of the twentieth century seem to write in an “unvocal” style, with leaps that are awkward and ranges that are unnatural for the average trained singer. The vocal lines in his music are very beautiful, yet many reveal a complexity which only a strong musician can grasp. Musto admits that with the help of Burton he has overcome a common problem shared by many composer’s -- the temptation to write music for the voice as if it were a violin or a trumpet, or even a keyboard. “The voice is unique in its range of capabilities. There is no other instrument like it.”

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8Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
9Ibid.
10Ibid.
11Ibid.
CHAPTER 2
THE GUIDE TO SELECTED SONGS

In New York City on May 11, 1998, I interviewed John Musto and his wife, the singer Amy Burton at their apartment. When I arrived at their door, the Mustos had just returned from working out at a local gym. Their neatly furnished apartment displayed pictures, drawn by their son, hanging on the front door and the refrigerator. They invited me to join them for a cup of tea. At first, Musto seemed somewhat reserved, and Burton did most of the talking. They were both receptive to the idea of taping our conversation. After a short time, Musto joined in the dialogue.

With great humility, Musto showed me the Emmy which he had won for the film score Into the Light. He pulled out several recordings of Shadow of the Blues and Dove Sta Amore which are unavailable, and made copies for me. We discussed the genesis of these works as well as some of the circumstances surrounding the premieres of both pieces. Finally, it was time for me to sing for him. Musto made a few general comments about the type of singing he likes to hear. Musto writes songs with a jazz flare, but insists that the singer primarily utilize a classical vocal technique. He finds a few scoops, slides, or straight tones acceptable, if handled with good taste. With classical technique in place, Musto then wants the singer to adhere strictly to his markings. We talked about what a singer needs to add to make a song his or her own. Musto replied, "I want the
singer to feel comfortable with the songs, but there are very few places in the music for variation.”

Some of Musto’s songs were composed for specific voice types and performers. When asked how he felt towards different voice types singing the same songs, his response was, “as for voice types, range aside, that is up to the singer. There are gender specific poems, but people are crossing those lines these days.” Musto believes that if the singer has the requisite capabilities to meet the demands of the song, he or she should be encouraged to sing it. Burton has sung all of Musto’s songs at one time or another, regardless of the specified voice type.

The following discussion of these songs incorporates performance suggestions made by Musto, with additional suggestions derived from recorded performances, and my own study and performance of the songs.

Shadow of the Blues

*Shadow of the Blues* was written in 1986 for baritone Christopher Trakas and pianist Steven Blier. The set consists of four songs: “Silhouette”, “Litany”, “Island”, and “Could Be”. The second song, “Litany” was composed first, and is perhaps the most widely known. The song is quite hymn-like in nature. In the opening prelude one can hear the influences of Aaron Copland with its lyric,

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1 Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
2 Musto, John. E-mail to the author. March 3, 1998
3 Burton, Amy. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
pastoral sounds, and modal tunes, harmonized with chords built on perfect intervals and simple triads. (see example 1)

Example 1 mm. 1-8 “Litany”

Copland absorbed elements from jazz into his own compositional style as a conscious, intellectual maneuver to enrich his vocabulary and to make references to music of his own country.

“Litany” has fewer jazz idioms than the other songs in the collection because, as Musto suggested, he had not entirely figured out what direction he wanted to go with the set. Having selected a text by Langston Hughes, and after writing the

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second song, "Silhouette", he then decided to compose each song in Shadow of the Blues so as to reflect the blues.

In the interviews with Musto he uses terms such as "bluesy" and "jazz-like" when referring to the music in Shadow of the Blues. For the purposes of this paper, the author will define these terms for clarification. It has been said that the blues "represents the full racial expression of the Negro, the expression of the emotional life of a race."7 It is defined as a type of black folk music, used in jazz, and other forms of American popular music.8 Often a song of lamentation, it is characterized by twelve bar phrases, three line stanzas in which the words of the second line usually repeat those of the first, with continual use of blue notes in the melody and harmony. (see example 4)

Jazz is a remarkable performance style that grew up among black musicians beginning around 1910 and has gone through a series of developments.9 The word "jazz" as applied to this style meant to pep up, or get moving.10 American musicians have originated and developed this style from roots in ragtime and blues. Propulsive syncopated rhythms, polyphonic ensemble playing, varying degrees of

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6Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
9Ibid., p. 510
improvisation, and often deliberate distortions of pitch and timbre characterize jazz.

Another term often used almost interchangeably with jazz is swing; however, they are not synonymous. Swing is a type of big-band jazz of the late 1930’s and 1940’s. The style is characterized by rich, full sound. The rhythm is flexible and supple without ever being as flamboyant or boisterous as that of Dixieland Jazz.11

In my initial review of John Musto’s catalogue of songs, I came upon Shadow of the Blues and was immediately drawn to the music and the passion of the Langston Hughes poetry. Langston Hughes is well known for his colorful portrayals of African American life in the 1920’s through the 1960’s. He spent many years traveling through Europe and Africa, where he wrote about his experiences.12

“Silhouette” is written as an ironic treatment of Southern mores of the time. “Litany” shows the more compassionate side of man concerned with the poor and the homeless in the inner cities. “Island” represents lost relationships, or the losing of one’s self, with a ray of hope for a better future ahead, and “Could Be” epitomizes the blues, both musically and textually.

Although written for a baritone, this set of songs can be attempted by other voice types. The general vocal demands include large leaps to the upper reaches of the passaggio and many lengthy phrases. After the initial publication of the set, Musto released a transposed version of these songs to higher keys, though he left “Island” in the original key.

**Silhouette**

Southern gentle lady,
Do not swoon.
They’ve just hung a black man
In the dark of the moon.

They’ve hung a black man
To a roadside tree
In the dark of the moon
For the world to see
How Dixie protects
Its white womanhood.
Southern gentle lady,
Be good!
Be good!

In “Silhouette” Musto offers the barest, most subtle hints of jazz style, incorporated in a masterful way. The initial sounding of an E-flat minor tonality in an otherwise E-flat major piece suggests the lowered third, “blues note”, associated with the blues style.\(^{13}\) It is interesting that this downward reflection is

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\(^{13}\)Delony, Willis. *Personal interview*. Nov. 23, 1999
stated at the piano, an instrument of inflexible pitch, rather than the voice, which would be expected to bend the pitch downward in the blues style.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the song there are lilting syncopation's which seem less jazz or blues in style and more like a Broadway show tune.\textsuperscript{15} This is an obvious reflection of Musto's adoration of Gershwin's music. The tempo that Musto chose, \textit{Breezily} (\textit{\textbar{J}} = 112), is reflective of the swing style. The composer described "Silhouette" as off-handed.\textsuperscript{16} It is very important to Musto that the singer maintain the swing feel of the piece without sacrificing classical vocal technique. He recommends supporting the voice as if singing an opera aria, the emphasis of the first line is the word "swoon", and "Southern gentle lady" should be sung as smoothly as possible."\textsuperscript{17} In measures 3 through 5, diction is paramount due to the shocking nature of the line, "They've just hung a black man in the dark of the moon." It should be delivered with strong emphasis, and the \textit{poco rubato} should not be exaggerated. Musto remarked, "this song should be filled with the sarcasm intended [in the poem]."\textsuperscript{18} (example 2)

\textsuperscript{14}Dr. Delony, Willis. \textit{Personal interview}. Nov. 23, 1999
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16}Musto, John. \textit{Personal interview}. May 11, 1998
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
Musto suggested that he took a non-tonal approach to the accompaniment in the phrase in example 1 in order to express the horrific event. While singing this line, the intensity should grow throughout until a climax is reached at measure 10. From the end of measure 9 through measure 11, Musto uses a quotation from the southern folksong “Dixieland.” (example 3)

For the sake of sarcasm, in (measures 12-13), the words “white” and “womanhood” should be emphasized. Finally, there are three statements of the text “be good”. Each repetition should be less prominent than the preceding one. Originally, “Silhouette” was written in a medium range which encompassed C4 to F5. A later edition was transposed to a higher key with a range from D4 to G5. The tessitura lies between F#4 and D#5.
Litany

Gather up
In the arms of your pity
The sick, the depraved,
The desperate, the tired,
All the scum
Of our weary city

Gather up
In the arms of your pity.
Gather up
In the arms of your love -
Those who expect
No love from above.

Of all of his songs, Musto regards “Litany” as his favorite. Burton favors this song, as well. He played through the lengthy prelude for me because “the pianist sets the emotional tone for the rest of the piece.” Shortly after I began to sing, Musto stopped and suggested that I sing with no emotion. He feels that the singer must portray an impartial bystander, simply observing the despair in the situation.

20 Ibid.
“Litany” is a much more complex song. The blues seen in this song come from the text, which expresses the views of a bystander looking on. Due to the complicated rhythms in “Litany”, the singer must guard against dragging. Musto pushed the tempo ahead, indeed almost rushing to achieve a feeling of forward motion. He remarked, “The tempo needs to be fast enough that you can count the meter changes. I want them to go unnoticed to the listener.”\textsuperscript{21} The tempo for this piece is marked \textit{slowly} ($\frac{\text{j}}{\text{m}} = 66$), but when we arrived at the vocal section of the song, the tempo actually was $\frac{\text{j}}{\text{m}} = 73$.

Musto requested that a very slight glottal be placed between the words “gather” and “up”, each time the words occur, and that the \textit{r} of “gather” be pronounced as a schwa [\textipa{\v{a}}] sound rather than as an American \textit{r}. In measure 20, Musto once again moved the tempo forward. When I noted that at measure 22, the note for the word “tired” is spelled as a C flat, followed in the next measure by a B natural spelling on the word “all”, (see example 4) Musto commented that the accidentals were “getting out of hand” so he “just spelled the notes this way”.\textsuperscript{22}

Example 4 shows a pattern in the accompaniment that is developed throughout the song. Through different techniques, such as sequencing and expansion, Musto

\textsuperscript{21}Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
uses this motif throughout in the accompaniment and occasionally quotes it in the vocal line, as well. (see example 5) As Musto plays the accompaniment, he leans on the non-tied notes for emphasis. (see example 6)

Example 4  mm. 20-25 "Litany"

Example 5  mm. 1-8 "Litany"
After finishing the vocal part, Musto played the postlude in its entirety. “The piano part is not just a mere accompaniment. It is an equal part to the vocal line.” said Musto after he finished playing.\textsuperscript{23} The song recalls qualities of the lydian mode. When originally published the range of “Litany” was from B natural 4 to E natural 5. The tessitura is from E4 to D5.

\textbf{Island}

\begin{verbatim}
Wave of sorrow
Do not drown me now:

I see the island
Still ahead somehow.

I see the island
And its sands are fair:

Wave of sorrow
Take me there.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{23}Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
The Blues aspect of "Island" is noted in the form of the flat seventh. Unlike the previous two songs, the text for "Island" also represents the blues in a different manner. Here the poetry draws a picture of someone looking for the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

The vocal line in this song is quite simple compared with the complex piano line. Musto quotes a section of his own unpublished piano concerto in the introduction of the song. He utilizes a dorian mode throughout the song. He stated that he had never really thought about key relationships in Shadow of the Blues. "I notice technical details in my music after the fact, or have them pointed out to me by others, which always intrigues me. Not every choice is the product of a conscious thought. This is not to say they are serendipitous. They’re just instinctual."24

As we prepared to look through "Island", Musto began to laugh. He suggested that if the singer can "just keep up with the pianist, he should consider the song a success!"25 One of the most important aspects is the tempo, marked as fast and fleeting ($\textbf{q}=$208). The many meter changes and the rapid tempo make the song rhythmically challenging. The vocal line is relatively simple. This is the only song that was not transposed in the higher edition. Musto says this is so because crucial

\begin{flushright}
24Musto, John. E-mail to the author. April 5, 1998
\end{flushright}
fingerings are required by the piano part. Musto remarked that, because the piano part is rapidly flowing, the singer should avoid punctuating each note against it.26 As in “Litany”, the phrases are quite long, and there is a lengthy piano prelude. Musto remarked, “It is easy for you (the singer) to get wrapped up in counting the song. I want it to flow as if it were easy to hear the entrances. Make it look easy!”27

It is characteristic of Musto to use such time signatures as $\frac{11}{16}$ and $\frac{12}{16}$ to accommodate the piano line. Musto said that he could have written these time signatures in more conventional patterns, but he found this more easily readable.

Could Be

Could be Hastings Street,
Or Lenox Avenue,
Could be 18th & Vine
And still be true.

Could be 5th & Mound,
Could be Rampart:
When you pawned my watch
You pawned my heart.

Could be you love me,
Could be you don’t.
Might be that you’ll come back,
Like as not you won’t.

Hastings Street is weary,

27Ibid.
Also Lenox Avenue.
Any place is dreary
Without my watch and you.

The final song is "Could Be". The text and the music for this song are the most jazzy of the group. Musto wrote the time signature in $\frac{12}{16}$ to help the singer "feel the swing." The references in the text to Hastings Street, Lenox Avenue, 18th & Vine, 5th & Mound, and Rampart are all jazz/blues cultural references. Besides the swing feel of the vocal line, there are many syncopations, accompanied by the flat third and flat fifth, or blue notes. The vocal line ends on a D-sharp which is the seventh of the dominant chord, a technique in jazz.

With its syncopated rhythms, the last song of the set, "Could Be", has a swing feel to it. Musto, again, uses unconventional time signatures. "As most classical singers have a hard time feeling the swing, I wrote "Could Be" in $\frac{12}{16}$ to help the singer out." The rhythms, while complex, are less complicated than in the previous songs. Sitting at the piano, at the end of the first phrase, Musto stopped and looked as if he were contemplating something important. Then he admitted, "You know, I wrote the last notes of this first phrase to be held, (see example 7) but I wish I had made them short. That would be more appropriate for a jazz/blues style." After contemplating this, for a moment, Musto asked me to

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
sing them short. Musto discussed the proper way to handle syncopation in jazz/blues style. His instruction was to lead the notes ahead and not drag them behind. “If you try to make the syncopation happen, it will sound stifled and not natural. Don’t fight against it, just relax and let it happen.”

Example 7 mm. 9-13 “Could Be”

There were occasions in this song where Musto asked me to sing in more of a jazz style. Having never really done that before, I asked him how: “less vibrato, less care for hitting the pitches directly, more ‘slang’ diction, you know,” he sang a few lines for me “sort of like that only much better,” he laughed. Then we discussed Christopher Trakas’ performance of the song. Trakas uses straight

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tones and some scooped pitches. Musto said that he doesn’t like pop-style singing for the most part, but he feels that the performer can sing an occasional straight tone for effect, if done with proper technique in mind. On the phrase, “You pawned my heart”, Musto asked me to use this sound. (see example 8)

The phrase that follows in measure 22-24 is to be kept in strict tempo to achieve the rhythmic effect of the syncopation. At the next vocal entrance, measure 28, Musto asked me to sing the line as evenly as possible despite the disjunct nature of the vocal line. Another jazz oriented phrase is: “like as not you won’t”. (see example 9) On the last note of this phrase, Musto recommended a straight tone. He also finds it acceptable to slide from the B flat 5 to the G4 on the word “weary”, in the phrase “Hastings Street is weary.” (see example 10)

Musto wrote alternate notes for the word “dreary”. (mm. 43) Some singers may find the skip from G4 to G#5 difficult. He did say, however, that the use of falsetto was acceptable, even preferable. Again, he instructed me to sing the last
note (mm. 46) straight at first, and warm the note with the vibrato at the end, as would be done in a jazz style.\textsuperscript{32} “Could Be” was written in a medium high range which encompasses C4 to G#5, and the transposed key is one half-step higher. The tessitura is G#4 to E5.

Example 9 mm. 34-37 “Could Be”

Example 10 mm. 38-40 “Could Be”

\textsuperscript{32}Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
Dove Sta Amore

Dove Sta Amore is one of Musto’s most dramatic works. It was premiered on March 2, 1996 by Dominique Labelle with the Jacksonville Orchestra, conducted by Roger Merenburg. Musto had suggested this work to replace a performance of Canzonettas because he felt it was a superior work. In Dove Sta Amore it is the essence of the emotion of love that ties the pieces together, from a woman who is about to jilt her lover in “Maybe”, to a play on words in the final song, “Dove Sta Amore.”

The cycle features a symmetrical form: the outer songs are dance-like, and frame the inner song by posing two different kinds of questions; one ambivalent and one disconcerting, though both are lullabies. The central song, the darkly comic “The Hangman at Home”, reveals the most complex textures. A spiral of rising thirds, initially heard in the first song at the words “somebody, somewhere, maybe,” flickers throughout the cycle, blazing forth in the final song with the words Dove sta amore.

The cycle opens with the swing-time of “Maybe”. In this setting of Carl Sandburg’s poem, jaunty rhythms evoke a mixture of charm and callousness, through a languorous, teasing vocal line. “Sea Chest” and “The Hangman at home are also poems by the same poet. Sandburg won a Pulitzer Prize for his six volume biography of Abraham Lincoln. A musician himself, he collected
over 300 folksongs which he published in The Songbag in 1950, and was known to give recitals on occasion.33

Musto’s interpretation implies a rocky future for the young woman’s offstage boyfriend, who is heading for a fall. The composer was attracted to the next poem “Sea Chest”, because of a chance comment made by a friend who suggested that relationships are seldom a 50/50 proposition. Sandburg’s poem speaks of a marriage based on fundamental inequality. The composer seeks to create a musical metaphor for the stability yet sadness of their love by utilizing a rocking ostinato figure in the left hand, constantly off the beat, but which sustains the emotion by virtue of its consistency.

“The Hangman at Home” represents the purest form of gallows humor.34 Set to what this author has dubbed, a typical Musto wrong-note rag, the music seems to be looking for a comfortable tonal center. These are contrasted with bursts of rapid filigree which suggest the family’s nervous, skittish avoidance of the subject of the hangman’s work. Musto chose the fourth poem, James Agee’s “How Many Little Children Sleep”, as an antithesis to the previous song. Agee achieved greatness by winning the Pulitzer Prize for his work A Death in the Family.35

34Blier, Steven. Program notes for Dove Sta Amore. October 2, 1996
Musto and his wife had just found out that they were to be parents when he discovered the poem. This poem made him consider the chances that parents take while raising children. Instead of innocent children, parents realize their powerlessness over children who will kill. “Who will be hangman and who will be hanged,” said Musto. 36 When he wrote this song, the composer had just learned that he was to become a father. There is an aching wistfulness in the music, climaxing with its ethereal floating cries.

The title song of the cycle “Dove Sta amore” is a playful aria based on a Ferlinghetti poem. Ferlinghetti is best known for his involvement with the Beat writers, in San Francisco. Some of his biographical sources may be inaccurate because he invented many stories about himself and was known by several aliases.37

Musto has described the song as symmetrical in form, with the title recapitulating the symmetry. Several brief sections, approximately 16 measures long, precede a longer, more sustained central section, where the vocal line becomes more diatonic, then the brief, mirror-like sections return in the reverse order.38

36 Blier, Steven. Program notes for Dove Sta Amore. October 2, 1996
38 Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
Maybe

Maybe he believes me, maybe not.
May I can marry him, maybe not
Maybe the wind on the prairie,
The wind on the sea, maybe,
Somebody, somewhere, maybe, can tell.
I will lay my head on his shoulder
And when he asks me I will say yes

Maybe

Although the cycle is written in a classical style, the first piece features appealing syncopated rhythms. With hints of jazz and blues, Musto’s first recommendation was for the singer to relax into the syncopation. “The sooner the singer gets out of the music and just simply hears it, instead of being glued to it, the sooner he will relax and trust what he knows.”39 The first song of the cycle, “Maybe”, is representative of what Dr. Willis Delony calls “unforced jazzisms.”40 Musto’s use of these idioms sounds natural and uncalculated.

Like Shadow of the Blues, “Maybe” is written with jazz elements. Musto writes a melodic motive using a stock blues figure with a flat third set against harmonies with a major third, typical of blues and jazz. (see example 11) Note the figure in measure 15 on the words “maybe, maybe” for a specific example.41 One can hear the rag-time influences throughout the song, particularly at measure 18 in the piano accompaniment. (see example 12)

40Dr. Delony, Willis. Personal interview. Nov. 23, 1999
41Ibid.
Example 11  m. 15 “Maybe”

Example 12  mm. 19-21 “Maybe”

Musto feels that the girl in the poem is in complete control of the situation. She intends to get rid of the guy. Though she is saying maybe, she has already decided. In measures 6 through 11 the word “maybe” appears five times and should be sung without accent regardless of where it falls in the measure. This represents the impending doom of the boyfriend. Musto suggested that to add drama, a slight break should be observed between “maybe, maybe” of measure 15.
"I will lay my head on his shoulder," at measure 24, should be delivered with a sarcastic edge, which sets the lover up for his fall. The following repeated phrase, "and when he asks me," (example 13) also foreshadows the impending doom characterized by the use of ascending, diminished arpeggios in the vocal line.42 Musto ends the song with a restatement of the initial question. The piano ironically echoes the theme of "Maybe" in measure 31. (see example 14)

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Example 13 mm. 26-28 "Maybe"

Example 14 mm. 30-32 "Maybe"

42Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
Sea Chest

THERE was a woman loved a man
as the man loved the sea.
Her thoughts of him were the same
as his thoughts of the sea.
They made an old sea chest for their belongings
 together.

The second song of the cycle, “Sea Chest”, was composed on a train while travelling with Burton in France. Musto said that the song came to him in a matter of minutes. The composition is much like a Celtic folksong, with a little twentieth century flare. Written in time, the accompaniment begins on the off-beat. Musto commented that this highlights the idea that the relationship between these two people is rocky from the start. In the orchestrated version of the song, the low strings start the “rocking” motif in the beginning and sustain it throughout the song. This motif represents the rocking of the boat. (see example 15)

Example 15  mm. 1-5 “Sea Chest”


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A device Musto employs in setting the verses of “Sea Chest” is stacking of the lines of the poem. Musto uses the first line of the poem alone, then the second line alone, and finally a combination of the two, through to the end. “Sea Chest” with its haunting melody, is written in strophic verses and simple accompaniment.

Among Musto’s songs, this is easy to learn and to sing. The gentle rocking beat is purposefully set off the downbeat, beginning on the second beat of the measure.

Musto requested that the song be sung with no emotion. The composer feels the singer should assume the role of one who is looking at a photo.44 The muted dynamics seen throughout the song are broken only at measure 59, where he has written the forte. This is the only point at which the vocal line departs from the normal melody of the rest of the song. The forte is short-lived, followed to the end by the mp dynamic.

The Hangman at Home

WHAT does the hangman think about When he goes home at night from work? When he sits down with his wife and Children for a cup of coffee and a Plate of ham and eggs, do they ask Him if it was a good days work And everything went well or do they Stay off some topics and talk about The weather, baseball, politics And the comic strips in the papers And the movies? Do they look at his

44Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
Hands when he reaches for the coffee
Or the ham and eggs? If the little
One’s say, Daddy, play horse, here’s
A rope - does he answer like a joke:
I seen enough rope for today?
Or does his face light up like a
Bonfire of joy and does he say:
It’s a good and dandy world we live
In. And if a white face moon looks
In through a window where a baby girl
Sleeps and the moon-gleams mix with
Baby ears and baby hair - the hangman
How does he act then? it must be easy
For him. Anything is easy for a hangman,
I guess.

While “Sea Chest” is the easiest song from the cycle to learn and perform, “The
Hangman at Home” is an extremely difficult song. Not only are the rhythms
complex, but the melodic line is challenging, as well. Further, the singer plays
multiple roles, the questioner, kids, and the hangman. One can hear a rag-time
theme that reoccurs, interrupted by eerie sonorities, painting the goulishness of the
hangman’s daytime hours.

After hearing the orchestral premiere, Musto made a few alterations in the
vocal line to assist vocal projection in the singer’s lower range.45 (see examples
16A and 16B) “The Hangman at Home” is a very ironic song. Musto’s first
words about this song were, “be funny”. He doesn’t want the song to be made
into something heavy.46 The accompaniment is intended to lighten the dark

45Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
aspects of the song, and the singer should exude pleasure in singing these ironic texts. From a musical standpoint, this is the most complicated song in the cycle. The rhythms are quite challenging, and the pitches are unsupported by the piano most of the time.

Example 16A  The original notes m. 30
“The Hangman at Home”

Example 16B  The altered notes m. 30
“The Hangman at Home”

46 Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
The accompaniment begins with a brief recurring motif. (see example 17) At measures 7 through 9, Musto requests the phrase be performed in a strict legato representing the sweetness of the family. (see example 18) In measures 13 through 17, as the text poses the question, “Do they ask him if it was a good days work and everything went well?” Here, the piano plays a disjunct and extremely dissonant line expressing the tension the family might have in asking such a question. (see example 19) The vocal line (mm. 18-26) continues in a light registration. The tempo quickens as the alternative line of conversation is considered, reinforcing the uncomfortable circumstances. The mood in the piano seems to suggests that it would be better for the family of the hangman to refrain from mentioning particular topics, and the text moves on to “talk about the weather.”

Example 17 mm. 1-2 “The Hangman at Home”

Example 18 mm. 7-9 “The Hangman at home”
Example 19  mm. 14-18 "The Hangman at Home"

The strong contrast of moods at measure 33, is reflected in the voice and accompaniment as the children are mentioned. How strange it must seem to them that seemingly normal comments might strike a nerve. The singer may choose a lighter registration, almost child-like in sound, to express the thoughts of the children.\(^{47}\) In measure 39, the father replies to the children with a heavier, though not sinister sound. The singer resumes narrating at measure 40.

A motif from the piano part in the very beginning reoccurs in the vocal line at measure 46. Notice that the line is written in even eighth notes. This carefree statement should be sung with an extreme legato. (see example 20)

\(^{47}\)Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
It's a good and dandy world we live in. And if

Example 20  mm. 46-47 “The Hangman at Home”

Musto commented that often singers have not performed this line as he intended. “The tendency seems to be for the singer to want to dot the eighths,” said Musto rubbing his chin, “I’m really not sure why, but I want what I wrote, which is even eighths.”

The text at measure 53, “The hangman- how does he act then?” is not marked to be sung as sprechstimme, but Musto said to almost speak into the pitches of this line. (see example 21) Musto’s final comment for the song was for the singer to be very short with the last note. He recommended singing the last note staccato. “It helps to punctuate the end of the song.”

In the original key of this song, the range encompasses B4 to B flat 6. The tessitura lies from E4 to F#5.

How Many Little Children Sleep

How many little children sleep
To wake, like you, only to weep:
How many others play who will
Like you, and all men, weep and kill.

And many parents watch and say,
Where they weep, where they play,
"By all we love, by all we know,
It never shall befall them so."
But in each one the terror grows
By all he loves, by all he knows,
"Soon they must weep: Soon they will kill
No one knows it, but all will."

" 'How Many Little Children Sleep' has got to be one of, if not my all time favorite of all John’s songs." said Burton. The idea came to Musto while he and Burton were discussing their unborn child. Musto had already read the poem and thoughts began to run through his mind.49 The underlying theme in “How Many Little Children Sleep” is the song “Rock-a-bye Baby”, so according to Musto, the

49Musto, John and Burton, Amy. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
song should be sung as a lullaby. In contrast to “The Hangman at Home”, the vocal line, while not simple, is less complicated. In contrast to the other songs in the cycle, this one does not incorporate the same jazz idioms and swing styles that the others possess.

Musto made light of “The Hangman at Home” with its ironic concept, but the poem by James Agee, “How Many Little Children Sleep”, is treated seriously. Mimicked in the piano accompaniment, in the orchestrated version of the song, Musto begins with a single long note played by the clarinet, held against an arpeggiating harp. While these sounds are very soft to the ear, there is a dark, underlying eerie quality. As the voice enters in measure 3, the vocal line quotes the familiar “Rock-a-bye Baby,” which adds to the eeriness of the song. (see example 22)

Example 22 mm. 1-4 “How Many Little Children Sleep”

The weeping mentioned throughout the song, is represented by a motif, first appearing in the voice part in measure 11, followed by the piano in the same measure, (see example 23) This motif is echoed in the vocal line in measure 10
and 11, as well. In the final phrases of the song, this motif appears in the vocal line (m. 55) with some alterations. (see example 24)

Example 23  mm. 9-12 “How Many Little Children Sleep”

Example 24  mm. 55-60 “How Many Little Children Sleep”

Unlike “Sea Chest” and “Litany”, Musto wants strong emotion expressed throughout. The emotional aspect is reflected by the use of many dynamic markings, ranging from pianissimo to fortissimo, in contrast to the more static use
of dynamics in the previous songs in this cycle. As we worked on this song Musto had little to say about the piece or my performance. When asked about this, he replied, “I think that if you just feel the powerfullness of the text while you sing, then the rest just falls into place.”

Musto requested that most of the piano and pianissimo sections be sung with an ethereal vocal quality. This applies, especially, to the weeping motif. “How Many Little Children Sleep” is generally less complicated rhythmically. This song has a wide vocal range, from A4 to A6, and there is no identifiable tessitura.

_Dove Sta Amore_

Dove sta amore  
Where lies love  
Dove sta amore  
Here lies love  
The ring dove love  
In lyrical delight  
Hear love’s hillsong  
Love’s true willsong  
Love’s low plainsong  
Too sweet plainsong  
In passages of night  
Dove sta amore  
Here lies love

“Dove Sta Amore” is the final song of the cycle. The wide-ranging vocal line, from low A4 to high D-flat 6, includes passages of bravura singing. The fioratura of the vocal lines and the brighter colors in the orchestrations clear the air after the

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50Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
dark moods of the middle songs. Musto chose a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti to complete the cycle. "'Dove Sta Amore' is really not a song, but more like an aria," Musto stated. It is the longest song in the set. The compositional approach is distinct in that the texture omits the jazz/blues idioms and reveals repetitive piano figures, which recall the music of Phillip Glass.

The poem "Dove Sta Amore" is quite different from the other poems in this song cycle. In contrast to the others which tell stories, here Musto plays with the words and the sound of the words. He is not shy in restructuring the poem and repeating the phrases. This elongation results in an eight minute aria. This "aria", as Musto calls it, loosely has an exposition, development, and recapitulation. The extremely complicated piano part requires a pianist of prowess. When Musto began working on this song, he asked Burton to look at the vocal line and tell him if it were singable. Her reply was, "Its singable, but not just anyone could sing it!" Musto intends not to dwell on the meaning of the poetry, but rather to play with the sounds of the words against the accompaniment.

A vocal motif which occurs in various keys with slight alterations is presented in the first vocal line. One of the challenges often facing the singer is finding the initial pitches as the motif is repeated at rising intervals. (see examples 25 and 26)

51 Blier, Steven. Program notes for Dove Sta Amore. October 6, 1996
52 Musto, John. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
53 Ibid.
In measures 23 through 25 Musto uses an arpeggio, based on intervals of a fourth, which crosses through the upper and the lower registers, making this phrase challenging for even an experienced singer.\textsuperscript{54} He develops this \textit{quartal arpeggio}, as Musto calls it, later in measures 162 through 164. (see example 27)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example25.png}
\caption{Example 25 mm. 1-4 “Dove Sta Amore”}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example26.png}
\caption{Example 26 mm. 17-19 “Dove Sta Amore”}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example27.png}
\caption{Example 27 mm. 23-25 “Dove Sta Amore”}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{54}Burton, Amy. Personal interview. May 11, 1998
At letter B, He completes the first section of the song with a statement of the phrase “the ring dove love in lyrical delight.” The singer repeats the latter part of this phrase one half-step higher. This motif returns at letter H, and again at measure 129. He also uses the same motif with a new text, “in passages of night.” (see example 28)

Letter C begins a new section of the song. The general mood and accompaniment changes here. In the piano, the beat is more prominent than in the orchestral accompaniment, where in the harp and the strings play a continuo which would be difficult to sustain without a conductor. (see example 29)

Example 28 mm. 143-145 “Dove Sta Amore”

Here, the vocal line becomes almost subservient to the accompaniment. In measure 69 the singer drops down to E flat 4, and because of the thickness of the orchestral accompaniment, she will have to make technical choices to allow for the best projection of the voice in that range. The long note values and sustained quality of the vocal line provide a brief respite from the otherwise disjunct and florid melody. Musto prefers the grace notes in measures 75 and 76 to be sung
quickly, using them to build tension as the song nears the climax.55 Beginning in measure 79, words give way to vocalized [a] vowel. Acknowledging the difficulty of these vocal lines, Musto said, “The singer should try to make this look as easy as possible. Never look as though you are struggling to work at it. After all, the song is meant to be light, not heavy and dramatic.”56 At the climax of the song, in measure 97, Musto provides an ossia to the melodic line that leads to a high D flat 6. The ossia reaches only to B flat 6. (see example 30) A short recapitulation of the first section is heard in measure 149. Musto continues to play with the word “dove”, and in measure 168, he instructs the singer to hum the notes. (see example 31) If it is difficult for the singer to hum in this pitch range, the phrase may be vocalized on a vowel, maintaining the sotto voce.57 As the song wanes, he suggests the singer to adopt an ironic smile. This song is extremely challenging but well worth the struggle. It is my opinion that “Dove Sta Amore” should be attempted only by experienced singers, because of its wide range [A4 to D flat 6], rhythmic complexity and the disjunct quality of the vocal line. There is no identifiable tessitura for the song.

56Ibid.
57Ibid.
Example 29  mm. 53-58 "Dove Sta Amore"

Example 30  mm. 97-98 "Dove Sta Amore"
Example 31  mm. 168-169 "Dove Sta Amore"
CONCLUSION

After studying the songs of John Musto, interviewing the composer and his wife, and performing his works, I am convinced that Mr. Musto is a composer worthy of attention. His music expands the normal vocabulary of classical vocal music through the incorporation of elements of more popular music. Most of his songs carry a thoughtful message, are diverse in construction, and elicit strong enthusiasm from musicians and the general public. It is hoped that through this monograph, the songs of John Musto will become known to a wider audience.
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Works by John Musto


Journal and Magazine Articles


Books About the Poets


**Interviews and Conversations**

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Musto, John. Interview with the composer at Mr. Musto's home on May 11, 1998. Telephone conversations and E-mail correspondence with the composer since October 1, 1997.

Dr. Delony Willis. Interview with the professor at Southeastern Louisiana University on November 23, 1999

**Online material from a computer service**


CATALOG OF PUBLISHED SONGS

TWO BY FROST
1982

Nothing Gold Can Stay (Robert Frost)
The Rose Family

SHADOW OF THE BLUES
1987

Silhouette (Langston Hughes)
Litany
Island
Could Be

ENOUGH ROPE
1987

Social Note (Dorothy Parker)
Resume
The Sea

TRIOLET (Eugene O’Neill)
1987

LAMENT (Edna St. Vincent Millay)
1988

RECUERDO
1988

Echo (Christina Rossetti)
Recuerdo (Edna St. Vincent Millay)
A Last Song (Louise Bogan)

QUIET SONGS
1990

maggie and milly and molly and may (e.e. cummings)
Intermezzo (Amy Elizabeth Burton)
Quiet Song (Eugene O’Neill)
Christmas Carol (To Jesus on His Birthday)
(Edna St. Vincent Millay)

51
Palm Sunday: Naples (Arthur Symons)
Lullaby (Leonie Adams)

CANZONETTAS
1987

Western Winds (anonymous)
All Night by the Rose (anonymous)
The Silver Swan (anonymous)

DOVE STA AMORE
1996

Maybe (Carl Sandburg)
Sea Chest (Carl Sandburg)
The Hangman at Home (Carl Sandburg)
How Many Little Children (James Agee)
Dove Sta Amore (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)

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VITA

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Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

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