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**Dual Wings of American Song:
Art Songs and Show Tunes**

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Despite a spectacular early fall afternoon and a street fair on Franklin Street, a good house showed up at 3:00 p.m. October 7 in Hill Hall Auditorium for a Janus-like look at American song. The first half of the program, titled "Songs By American Composers," featured art songs by two masters of the form, an immigrant, and an American premiere by a promising composer with Triangle connections. This entire program featured veteran UNC faculty member and tenor Stafford Wing. The other face of American song was on display in the second half of the program, titled "A Tribute To Rodgers and Hammerstein." For this, Wing was joined by soprano and fellow faculty member Terry Rhodes for thirteen generous selections that mixed solos and duets. The very able Julie Sargeant was the pianist for both halves.

Composer Ned Rorem is the foremost master of the art song in America with a long list to his credit. Five of his songs were performed: "Early in the Morning," "For Susan," "Spring and Fall," "Orchids," and "Spring." Wing has husbanded his vocal capital to an amazing extent. He has been active at UNC since 1969, the same year I became infected with the concert-going bug. He had made a number of recordings before coming here--I had an Lp in which he sang a Mozart sacred work conducted by the legendary Jascha Horenstein. On this occasion, Wing's diction was a model of excellence, and he had selected songs that fit his present compass well. The texts were put across with artful simplicity. His tone was pleasant and the voice well supported. Rorem is justly famous for his taste in poetry and his skill in setting it into song. I was struck by the lines "adder-mouthed" and "Their fluttery fledgling lips" in the song "Orchid"; the images were heightened by Wing's subtle vocal coloring. There was a hint of a tear in his voice in the line "Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy" in the last song. Sargeant was skilled in insinuating Rorem's deceptively simple piano parts.

Samuel Barber's piano scoring was not at all hidden in his Three Songs, Op. 10. "Rain has fallen" began with a delicate piano introduction, and its complexity equaled the interest in the vocal part. The next James Joyce setting, "Sleep Now," began with a pp piano part that remained more of a background to the text. Wing acquitted himself well in the part that lay high. "I hear an army" brought out an aggressive and stormy piano part for its war-like refrains.

Sargeant brought out an almost "blues" quality in the introduction to "Lonely House" from Street Scene by Kurt Weill, a three stanza setting with a text by Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. Wing showed great skill in evoking images of loneliness in a city. His voice was almost falsetto in the last line, "I'm lonely in this lonely house/In this lonely town."

The American premiere was "Song of the Son," three songs by composer Jeremy Beck, who was present. Wing had been attracted to the composer's work upon hearing Beck's "Black Water" (1994) when Terry Rhodes and Jane Hawkins presented it at Duke in the fall of 2000. This is an "operatic" setting of a fictionalized account by novelist Joyce Carol Oates of the Chappaquiddick incident. He asked the composer if he had any songs for tenor and Beck provided these three, which engrossed Wing immediately. "Song of the Son" was composed in January-February 1998 in Cedar Falls, Iowa. It was given its world premiere on October 23, 1999, in Echtzeit Hall, Munich, Germany. Beck holds degrees from Yale University, Duke University and the Mannes College of Music. His teachers were Lukas Foss, Jack Beeson, Stephen Jaffe and David Loeb. All three poems in "Song of the Son" were taken from "Cane" (1923) by Jean Toomer (1894-1967), a writer and poet who influenced many of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance. The poetic language is visually rich and lyrical in tone. All three poems show a young African-American writer attempting to connect with his cultural heritage and trying to convey that heritage to the world. The piano writing in the first, "Face," was delicate and impressionistic. A refreshing characteristic of Beck's style is his remarkable economy of means. "Beehive" was jazzy and benefited from Wing's skill at coloring the words. At points, Sargeant brought out the almost "stride-piano" quality of the score. The last song, "Song of the Son," was fascinating. The third of the five stanzas was an ascending arc. The song was

solemn with a stately piano part that was at times quite transparent. The line "Caroling softly souls of slavery" was poignant. It was one of those rare new works that grabs the listener upon a first hearing. I hope that Wing or others will program this set again. I look forward to exploring more works by composer Beck.

I will quickly pass over the well-received "Tribute to Rodgers and Hammerstein" because of my lack of familiarity with the musicals and operetta genres. Both Wing and Rhodes projected their texts clearly and with humor when appropriate. Both sang "It's a Grand Night for Singing" from *State Fair* (1945). From *Oklahoma* (1943), Rhodes soloed in "Many A New Day," and both sang the folksy duet "Surrey With The Fringe On Top" and "People Will Say We're In Love." From *The King And I* (1951), Rhodes well conveyed the complex emotions of "Hello, Young Lovers," while Wing began "I Have Dreamed" alone and was then joined by Rhodes. Both sang "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "If I Loved You" from *Carousel* (1945). Both sang "Some Enchanted Evening," while Rhodes dispatched "A Cock-Eyed Optimist" and Wing essayed "Younger than Springtime" from *South Pacific* (1949). They finished the concert with "My Favorite Things" and "Climb Every Mountain" from *The Sound Of Music* (1959).