

A World of Song: Introducing the Resources of the Hampsong Foundation

Thomas Hampson



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SONG IS POETIC THOUGHT ENCAPSULATED IN MUSIC. Poetry serves as a metaphor of the imagination, as music serves as a metaphor of its emotions. In the marriage of these two separate art forms, the composer births a new art form: song. A song is more than just poetry set to music. It is an identifier of any culture, acting as a guide, or even diary, that follows in the footsteps of its poets and composers. It seems to me that song, in almost any context, is a transcendent suspension of life's successive moments for the expanded reflection of a greater present. In performing and listening to song, we are led by artists' experiences, feelings, influences, and knowledge of life as they lived, or live it.

WHY ART SONG?

My commitment to art song goes beyond giving song recitals on stage, although performance is certainly the core of my devotion to song. My goal remains to tell a story that speaks across time, through a language, and out of a culture. I believe in projects that take the art of song into a broader context and engage a wide community in its narrative. With this approach, each song becomes its own unique résumé—a medium through which we can observe and relate to people of this or another place and time, a prism through which we can experience another world. There is no *prima la musica* or *prima la lingua*. In classic song, both poem and music are in a profound metaphoric dialogue, a conversation between equal partners. The specific use of that sung moment is then defined by its reflections, allowing Art to become the transformer—the active ingredient of expression—and not a belittling qualitative adjective.

THE ROAD TO HAMPSONG

Since the early days of my singing career, song has held an important place in my life. In fact, song is what drew me to singing in the first place. I remember fondly the early days of learning to sing in Spokane, Washington, with my wonderful teacher Sister Marietta Coyle. Sister Marietta was a devoted student of Lotte Lehmann, Charles Panzera, and William Vennard, and her guidance led me to discover and revel in the magical world of poetry and music that was so new to me. Since then, the study and performance of song has

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cultivated my curiosity, expanded my knowledge and understanding of other cultures, both past and present, and deepened my artistry.

In a professional world that seems focused on opera as the major thrust of a singing career, I have always made song an equal focus of mine. It always made sense to me that having lived on the inside of the psyche through a song inevitably enhanced the understanding of the motivations of a character in the larger context of a theatrical work. In my opinion, the idea of professional training as an opera singer or a recitalist is unnecessarily limiting to the notion of what a singer is.

I hope that my own career path, from my early days of community concerts, to the first programming of specific ideological recitals, to the overwhelming tutelage of Mahler songs with Leonard Bernstein—all the while maintaining an active operatic career—emboldens my younger colleagues to seek out wide horizons and pursue a variety of opportunities in singing.

ESTABLISHING THE HAMPSONG FOUNDATION

In 2003, I began the Hampsong Foundation with a vision: *To create a platform to support and proliferate the art of song from around the world as a means to enhance communication and understanding among cultures through their poetry and music.*

Through my experiences, I came to realize the possibilities of classic song as a tool of communication and came to view song as a real identifier of an individual's cultural experience narrated in his or her humanities tradition. Leading up to my founding of Hampsong, I had undertaken several extended song projects, and many in conjunction with the Salzburg Festival, such as:

- *"I Hear America Singing,"* a survey of American ideals and texts which inspired both American and European composers through song.
- *Hugo Wolf und Seine Zeit*, a journey into Wolf's life, times, and the pursuits of his contemporaries.
- *Antonin Dvořák und Seine Zeit*, a guide to the Dvořák's life in song, focusing especially on works influenced by living in America.
- *"Verboten und Verbannt"* (*"Forbidden and Banned"*), the study of prejudice, hatred, and isolation over many generations of Jewish composers in Central Europe.

In creating these projects, I knew that I wanted to make the materials from these events available to a larger community and give inspiration to the next generation of singers through new technology. I saw the possibility to engage an audience beyond those who attended the physical concerts and needed a platform through which to connect with and encourage others who shared my passion for song. Thus the Hampsong Foundation was born.

The song projects of the Hampsong Foundation grew from the core of these early projects, and now the Foundation boasts an extraordinary number of initiatives and collaborations that explore connections between poetry and music, history and culture, research and performance, society and song. Let me take you on a brief tour of what the Hampsong Foundation has to offer in supporting teachers of singing, their pupils, scholars and our participating public.

HAMPSONG ONLINE: WELCOMING STUDENTS, SCHOLARS, AND LOVERS OF SONG

The essential fact that song serves a bridge between different cultures remains the most powerful force in Hampsong Foundation projects. The Hampsong website started as a "hobby" section of my own personal site, created in 1997. With the launching of the Foundation in 2003, my personal website was separated from what became the first Foundation website. And the "now" in the alchemical Spirit of Reinvention that is so part of any web presence: In the spring of 2012, the Hampsong Foundation launched its newest, most technologically up-to-date version: <http://hampsongfoundation.org>, a deep resource highlighting past and present projects and collaborations of the Foundation on a variety of topics. *The Hampsong Foundation endeavors to take full advantage of innovations in technology to enhance educational possibilities and communicate its resources to visitors.*

The website is structured for three types of visitors: the student beginning a journey into the world of song, the experienced listener looking to access and augment his or her knowledge, and the casual visitor who found the experience of a song recital new and is curiously intrigued by the art form of song and its communicative possibilities.

The Hampsong Foundation website is first and foremost a repository for high quality digital multimedia

materials relating to song, available in full, for free, to all visitors. From the archives of the Salzburg projects mentioned earlier to sections devoted entirely to the songs of Mahler and Schubert to the expansive Song of America project, the site includes full concert programs, song texts and translations, essays, historic images, and selected audio recordings and videos. You can watch vocal and instrumental master classes, listen to interviews and lectures, and experience special events from your own computer.

HAMPSONGFOUNDATION.ORG AT WORK

Song of America: Collaboration, Tour, and Online Database

One of the major ventures of the Hampsong Foundation is the many-layered Song of America project. In the 2005–2006 season, I embarked on a national tour in conjunction with the Library of Congress’s “Creativity Across America” initiative. The national tour combined recitals of American classic song with physical artifacts from the Library of Congress archives to tell the story of American culture through song. I am extremely grateful to the Library of Congress for collaborating with me on this tour—as well as a second tour in 2009, celebrating 250 years of song in America—and for inspiring several dimensions of the Hampsong Foundation’s Song of America project.

The commitment to tell the history of American culture through the eyes of our poets and the ears of our composers is the basis of the Hampsong Foundation’s Song of America endeavors. In 2009, in addition to several new recordings of American classic song, the Hampsong Foundation launched the Song of America database, <http://www.songofamerica.net>. Song of America is an online resource that now catalogues close to 200 composers, 300 writers, and 2,000 songs. Integral aspects of the database include hundreds of song recordings, as well as an extensive timeline, scholarly essays on topics in history and culture, and a calendar of worldwide events in American song. The Library of Congress launched its own Song of America website as well, providing a doorway to the vast song resources of the Library of Congress. This site can be found at the following web address: <http://www.loc.gov/songofamerica>

Song of America Radio Series

Another major facet of the Song of America project is the Song of America Radio Series. In collaboration with WFMT Chicago, the Hampsong Foundation produced this 13-episode exploration of American classic song on such diverse topics as “American Characters,” “Ives the Chronicler,” and “Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance.” Since its first airing in 2011, the Song of America Radio Series has been featured on hundreds of radio stations in America and Europe.

The Hampsong Foundation in Collaboration

In addition to these materials, the website features collaborations in which the Hampsong Foundation is engaged. The Foundation has become more and more hands-on and has sought out collaborators and partners with a similar all-encompassing vision of the influence of classic song. One of these partners is the summer training program SongFest, a four-week course that focuses on the art of song and takes place at the Colburn School in Los Angeles every June. The Hampsong Foundation and SongFest work together to make past materials from SongFest events available online. For example, the Hampsong Foundation created a special online feature for a SongFest concert from June 2012 on the songs of American composer William Bolcom, which included the world premiere of Bolcom’s “Gettysburg: June 1, 1862.” You can learn more about SongFest on their website: <http://www.songfest.us>

Singers on Singing: Great Artists in Conversation

Another major initiative of the Hampsong Foundation is the housing of the extensive interview archive *Singers on Singing: Great Artists in Conversation*, created and executed by award-winning documentarian Jon Tolansky. At the rate of one per month, the Foundation publishes audio interviews, referred to as documentary portraits, with renowned singers from Marilyn Horne and Mirella Freni to Angela Gheorghiu and Jon Vickers. The artists are captured in discussion with Jon, conversing on topics from song repertoire and operatic roles to biographical details and singing technique. *Singers on Singing* is not only an incredible resource and an entertaining listen, but it is also an important historical document for the past, present and future of classical singing.

Digitization: Partnering to Preserve our Field's Treasures

Historical documentation of developments in song is of key importance to the Hampson Foundation's mission, and the Hampson Foundation's collaboration with the Ernestine Schumann-Heink Collection of Claremont College engages in that topic. In 2012, the Hampson Foundation awarded the Schumann-Heink Collection a major grant to digitize the entire music manuscript collection of the great contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861–1936). Ms. Schumann-Heink had an exceptional influence on the cultural and musical life of the United States thanks to her cross-country recital tours, numerous radio appearances, and remarkable spirit. A project which is scheduled to finish in 2014, the digitized Schumann-Heink Collection will eventually be available online for visitors to search through hundreds of unpublished gems by composers such as Amy Beach and Henry Burleigh.

Developing Key Partnerships and Assisting Scholars

In addition to its close collaboration with the Library of Congress, the Hampson Foundation is a dedicated partner of several other organizations, including the Elinor Remick Warren Society, which seeks to preserve and increase the presence of the American composer who serves as their namesake. Collaborative grants with MusicFest Northwest, the American Musicological Society and the Society for American Music support smaller projects in classic song and assist scholars and artists working in the field.

The Heidelberg Lied Academy, of which I am the Artistic Director, takes place each spring in conjunction with the Heidelberg Frühling Festival. News and information, especially for students looking to apply for next year's Academy, can be found on the website of the Hampson Foundation as well as here: <http://www.heidelberg-eruehling.de>

The Hampson Foundation is also grateful to the many individual collaborators and scholars who have made it possible to create the vast archive of song texts and translations, scholarly essays, timelines, and dozens

of concert programs featuring innovative programming available on the Foundation's website. You can also find myriad links to resources outside of the Foundation website to continue your research. Acting as a kind of "dashboard," these resources can help guide students in their own song recital brainstorming and planning.

The Foundation also awards a limited number of helper grants to students and professionals for individual projects that approach classic song with innovation and creativity and have a budget under \$1,500. Visit the Hampson Foundation's website for more details.

NEW MEDIA: INVITING TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE

New media and developments in technology offer endless possibilities to the creative mind with a vision and love of the presented content. There are so many opportunities to be explored, and I invite you to discover the web resources available through the Hampson Foundation—or to start your own! Again, the addresses for the Hampson Foundation websites are: <http://hampsonfoundation.org> and <http://www.songofamerica.net>.

Through all of these projects and collaborations, the Hampson Foundation seeks to deepen the understanding that song is one of the most personal and natural forms of human expression, vital for communication in our lives today.

The arts and humanities provide us a complex and multifaceted narrative, rife with wisdom of life's experiences, that can serve as the blueprint for our lives as human beings and artists. The wisdom held in songs—each one a gateway to the distinctive universe of a time and a place and a people—are audible pages of that essential diary of human experience across the ages.

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