Natalie Kaftan, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2004, successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on November 3, 2007.

The title of the paper is:

"Being Good"

Professor Diana Spradling, Music, Jazz

Dr. Janet Stillwell
Senior Honors Thesis Recital
Being Good
Saturday 3 November 2007
Lee Honors College Lounge
2:00 p.m.

NATALIE KAFTAN, Vocals
assisted by
Dave Izard, Piano
Nate Adams, Vocals and Guitar
Amy Yassinger, Vocals

Bill Withers
Kurt Weill
Frank Wildhorn/Leslie Bricusse
Jonathan Larson
Stephen Sondheim
Thomas “Fats” Waller
Nanci Griffith
Nanci Griffith
Natalie Maines/Emily Robinson/
Martie Maguire

Ain’t No Sunshine
Wie Lange Noch?
In His Eyes
Without You
Losing My Mind
Honeysuckle Rose
I Would Bring You Ireland
It’s a Hard Life Wherever You Go
Ready to Run
About today's presentation:

During Natalie Kaftan's undergraduate years at Western Michigan University our paths have crossed many times and under many circumstances. From the beginning I found her to be adventurous, intensely curious, respectful of the academic process and wonderfully outspoken about her convictions!

This presentation is eclectic and broad in its content. As you will see, her soul is brimming with music, all kinds of music, especially music with text. Her choices reflect her spiritual voice, her sense of humor, her self determination and her point of view as a woman.

For as long as I have known her, Natalie has had a difficult time committing to one kind of music, be it classical, jazz, pop or music theatre. On her own she has come to realize that her interests have taken her far beyond the study of a single genre; and much to her credit, she has found a "less typical" way (an honors recital project as opposed to a formal voice recital) to let her voice be heard.

To me the most striking factor in Natalie's singing is the flexibility of her voice instrument. Natalie has the ability to use several different timbres (colors) in her sound making it easy for her to move among many and varied musical styles and genres. For example, you will hear completely different timbres when you compare the sounds used in the German cabaret song *Wie Lange Noch?* and the Dixie Chicks' country tune *Ready to Run.*

I see the definition of "honor" in this honors college project as a way of documenting part of the intellectual transformation Natalie has undergone during her undergraduate experience at Western. If the ultimate purpose of a college education is to challenge people to think for themselves, Natalie honors that purpose.

Professor Diana Spradling  
Voice Coach and Project Mentor

Creating a title for my Honors Thesis Recital was more challenging than I believed it would be. How does one use only a few words to make a bold, profound, and meaningful statement about what a recital means to the performer?

In order to find the most fitting title for my thesis project, Professor Spradling encouraged me to re-evaluate the things that are most important in my life. In the end, I decided that being good is the main goal for which I strive. The title "Being Good" means never settling for mediocrity (except in physics class), using tact and sensitivity when interacting with others (which I am working on), and staying out of trouble (just not the fun kind). It means being a good sister, a good friend, a good performer, a good student, a good (if somewhat challenging) daughter, and a good overall human being.

Natalie Kaftan
Ain’t No Sunshine was written by Bill Withers (b. 1938) and appears on his 1971 album *Just As I Am*. A breakthrough hit for Withers, the song has a rock/blues feel; the rock element gives the song a groove in an eight bar blues form, and the harmonic structure is mostly built on two minor chords. The “I know” section of the song can be considered a chorus, and Withers originally intended to add new lyrics to the section after its release, though he was eventually dissuaded by his fellow musicians. This song has been recorded by over forty artists and is featured in the film “Notting Hill.” I dedicate this performance to my parents, who have almost never missed a weekend of watching the film (no kidding), and to their favorite character, Spike.

Kurt Weill (1900 – 1950), the composer of *Wie Lange Noch?*, is well known for his contributions to music theatre, for his collaborations with other prominent music figures in the mid-1900s, and for his romance with German cabaret singer Lotte Lenya. Weill, a Jewish man born in Germany, fled to the United States during the Second World War. *Wie Lange Noch?* is a cabaret style piece sung by a rejected and tormented lover. It is likely that Weill intended there to be a parallel between a betrayed lover and the country that he felt had betrayed him. The German title translates as “How Long Still?” or “How Much Longer?” This piece is a favorite of mine because it combines a sense of the German Lied of the late 19th century with cabaret singing.

I will confess there was a night when I willingly gave myself to you.
You took me and drove me out of my mind.
I believed that I could not live without you.

You promised me blue skies, and I cared for you like my own father.
You tormented me, you tore me apart.
I would have put the world at your feet

Look at me, will you!
When will I ever be able to tell you: It’s over?
When that day comes...I dread it.
How much longer? How much longer? How long?

I believed you.
I was in a daze from all your talk and your promises.
I did whatever you wanted.
Wherever you wanted to go, I was willing to follow.

You promised me blue skies, and I – I didn’t even dare to cry.
But you have broken your word and your vows.
I have been silent and tortured myself.
Look at me, will you!
When will I ever be able to tell you: It’s over?
When that day comes...I dread it.
How much longer? How much longer? How long?

_Translation by Lys Symonette (1914-2005)_

The musical _Jekyll and Hyde_, written by Frank Wildhorn (b. 1959) and Leslie Bricusse (b. 1931) is based on the novella “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson. The show, which opened on Broadway in April of 1997, is about a man who is trying to separate the human traits of “good” and “evil” in order to cure his father of a mental illness. After experimenting on himself, the “evil” part of his mind, Mr. Hyde is released, and he struggles to keep his own sanity and life intact. The “good” part of his mind, Dr. Jekyll, is engaged to the character of Emma Danvers, a sweet, innocent, affluent young woman. On the other hand, Mr. Hyde is mad with passion for a beautiful prostitute, Lucy Harris (originally played by Linda Eder). _In His Eyes_ is a duet sung by these two women as they struggle to understand their feelings toward the man they love. It is my great pleasure to sing the part of Emma with graduate voice major Amy Yassinger’s Lucy.

Jonathan Larson’s (1960 - 1996) _Rent_ opened on Broadway in 1996. Based on Giacomo Puccini’s opera, _La bohème_, the story is about young artists struggling to survive in a city ridden with crime, violence, and disease. _Without You_ is sung by two of the main characters, Roger and Mimi. Roger’s girlfriend commits suicide after finding out that she has AIDS and has passed it on to him. Mimi, a young, drug-addicted stripper who also has AIDS, helps Roger out of his depression. After the death of one of their close friends and a highly emotional argument, Roger moves away. _Without You_ is sung while they are separated. I’ve chosen to sing this song because I am captivated by its raw, honest lyrics.

_Losing My Mind_ is from Stephen Sondheim’s _Follies_, which debuted on Broadway in 1971. Stephen Sondheim (b. 1930) is an American composer and lyricist who is known for his sophisticated storylines and for scoring works such as _West Side Story, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Gypsy, Sweeney Todd, A Little Night Music_, and _Into the Woods_. He has won an Academy Award, multiple Tony Awards, multiple Grammy Awards, and a Pulitizer Prize in Drama for the musical _Sunday in the Park with George_. It is important to note that Sondheim is very particular about the way his pieces are performed: the songs must be played and sung exactly as written. _Losing My Mind_ is sung by the character of Sally, a fifty-year-old former Follie who is married to a cheating husband (Buddy) and is in love with another man (Ben), about whom this song is sung. Out of all of the songs on today’s program, this is my absolute favorite piece to sing because of its “big, meaty” musical theatre style.
Jazz legend Thomas “Fats” Waller (1904-1943) was the original composer of **Honeysuckle Rose**. Though the song was recorded in 1928 as a piano piece, Fats Waller recorded a version of the song with Louis Armstrong singing lyrics in 1938. This tune has been recorded and performed by countless artists, and it is the one jazz standard that I never tire of singing.

Nanci Griffith was born in Texas in 1953. She is a singer, a songwriter, and a guitarist who performs various genres including country, folk, and her self-proclaimed “folkabilly”. Griffith won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album in 1994 for her recording of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. In addition to her musical career, Griffith spends a great deal of time working to dissipate political and religious tensions in America and overseas, particularly in Ireland. As a result of the hospitality shown to her and her band, The Blue Moon Orchestra, Griffith wrote **I Would Bring You Ireland**. It is my pleasure to share this music with you.

**It's a Hard Life Wherever You Go** was also written by Nanci Griffith. After her trips to Belfast, Ireland, Griffith became an activist and is now involved with numerous charities including the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the Mines Advisory Group, the Journey of Hope Organization, and the Voters for Choice organization. I chose this song because of the timeless and sincere message. More important than the music are the words, which are becoming even more significant in our increasingly violent world.

I am a backseat driver from America.  
We drive to the left on Falls Road.  
And the man at the wheel's name is Seamus.  
We pass a child on the corner he knows,  
and Seamus says, “Now, what chance has that kid got?”  
And I say from the back, “I don't know.”  
He says, “There's barbed wire at all of these exits,  
and there ain't no place in Belfast for that kid to go.”

It's a hard life, it’s a hard life, it’s a very hard life.  
It's a hard life wherever you go.  
And if we poison our children with hatred,  
then a hard life is all that they'll know.  
And there ain't no place in Belfast for that kid to go.

Cafeteria line in Chicago;  
the fat man in front of me  
is calling black people trash to his children,  
and he's the only trash here I see.  
And I'm thinking this man wears a white hood  
in the night when his children should sleep;  
But they'll slip to their windows, and they'll see him,  
And they'll think that white hood's all they need.
I was a child in the sixties,
when dreams could be had through T.V.,
With Disney, and Cronkite, and Martin Luther;
And I believed, I believed, I believed.
Now I am a backseat driver from America,
I am not at the wheel of control,
and I am guilty, I am war, and I am the root of all evil,
Lord, and I can't drive on the left side of the road.

The Dixie Chicks (Natalie Maines, Emily Robinson, and Martie Maguire) started performing their music in 1989 in Dallas, Texas. To date, they have sold the highest number of recordings as a female band in any genre. **Ready to Run** is from their fifth album, *Fly*, which won two Grammys in 2000. After attending one of the Lilith Fair concerts that showcased only female musicians, I remember telling my mother that I really liked the Dixie Chicks, even though they sounded a little too “country”. She laughed and said, “Natalie, they are country.”

I can think of no better way to end this program than with an all-American country tune by an outspoken, freedom-loving chick band.
Discography

*Ain't No Sunshine*, Bill Withers, *Just As I Am*, Sussex Records, 1971


*Honeysuckle Rose*, Fats Waller, *The Very Best of Fats Waller*, RCA, 2000

It's a Hard Life Wherever You Go, Nanci Griffith, Storms, MCA Nashville, 1989

Ready to Run, Dixie Chicks, Fly, Sony, 1999