Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

RENA-MARIE ROUSSIN

BA (Hons) (Acadia University, 2014)

“Haydn’s Last Heroine: Hanne, The Seasons, and Sentimental Opera”

School of Music

Thursday, August 23rd, 2018
10:00 a.m.
Fine Arts Building
Room 112

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Joseph Salem, School of Music, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Michelle Fillion, School of Music, University of Victoria (Member)
Dr. Susan Lewis, School of Music, University of Victoria (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Elena Pnevmonidou, German and Slavic Studies, University of Victoria

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Kara Shaw, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Joseph Haydn's final oratorio, The Seasons (1801), has consistently been neglected in performance and scholarship, particularly when compared to its earlier, more successful counterpart, The Creation (1798). A number of factors contribute to this neglect, central among them the belief that The Seasons lacked the musical innovation of Haydn's setting of the Judeo-Christian creation story, a thought that would gain further momentum as aesthetic and musical tastes changed throughout the nineteenth century. Yet Haydn's final oratorio is a work of remarkable musical artistry and insight, especially when considered in the context of the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility and the rise of sentimental opera, conventions with which Haydn's would have been intimately aware of given his work in opera composition and production from 1762-1790. By examining the ways in which Hanne, one of the three central characters in The Seasons, is constructed as sentimental in van Swieten’s libretto and Haydn’s score, I demonstrate how the librettist and composer engage the trope of the sentimental heroine. Hanne features many of the expected qualities: she is chaste, virtuous, and possesses refined sensibility and sensitivity. Furthermore, her singing style is firmly rooted in sentimental traditions. Yet her music is also imbued with coloratura and musical markers of nobility. Through these musical choices and by textually defining Hanne through joy rather than suffering and pathos, van Swieten and Haydn depart from typical constructions to rethink the sentimental heroine. Therefore, in his final major musico-dramatic work, Haydn experiments with one of the central operatic tropes of the eighteenth century. In being aware of this feature, we might simultaneously arrive at a renewed appreciation for The Seasons and of Haydn's abilities as a musical dramatist.