

Stephen Salters, baritone

RECITALS

“From Stephen Salters, Powerful and Elegant Singing

Stephen Salters is one of the rising voices of the operatic world, and judging from his fearless and nearly flawless recital at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater Saturday night, it's not hard to hear why...Not only does he sound like God on a good day, but he's intensely imaginative and adventurous, navigating repertoire that would make most singers creep into the wings and weep.

The whole recital, in fact, was so satisfying that it's hard to find a peak...This was sophisticated repertoire for a sophisticated voice, and Salters made the most of it. His sound is rich and powerful, with a slight roughness that adds to the bite. But Salters's command of detail and dynamics is precise and elegant, and it's no wonder that the audience brought him back for four spectacular encores.

The Washington Post

Storytelling in the Quiet Light of Song

The baritone Stephen Salters, who gave his Naumburg recital on Monday night at Alice Tully Hall, is a man of thorough confidence, huge charm and a vocal allure that comes brimming off the stage. He started his program with an unaccompanied traditional song, repeating over and over again the same words: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." And that was what he did for the next two hours, except that his light was not so little and was joined by the light (also not so little) of David Zobel at the piano.

Qualities Mr. Salters had shown in that prologue -- an ability to communicate gentleness and power with the same immediacy, a sense for the whole line of a song, a strong hold on rhythm, an unshakable conviction that L is one of the vowels and, therefore, can indeed shine -- were extended and developed in almost everything he did afterward. And Mr. Zobel added his own strength in delicacy, purity of sound and refinement. The two of them together, in an enchanting performance of Cui's gorgeous "Statue at Tsarskoye Selo," simply made it obvious that vocal tones and piano tones are the same thing, both made of quiet light.

Mr. Salters's genius for telling stories in music appeared not just in Ravel's "Histoires Naturelles" (with, again, superb playing from Mr. Zobel) but also in William Bolcom's new "Naumburg Cycle," a group of seven songs made with skill, care and generosity for this occasion and this singer, but surely destined to live on, and therefore in need of a more compelling title.

Mr. Bolcom's work honored Mr. Salters's African heritage in setting texts by Langston Hughes ("Ballad of the Landlord") and Arnold Weinstein ("Africa"), by bringing shades of stride piano into the accompaniments, and by doing both with utter naturalness. As might be expected from this composer, the music swims surely between popular and art idioms. It allowed Mr. Salters to express self-certainty, as well as a wry sense of human weakness.

The audience wouldn't let Mr. Salters go without encores (Strauss's "Morgen," "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho"). He will be back.

The New York Times

“Baritone Stephen Salters in full flight – the sound, the presence, the personality are the kind that will just walk in and take over a room – no resistance seems possible.’

The Boston Globe

This was a concert played lovingly by musicians who had donated their services (and paid their own expenses) for the occasion, and given that it was perhaps beside the point to single out favorite performances. Two that were particularly moving, though, were both readings of Debussy songs. Ms. Upshaw, with Stephen Hough at the piano, gave a ravishing account of the "Chansons de Bilitis," and Stephen Salters, a baritone, and Steven Osborne, a pianist, both late-1990's winners, contributed evocative renderings of the "Ballades de François Villon."

The New York Times

“Stephen Salters showed the breadth of his artistic personality and his professionalism: admirable diction in every language that strengthens the contact with his public and highlights the musical writing; quality of style, marvelously adapted to all repertoire; eloquence and authority carried by a generosity with no limit except the rules of art...”

La Libre Belgique

“Baritone Stephen Salters takes hold of his listeners with an impressive bronze timbre backed up by irresistible manly ease...he proves to have a musicality in full bloom, a dramatic stage presence and an understanding for clear diction that delights the ear and the listener.”

Le Soir (Brussels)

“Stephen Salters, in his recital honoring Hayes, can hold an audience in thrall with his storytelling. His scrupulous musicianship and handsome voice always affected pleasure. He took vocal and dramatic risks and was rewarded with an audience that was transfixed.”

The Boston Globe

“Salters is an impressively versatile vocalist. During the evening he moved through 23 songs in four languages and five distinct musical styles. Expertly and sensitively accompanied on the piano by Margo Garrett, Salters started off with songs in Russian by Sergei Rachmaninov and shifted smoothly to a contemporary American idiom with songs by Elena Ruehr. After intermission he moved on to five songs by Maurice Ravel and finished with a bang-up presentation of lieder by Richard Strauss...Salters’ voice is a high baritone...He has a clear tone, very precise diction, impressive power and throws himself into his songs with great emotional vigor...Salters and Garrett scored a solid artistic success.”

The Post Dispatch

“With look and gesture, he accompanies a song where all his theatrical volubility is effortlessly transmitted, served by a timbre whose richness of color constantly enchants.”

Le Soir (Brussels)

“ More than usually engaging, Stephen Salters, a young American baritone who appeared on the series Monday night, gave notice of a big talent and considerable musical accomplishment. In his recital with pianist Linda Osborn-Blaschke, Salters showed resourceful vocal technique, deep stylistic conviction and a caressing manner with poetic texts...He brought liveliness, poetic awareness and abundant dynamic variety to six Rachmaninoff songs – sung in Russian...He introduced composer Elena Ruehr to his rapt audience through a radiant and pungent cycle of songs to poems by Langston Hughes, called “Lullabies and Spring Songs.” He sang Ravel’s “Histoires Naturelles” exquisitely and with effortless but projected wit. And he gave new twists to Falla’s ubiquitous Seven Popular Spanish Songs.”

Los Angeles Times

“...listeners sat silently without any movement, afraid to miss a single note. Originality, smoothness of performance and the innate artistic talent of Stephen Salters is one of the indisputable successes of the “Musical Olympus” Festival.

Both nonprofessionals and musicians agree that Salters stands out from the galaxy of the gifted not only by his absolute innate feeling of music, but also by its combination with a brilliant use of voice and the talent of a dramatic actor.”

Nevskoye Vremya (Russia)

“Salters, a singer with the courage and the technique to use the full range of his voice’s expressive sounds, gave vivid readings of a group of spirituals accompanied by pianist Linda Osborn-Blaschke...”

The Washington Post

“Rachmaninoff, far better known for his instrumental music, wrote some exquisite songs, most based on Russian poetry. Salters performed the songs with consistent, heartfelt artistry, handling the delicate passages with subtlety and tenderness, his powerful voice swelling to fill the church as the music’s drama intensified.”

Savannah Morning News

“Salters breathed fire into Bolcom’s setting of A.D. Winans’ “Lady Death” and gave a dark, yet transparent reading of Ezra Pound’s difficult, cerebral “Historian”...Other enjoyable pieces were Ravel’s Histoires Naturelles, sung by Salters with gentle grace, character and humor – and marvelously acted to boot. Among the set of Russian songs to Pushkin texts, Cui’s “The Statue at Tsarskoe Selo” was gorgeous...”

Andante.com

“...And he’s a natural – confident, authoritative, charismatic...The second half of the program revealed Salters at his unaffected best. His resonance was capacious but unforced for Schubert’s three interior settings of Goethe’s Songs of the Harper...And in “Calvary,” the first of his five closing spirituals, Salters reached the level of intensity and inwardness that he achieved in the St. Matthew. Roland Hayes’s arrangement of “Two Wings” was another triumph.

“For those of you who are interested,” he announced before the encores, “the Red Sox have just won.” He had that kind of easy rapport with the audience...”Didn’t It Rain,” “Joshua fit de Battle of Jericho,” and the final, indrawing air “Think on Me” – he did straight, and they went straight to the heart of the music – and to the heart. Salters is one more star in the becoming...”

The Boston Phoenix