

Twenty-Second BW Art Song Festival to feature recitals by Joan Rodgers and Andrew Garland

by Daniel Hathaway



The twenty-second Art Song Festival, now firmly established at Baldwin Wallace University, got down to business on Monday, May 19 and will culminate in a free recital by ten singer-pianist teams on Saturday, May 24. In between, those teams will receive coachings in master classes from British soprano Joan Rodgers, American baritone Andrew Garland (left), and the celebrated collaborative pianists Roger Vignoles and Warren Jones.

Participants will also have the opportunity to hear their teachers in action in two evening recitals. Rodgers and Vignoles will perform in Gamble Auditorium on Tuesday, May 20, followed by Garland and Jones on Thursday, May 22. Both performances begin at 8:00 pm and [tickets](#) are required.

Dedicated to the advancement of one of the most intimate and expressive forms of chamber music, the Art Song Festival was first organized by George Vassos at the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1985 and featured two distinguished artists, Elly Ameling and Gérard Souzay. Following a one-year hiatus in 1989, the festival was relaunched as an every-other-year event, and eventually moved to Baldwin Wallace, where it is now headed by BW's voice department chair Joanne Uniatowski.

How do mentors prepare to coach singers in those master classes? "It depends on who is singing and what they're presenting," Andrew Garland told us in a telephone conversation from his home in Boston. "I learned a long time ago — and this applies to all life, not just to teaching — that you prepare as thoroughly as you can, and when you go out to do what you prepared to do, you won't end up doing anything you prepared, but somehow you'll be in good shape because you prepared."

Given the high level of singers and pianists who are accepted into the festival program, there won't be any basic voice teaching going on. As Garland said, "I'm going to guess

that these are some of the most advanced singers that I've had the pleasure to coach." He also noted that he'll find himself giving advice to a colleague he sang onstage with last summer. Is that going to be awkward? "Not in this case. I'm very much looking forward to it, and I'll talk to him as a colleague, not as a student."

What has Andrew Garland himself taken away from singing in master classes? "The most important lesson is that you need to listen. I remember going into classes as an upper classman and graduate student when my goal was to have the presenter tell me 'that was great — I have nothing to say.' But you should come to a master class to discuss things you have to explore in a song, not to receive compliments. I remember a quote from Jimi Hendrix: 'I don't like compliments — they distract me.' I don't want to hear that something I did was nice, I want to hear if I'm going in the right direction. When I'm rehearsing with Warren Jones in his apartment and he says something was good, that's a professional assessment, not a polite, feel-good moment."

Joan Rodgers will present a program of songs by Schubert, Joseph Marx, Rachmaninov, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky on Tuesday evening. On Thursday evening, Andrew Garland will sing a wide-ranging program entitled "The Quest: Don Quixote and other Wanderers," including Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel*, works by Schubert, Gabriela Lena Frank and Ravel, and American folk song arrangements by Steven Mark Kohn.

Garland and Jones performed this program at Carnegie Hall in November of 2012 and decided to revive it. Wandering — or moving forward — is the thread that links the songs together. Appropriately, it begins with the Vaughan Williams songs. "I've been dabbling with the *Songs of Travel* since undergraduate days, but this program was my first crack at the whole cycle", Garland said.

Schubert's *Der Wanderer* was also a shoo-in, the first of three songs on the program by that composer. Garland went on to talk about the character in *Der Musensohn*, who goes about all year singing to all the people in the land, and noted that Goethe wrote *An Schwager Kronos* after the success of his first volume of poems, "when he wanted to get out there and keep moving forward as a poet."

Gabriela Lena Frank's name has been in the news lately — her new piccolo concerto was recently premiered by Mary K. Fink and The Cleveland Orchestra. Two of her songs on Garland's recital are part of a cycle entitled *Cantos de Cifar y el mar dulce*. "There will be more than twenty of them when the cycle is finished," Garland said. "She's a spitfire. The story is a Nicaraguan *Odyssey*. Frank went to Nicaragua to seek out these unknown, unpublished poems by Pablo Antonio Cuadra. They represent two episodes in the life of Sifar. In the second, he's sailing in a storm and cursing it. He says he'd rather suffer the storm of his lover, Eufemia, than this literal storm. Even if you didn't speak a lick of

Spanish, you could hear the twenty-foot waves and feel the rain and the wind in your face. You'll also clearly hear a Nicaraguan marimba in the piano part."

Ravel's *Don Quichote à Dulcinée* fits perfectly into the quest theme and like French music in general, Garland said, also fits his voice well. The baritone described a set of American folk song arrangements by Cleveland Institute of Music faculty member Steven Mark Kohn as worthy successors to Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs*. "They should be assigned to all beginning singers." Garland has recorded them for Cleveland's Azica Records and the [audio tracks](#) are available on YouTube.

How do you close out a concert entitled 'The Quest: Don Quixote and other Wanderers?' With *The Impossible Dream* from *Man of La Mancha*, of course. "After giving a program a title like that," Andrew Garland said, "there's no other way to end it."

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