

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: UNUSUAL SONG TEXTS: SELECTED 20TH-
AND 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN ART
SONG REPERTOIRE USING NON-POETIC
TEXTS

Koon Ee (Alex) Chan, Doctor of Musical Arts,
2023

Dissertation directed by: Professor Rita Sloan, School of Music

As art songs in America developed from Stephen Foster's popular songs to classical music giants like Samuel Barber and Leonard Bernstein to composers of today's musical landscape, the genre has changed tremendously to reflect the current state of the world in which we live. Composers have turned to different sources of text, opening up an infinite possibility of choices. Songs that use non-poetic texts have since entered the American song repertoire, making them more accessible for both the performers and the audience alike.

During my studies as a collaborative pianist, I began to explore some of these works of this nature, and became very interested in performing more of them. This dissertation, I explored some of the works of this nature and showcased an array of available repertoire. These include text sources such as the dictionary, letters, a diary, a cookbook, speeches, and so forth. Selected works by the following composers were performed: Bruce Adolphe, Dominick Argento, Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Celius Dougherty, Stacy Garrop,

Juliana Hall, Jennifer Higdon, Lee Hoiby, Richard Hundley, Gabriel Kahane John Kandar, William Kenlon, Lori Laitman, Libby Larsen, Patrice Michaels, Ned Rorem, and Kamala Sankaram. The differences between using poetry and prose to compose an art song were discussed using several examples. A survey was also conducted with some of the composers of today to get some insight into how they approach composing with prose texts, and these questionnaires are attached in the appendix of this document. My excellent collaborators for this project were Olivia O'Brien, Henrique Carvalho, Amanda Densmoor, Colin Doyle, Jessica Harika, Alfonso Hernandez, and Bill Townsend.

The three recital programs comprising this dissertation were presented on April 14th, 2021, September 21st, 2022, and February 28th, 2023. Recordings of these three recitals can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

UNUSUAL SONG TEXTS: SELECTED 20TH- AND 21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN
ART SONG REPERTOIRE USING NON-POETIC TEXTS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:

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Acknowledgments

I remember when I was a five-year-old boy, my mother decided that I should receive piano instruction, not for me to become a world-class musician, but for the sole purpose of keeping me occupied after school for the years to come and staying out of trouble, especially during my teenage years. Little did she know that this would eventually ignite a spark of enthusiasm and interest in music. I thank her for giving me the chance to pursue music and relentlessly teaching me to be a better person in general.

It goes without saying how grateful I am for my piano teachers along the way: Felicia Chen, Dr. Yew Choong Cheong, and Dr. Nicholas Ong. Last, but never least, Professor Rita Sloan, who is my “Amazing Grace”. She never gave up on me; I became who I am today as a performer, a vocal coach, and a teacher because of her. Furthermore, I need to thank Timothy McReynolds for teaching me everything I needed to be a vocal coach, and most importantly – learning to trust my musical instincts from the get-go.

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I express my deepest gratitude to all my wonderful collaborators. Without you, your endless support and friendship, and your talents and knowledge, I would not have been able to make my recitals happen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you.

“O Mistress Mine” and “A Northeast Storm” Music by Juliana Hall. Copyright © 2017 by E. C. Schirmer Music company, Inc., a division of ECS Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Water Songs by Bruce Adolphe. © 2019 Southern Music. Used by permission.

MONICA’S WALTZ (from THE MEDIUM)

By Gian Carlo Menotti

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Recital Program I

Selected songs

1. The Bird and the Beast
2. The Children's Letter to the United Nations
3. Love in the Dictionary

Celius Dougherty
(1902 – 1986)

Selected songs

1. The Astronomers
2. A Package of Cookies
3. Postcard from Spain

Richard Hundley
(1931 – 2018)

Amanda Densmoor, soprano
Colin Doyle, tenor

Four Dialogues (1954)

1. The Subway
2. The Airport
3. The Apartment
4. In Spain and in New York

Ned Rorem
(1923 – 2022)

Alfonso Hernandez, piano

Intermission

Selected songs

1. Nuvoletta, Op. 25
2. Solitary Hotel, from *Despite and Still*, Op. 41

Samuel Barber
(1910 – 1981)

I Hate Music! (1943)

- I. My mother says...
- II. Jupiter has seven moons...
- III. I hate music!
- IV. A big Indian and a little Indian...
- V. I just found out today...

Leonard Bernstein
(1918 – 1990)

La Bonne Cuisine (1947)

- I. Plum Pudding
- II. *Queues de Bœuf* (Ox-tails)
- III. *Tavouk Gueunksis*
- IV. *Civet à Toute Vitesse* (Rabbit at Top Speed)

Amanda Densmoor, soprano

Recital Program II

My Ántonia (2000)

4. Landscape I: From the Train
5. Ántonia

Libby Larsen
(1950 -)

Try Me, Good King (2000)

2. Anne Boleyn

Amanda Densmoor, soprano

From the Diary of Virginia Woolf (1974)

- VII. Parents (December, 1940)
- VIII. Last Entry (March, 1941)

Dominick Argento
(1927 – 2019)

Jessica Harika, mezzo-soprano

Intermission

Me (Brenda Ueland) (1987)

- I. Why I Write This Book
- II. Childhood

Libby Larsen

A Letter, from “Four Dickinson Songs” (1988)

Lee Hoiby
(1926 – 2011)

The Northeast Storm (2015)

Juliana Hall
(1958 -)

A Letter from Sullivan Balou (1994)

John Kandar
(1927 -)

Dear Future Roommate (2017)

Lori Laitman
(1955 -)

Henrique Carvalho, baritone

Miss Manners on Music (1998)

- VI. Manners on the Opera
- VII. Envoi

Dominick Argento

Olivia O'Brien, mezzo-soprano

Recital Program III

“Water Facts,” from Water Songs (2019)

Bruce Adolphe
(1955 -)

Amanda Densmoor, soprano

“Lincoln’s Final,” from Civil Words (2015)

Jennifer Higdon
(1962 -)

Little Dream Pieces (2011 - 2016)

William Kenlon
(1983 -)

- I. Shoelaces
- VII. Columbia University
- XIV. Six Shots
- XX. Shoehorn
- XXII. The Fox

Bill Townsend, baritone

The Long View (2017)

Patrice Michaels
(1956 -)

- III. Advice from Morris
- IV. On Working Together

My Dearest Ruth (2013)

Stacy Garrop
(1969 -)

Amanda Densmoor, soprano

“The Mountain,” from Call Out (2018)

Kamala Sankaram
(1978 -)

Twitterkreis (2018 - 2019)

Gabriel Kahane
(1981 -)

- 1. *Fleischlied für* Mitt Romney
- 2. Martha Stewart
- 3. God’s Perfect Killing Machines
- 4. Marxist Peanut Allergy (for Robert Schumann)
- 5. Body Positivity
- 6. Euphemism
- 7. Hillary’s Social Media Game Leaves Something to be Desired
- 8. Marie Kondo
- 9. Nihilist Arby’s
- 10. Food Court Salad Whale Song
- 11. Ladies, If He...
- 12. *Fleischlied für* Mitt Romney: Part II

Bill Townsend, baritone

Recital Recording Tracks

Recital I

- 1-1: Celius Dougherty – The Bird and the Beast
- 1-2: Celius Dougherty – The Children’s Letter to the United Nations
- 1-3: Celius Dougherty – Love in the Dictionary
- 1-4: Richard Hundley – The Astronomers
- 1-5: Richard Hundley – A Package of Cookies
- 1-6: Richard Hundley – Postcard from Spain
- 1-7: Ned Rorem – Four Dialogues
- 1-8: Samuel Barber – Nuvoletta
- 1-9: Samuel Barber – Solitary Hotel
- 1-10: Leonard Bernstein – I Hate Music
- 1-11: Leonard Bernstein – *La Bonne Cuisine*

Recital II

- 2-1: Libby Larsen – My Antonia
- 2-2: Libby Larsen – Try Me, Good King
- 2-3: Dominick Argento – From the Diary of Virginia Woolf
- 2-4: Libby Larsen – ME (Brenda Ueland)
- 2-5: Various – Letters
- 2-6: Dominick Argento – Miss Manners on Music

Recital III

3-1: Bruce Adolphe – Water Facts

3-2: Jennifer Higdon – Lincoln’s Final

3-3: William Kenlon – Little Dream Pieces

3-4: Patrice Michaels – The Long View

3-5: Stacy Garrop – My Dearest Ruth

3-6: Kamala Sankaram – The Mountain

3-7: Gabriel Kahane – Twitterkreis

Chapter 1: Introduction

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was once told by his mentor, Johann Gottfried Herder, that poetry was meant to be sung. Almost all of his output was set to music by many composers of his time and continues into the 21st century. After the turn of the 20th century, a blossoming of different literary and artistic movements emerged. Art went into several different directions: pointillistic (Impressionism), rebellious against classical ideals (e.g. Expressionism, Dadaism), reminiscent – or rather, forgetting – of the world wars (Purism, Surrealism, Minimalism), or reflective of the modern, fast-paced, industrial, capitalist society (Futurism). Literature in the 20th century became more unrestricted in form, meter, and rhyming schemes. Thus, composers were looking into new ways of creating art songs; employing prose texts was one of them.

How did this trend start? Who started it? And how is composing art songs using prose texts different from poetic or folk texts? What needs to be taken into consideration when one performs these works? Are these works as powerful as the ones which use poetic texts?

Johannes Brahms wrote *Vier ernste Gesänge* (Four Serious Songs) in 1896, a set of four songs based on verses in the Luther Bible, in anticipation of Clara Schumann's impending death. This collection of art songs stands out as one of the earliest works to feature texts that are non-poetic, when poetry was the preferred medium for many composers in the 19th century. American composer Charles Ives wrote several songs, found in his collection of 114 Songs, that incorporated

unconventional texts, such as a newspaper article, a quote, and an essay from a journal. Despite being considered avant-garde for his time, his music was not widely accepted until later in his life. In fact, Ives may be considered a predecessor of this trend in using non-traditional sources for musical inspiration.

Over the last decade, several dissertations have been written about song cycles of this nature, but not much research has been done on this general topic. In my dissertation recitals, I performed selected works for voice and piano by American composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, and one for two pianos and two voices. Some of these works will be used to show how different composers dealt with these prose texts. Interviews with nine living composers were conducted in the form of a questionnaire, and all their answers are included in the appendix of this dissertation. Questions asked include how each of them approached the texts, the reason behind choosing them, the compositional techniques employed to reflect the text, and if applicable, how a performer should approach these songs.

I shall define prose texts in this dissertation to be any text that are not in any poetic form – including free verse – nor folk songs (as these were orally transmitted down through generations). Translations of foreign texts are not included in my discussions either, because of two reasons: one, the original intention of the original text may be lost (such as the rhythm and sounds of the language), and two, the original text source may be a poem. Generally, sources like newspaper articles, novel passages, letters, diaries, composer-written non-poetic texts, and so on, are perfect for the purpose of my research.

Chapter 2: Poetry vs Prose

Poetry, as defined by Britannica, is “literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound and rhythm.”¹ Poetry is made up of lines and stanzas, normally identifiable when the lines stop halfway through the page, sometimes has no punctuation in the same line, and continues with the thought on the next line. Artistic language is used in poems, usually for expression. Often you will see a lot of adjectives used to describe – in detail – feelings, situations, and/or scenes. Due to the artistic nature of poetry, there is a ‘limit’ on the words used, so poets use flowery words to convey meanings that are not used in daily situations. They can include rhyme and rhythm.

Rhythm in poetry, simply put, is the beat and pace of a poem, which is created by the stressed and unstressed syllables in the lines or verses. Poets intently arrange the words in a certain way to create rhythms, but if there are no apparent rhythmic patterns, the poem is a “free verse.” Here are some examples of rhythmic patterns: disyllabic patterns include an iamb (“duh-DUH”), a trochee (“DUH-duh”), a spondee (“DUH-DUH”); trisyllabic patterns such as an anapest (“duh-duh-DUH”), and dactyl (“DUH-duh-duh”). One unit of these rhythms is called a foot.

Meter in poetry, similar to meter in music, is the pattern of beats in a line. A monometer means there is a foot in a line, a dimeter means two feet in a line, and so

¹ Howard Nemerov, “Poetry,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry>.

on. Having more than eight feet per line is rare, but exceptions like C.K. Williams' poems exist. In Fig. 1, all three features of rhythm and meter are illustrated.



Fig. 1: Visual representation of rhythm and meter

Starting with a simple example, an iambic dimeter means there are two feet of a common iambic rhythm in a line - “duh-DUH / duh-DUH”. Here’s an example by Robert Frost, “Dust of snow.” Words used in this poem are monosyllabic. The stressed words are also keywords to understanding the poem, rather than only saying “the bird shook something on me.”

The way a crow
shook down on me
the dust of snow.

- Robert Frost

The following excerpt from an epic poem “The Song of Hiawatha” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is in trochaic tetrameter: the stress is at the beginning of a disyllable, rather than the end (“DUH-duh”), and there are four feet in each line.

By the shores of Gitchee Gumee
By the shining Big-Sea-Water
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis
Daughter of the Moon, Nokomis

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

As a matter of fact, most (if not all) of nursery rhymes are trochaic too. It is well-established in ancient traditions that trochaic rhythm is faster than iambic rhythm and tends to be associated with lively situations.² Hence we can deduce that nursery rhymes have a ‘lively’ rhythm. Moreover, we also know that the tunes to some of these rhymes are in a major key.

“Come away, death,” a Shakespearean text that is frequently set to music, is taken from his play *Twelfth Night*, in Act 2, Scene 4. It is a song sung by Feste, the fool. Five different settings of this text by two British composers (Roger Quilter and Gerald Finzi), and three American composers (Dominick Argento, Juliana Hall, Erich Wolfgang Korngold) will be investigated. A detailed explanation of the process will be given in the case of Quilter, but a summary of the findings will be presented following it. Only the first four lines will be examined.

Roger Quilter wrote this song in 1905 and published it in a set of Three Shakespeare Songs, Op.6. As we know, the downbeats of each measure are points in the music that should be stressed, regardless of phrase. With this, I will mark down all the syllables that are on the downbeats, showing where the stresses are placed, which are underlined. Below is both the score, and the poetry:

² A.M. Devine and Laurence D. Stephens, “The Psychology of Rhythm,” in *The Prosody of Greek Speech* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 116.

Poco Andante (♩ = 63)

Voice. *mf*
Come a-way, come a-way,

Piano. *mp*

death, And in sad cy-press let me be laid;

Fig. 2: Roger Quilter – “Come away, death” Op. 6, No. 1, mm. 1-6

Come away, come away, death,
 And in sad cypress, let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
 I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

In this and the following settings, I will also take other strong beats as a stress. In Quilter for lines 2 and 4, as many of the syllables are on weaker parts of the beats, the other possible stressed syllable happens in mm. 9 on the third beat.

Gerald Finzi set Shakespeare’s texts between 1929 to 1942 and published these songs with a beautiful title “Let us Garlands Bring,” Op.18. The song is set in simple duple meter, so in theory, the stressed syllables will be on the downbeats.

Come away, come away, death,
 And in sad cypress, let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
 I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

Austrian-born composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold had Songs of the Clown, Op. 29, either published or composed in 1943, the same year he became a naturalized citizen of the United States. The “clown” in the song cycle title refers to Feste from the play. The word “me” is stressed in this song by syncopation, which I have italicized:

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress, let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

Dominick Argento wrote Six Elizabethan Songs from 1957 to 1958, and he utilizes the same texts in the fourth song which he titled “Dirge.” This particular setting is the most peculiar out of all five, as it is in quadruple meter within the beats of eighth notes. In this case, I have also marked up the third beats as semi-important, both underlined and italicized.

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress, let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

If you closely look at this finding, it almost seems as though the vocal line’s ‘downbeat’ is on beat 3, as these stresses occur more in each line of the poem.

Juliana Hall, a student of Argento’s, wrote “O Mistress Mine,” a collection of 12 songs for countertenor and piano, of which the ninth is “Come Away, Death.” As compared to the other settings, this one is in compound meter.



Fig 3: Juliana Hall – “Come away, death” from O Mistress Mine, mm. 5-10

Come away, come away, death,
 And in *sad* cypress, *let* me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
 I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

After looking through all these songs, there are definite words or syllables that are stressed in all five settings, such as ‘come’ and ‘laid’ in the first line. Depending on the composer and/or the reader, there may be different words that the composer would like to stress in the music, like ‘me’ in Korngold, or ‘sad’ in Hall, by musical techniques such as syncopation, changing of meter, or placing the syllable on a weaker downbeat. All in all, poems are in fact easier to set to music due to the natural rhythms ‘designed’ in the poem.

Prose simply is anything that is not a poem. It is a form of written or spoken language that follows the natural flow of commonplace speech. It uses ordinary

grammatical structures and follows conventions of formal academic writing. Below is a table explaining the clear differences of poetry and prose.

Poetry	Prose
Lines and stanzas	Sentences and paragraphs
Artistic language for expression	Normal language patterns
Word limits	No word limits
Can include rhyme and rhythm	No rhyme or rhythm
Need to dig deeper to understand meaning	Easy to understand
Used creatively/artistically	May or may not be used creatively

Table 1: Differences between poetry and prose

There are many types of prose, but some general categories of prose are fictional (e.g. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and so on), non-fictional (autobiographies, historical events, philosophy, finance), heroic (rare these days, but they include narratives about legends, mythology, fables, and parables), and poetic.

Poetic prose is a hybrid of prose and poetry, fusing both forms into one. One good example of this is “Breakfast Table,” by Amy Lowell. This block of text is not arranged in lines or stanzas, does not have a clear rhyming scheme, no word limits per se, but uses artistic language, has rhymes here and there for expression, and somehow brings forth a musical feel to the text.

Sentence stresses are ways in which the speaker stresses different parts of the sentence to convey a different meaning. Generally, it is normal to hear inflections in everyday spoken word, regardless of the language. Putting aside syllable stresses in a

word, let's examine this simple sentence, "Are you going to eat that?" There are exactly five words that can be stressed: ARE, YOU, GOING, EAT, and THAT. The following table shows the connotations of each different stress.

Are you going to eat THAT?	That's disgusting!
Are you going to EAT that?	I don't think it's food...
Are you GOING to eat that?	It's been there for a while...
Are YOU going to eat that?	I thought it's for ME!
ARE you going to eat that?	You're just staring at it...

Table 2: Different connotations for different stresses

Just as with poetry, prose texts would be organized by looking for stressed syllables or words, and then placed on the downbeats in the music. As discussed, poetic meter goes hand-in-hand with musical meter, and so, lines and stanzas correspond to phrases and melodies. This is also true for prose texts. Syncopation and marked *tenuti* both allow composers to highlight words that come after the downbeat.

Sentence inflections are reflected in music, either by giving stress on the word using the techniques mentioned or following the highs and lows of speaking the sentence itself. We do not speak in a monotone unless it is done for a reason. Inflections would thus be approximate to our daily speech, like Arnold Schoenberg's *sprechstimme*, and *recitativo* in any opera. A good example is "Monica's Waltz" in Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium*. Instead of having the singer speak it, Menotti tells the singer to sing these liberally, and gives pitches to sing them on, giving performers

less ‘freedom’ for interpretation. Similarly, composers use this approach to replicate speech inflections in the vocal line.

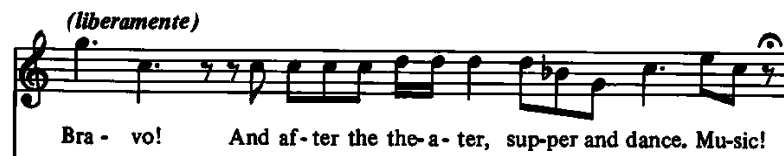


Fig. 4: Gian Carlo Menotti – Monica’s Waltz from The Medium, m. 7

Adolphe’s “Water Facts” combines cabaret with satirical humor into the piano part. The syllables underlined are necessary stresses in the following sentence, and the ones in bold and italics are possible stresses: “A jellyfish and a cucumber are ***each*** ***ninety-five*** percent water.” When a syllable of a word is placed in the beginning of the measure, it is a good indicator of a stressed syllable. The stressed parts, as predicted, are on strong beats (beats 1 and 3), while the unstressed syllables are placed in weaker parts of a beat. With the word ‘water,’ accent marks are placed on both syllables, possibly wanting to highlight that word, as it is the title of the song and the cycle. To achieve this, he made sure that the first note is higher in pitch than the unstressed syllable to show the correct word stresses. This is another demonstration of speech inflection.

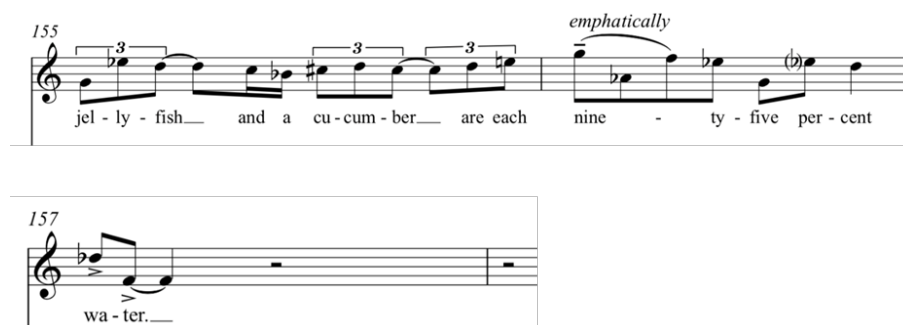


Fig. 5: Bruce Adolphe – “Water Facts” from Water Songs, mm.155-157, voice part

In the three recitals I have done, I have found several ways composers have set music to the texts of their choice. Depending on the nature of the texts, it dictates the style of the music that is needed to enhance the text. The following are three examples, each taken from my three recital programs.

In Samuel Barber's "Nuvoletta," he used text from James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake*, which is well known for its experimental style and infamously a difficult literary work in the Western canon. Some of the words Joyce used in this passage are not very accessible or are made-up, but they seem to have a sort of singsong quality to them. There are poetic devices such as alliterations ("spunn of sisteen shimmers") and onomatopoeia ("sighed" and "fluttered"). So, not only does it have a singsong quality, but the words also give a vivid illustration of the scene or the story. Seeing how poetic the text is, Barber composed a dance-like accompaniment that could possibly be played on its own. He changes the meter in the song to accommodate the text, paying close attention to stressed syllables. There are episodes in the song where text painting is involved, for example, starting from m.108 where the text mentions numbers, Barber underlays the numbers with the same rhythm for the left hand, "ones" with a quarter note, "twos" with two eighth notes, and so on.

Argento took the text from Miss Manners' advice column about a disgruntled operagoer in "Manners at the Opera," who was complaining about how some audiences were getting up immediately after the curtain closes to leave the hall just so that they could beat the crowds to the doors. Miss Manners gave her sage advice to say that there is no harm in that. The composer, upon bringing the text to life, imagines the situation and creates a backdrop to the text, allowing the listeners to picture the scene lucidly.

As Miss Manners states that she would have wished to be an opera singer, the music slowly unfolds to her vocalizing a beautiful melodic line, very much like a *bel canto* aria.

“Lincoln’s Final” by Higdon is composed in a very stately manner. Since the text is the inaugural address given by Lincoln, a perfect way to set the mood is to have blocked chords underneath the speech. The music is reminiscent of something regal, much like Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March, No. 1. The chordal accompaniment gives a stately atmosphere, invoking a clear sense of importance that is about to happen. The use of parallel root-position chords, left-hand open-fifths bass, and mostly major chords help with creating and instilling hope in the listener.

Chapter 3: Program Notes

3.1: Recital I

3.1.1: Celius Dougherty

Primarily a pianist, accompanist and duo-pianist, Celius Dougherty (1902 – 1986) also composed many vocal works, including a one-act opera for children as well as about 200 songs. He once said, “I love poetry. I love what poetry suggests to me in the way of music. The first thing that I wrote was a song. When I was seven years old I wrote a song.”³ Victoria Etnier Villamil describes his songs to be simple, “generally optimistic, often humorous,” and “rendered with taste and skill.”⁴

The Bird and the Beast (1951)

The Complete Plain Words is an English writing style guide written by British civil servant, Sir Ernest Arthur Gowers. It contains two separately written portions: *Plain Words* (1948), and *ABC of Plain Words* (1951). The *Complete* was published in 1954, and continually updated with the newest edition printed in 2014. This ‘manual’ has been used to aid officials in using the language as a tool of trade.

This block of text appears under Section V: The Choice of Words, where Gowers feels compelled to demonstrate the power of being straight-to-the-point and

³ Celius Dougherty, biography in *30 Art Songs: in original keys* (New York: G. Schirmer, 2004).

⁴ Victoria Etnier Villamil, *A Singer's Guide to American Art Song* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press), 137-139.

concise. He introduces this short essay written by a ten-year-old child about a bird and a beast to prove the simplicity of a child's thoughts.

The Children's Letter to the United Nations (1949)

This is a letter written by a kindergarten class of twenty-six kids from Public School No.90 in Queens, New York, about their views on war and peace to U.N. Delegate Warren Austin. Their teacher, Alma Haring, shared the letter.⁵

Love in the Dictionary (1948)

Dougherty was challenged by a friend to write something different, in the way of a love song. It was suggested to him that he look up the word "love" in the dictionary. Being fascinated by the series of definitions he found, Dougherty decided to write music to go with the entire dictionary entry.⁶

3.1.2: Richard Hundley

In 1987, Richard Hundley (1931 – 2018) was recognized as one of the only twelve American composers for vocalists by the Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition, joining the likes of Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Paul Bowles,

⁵ "Education: Guns, Babies, Bellybuttons," March 31, 1947, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,793510,00.html>.

⁶ Dougherty, Composer's Notes in *30 Art Songs: in original keys*.

and Charles Ives, to name a few. He studied composition with Israel Citkowitz, William Flanagan, and Virgil Thomson. In a preface to Hundley's publication of *Eight Early Songs*, tenor Paul Sperry wrote that Hundley's objective as a composer is "to crystallize emotion." He was very masterful in creating the right music for the songs that he wrote.⁷

The Astronomers (1959)

Carol Kimball describes this song as "one of Hundley's most beautiful and effective songs."⁸ Quiet chords accompany a recitative-like vocal line, before launching into the epitaph with a mystical accompaniment, bursting with a gorgeous piano solo that reflects the "breadth and mystery of the starry night."⁹

A Package of Cookies (1963)

This text is taken from a letter Virgil Thomson wrote to Hundley on July 16, 1963. In Hundley's *Ten Songs*, he writes:

"When Virgil Thomson and I met we immediately took each other up with enthusiasm. For twenty-seven years, until his death, he was my friend and mentor. We shared similar backgrounds: he was from Missouri, and I, though born in Cincinnati, was reared in Kentucky. A Package of Cookies is a setting of a letter Virgil wrote to thank me for the gift of a tin of cookies. I could hear him speaking in the letter, and I was inspired to write his musical portrait. The song contains musical

⁷ Paul Sperry, "Crystallizing Emotion—Remembering Richard Hundley (1930-2018)," New Music USA, March 7, 2018, <https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/remembering-richard-hundley/>.

⁸ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2005), 317.

⁹ Ibid.

materials favored by the composer, including rows of triads built on the whole-tone scale, polytonality, and a paraphrase of an old hymn tune that children often sang in Bible class on Sunday, “Yes! Jesus Loves Me!”¹⁰

Postcard from Spain (1963)

Hundley wrote in a recital program for a New York recital: “Earlier in the year, Miss (Teresa) Stratas had told me that she was looking for songs for a series of concerts in her native Canada. Not knowing what texts to set, but knowing her dramatic capabilities, I decided to rearrange the words of a postcard I had received from a friend.”¹¹

3.1.3: Ned Rorem

Ned Rorem (1923 – 2022) was a composer of many genres but known more for his vocal works. He composed over 500 works for the voice. Kimball quoted Rorem in an interview with Phillip Ramey: “I always think vocally. Even when writing for violin or timpani, it’s the vocalist in me trying to get out. Music is, after all a sung expression, and any composer worthy of the name is intrinsically a singer whether he allows it or not.”¹² Rorem was strongly enthusiastic about French music, particularly Impressionists like Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. He studied with numerous

¹⁰ Richard Hundley, notes in *Ten Songs for High Voice and Piano* (Milwaukee, WI: Boosey & Hawkes), ii.

¹¹ Esther Jane Hardenbergh, “Postcard from Spain,” *Song of America*, <https://songofamerica.net/song/postcard-from-spain/>.

¹² Philip Ramey, “Ned Rorem: Not Just a Song Composer,” *Keynote 4*, no. 3 (1980), 14, quoted in Arlys L. McDonald, *Ned Rorem: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 9.

composers including Gian Carlo Menotti, Aaron Copland, and Virgil Thomson. While spending time in France and Morocco, he was hugely influenced by neoclassicists such as Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud.

Four Dialogues

Frank O'Hara wrote the text in 1953, originally calling it *The Quarrel Sonata*, and intended it to be set for two voices and two pianos. Rorem referred to it as “glib non-poetry”¹³, however, rhymes are found in the lines of the dialogue. This work was conceived in early 1954, in a genre that falls in between a concert cantata and a staged opera. These four songs are set like a sonata: fast – slow – fast – slow. Rorem gives suggestions as to how this ‘sonata’ could be performed in his notes, either without action or with minimal staging. Additionally, he notes that he intentionally did not specify what voice types the singers should be, so any singers who are able to sing the vocal ranges may sing them. Equal importance should be given to all performers, including the piano duo, thus establishing a quartet of dialogues.¹⁴

3.1.4: Samuel Barber

Samuel Barber (1910 – 81), who majored in voice (he was a baritone), piano, and composition at the Curtis Institute, is one of the most prominent American

¹³ Ned Rorem, notes in *Four Dialogues for Two Voices and Two Pianos* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1969).

¹⁴ Ibid.

composers of his time. Some of his well-known works include the *Adagio for Strings*, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, and the song cycle *Hermit Songs*.

Nuvoletta, Op.25

Composed in 1947, a few months after *Knoxville*, “Nuvoletta” makes use of text extracted from James Joyce’s final novel, *Finnegan’s Wake*. This comic novel was written over 17 years, based on a comic Irish music hall song of the 1850s, and was considered avant-garde and revolutionary compared to its contemporaries. It contains many invented and combined words, such as ‘sfumastelliacinous’, and the characters and plot were treated nonlinearly. It was believed that Eleanor Steber, an operatic soprano with whom Barber was working with at the time, premiered this song, but the details of this premiere are unknown.¹⁵ In a 1978 interview about this song, Barber said:

“What can you do when you get lines like ‘Nuvoletta reflected for the last time on her little long life, and she made up all her myriads of drifting minds in one. She canceled all her engagements. She climbed over the bannisters; she gave a chilly, childly, cloudy cry,’ except to set them instinctively, as abstract music, almost as a vocalise.”¹⁶

“Solitary Hotel,” from *Despite and Still*, Op. 41

Despite and Still is a set of five songs written in 1968, after the failed premiere of *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Barber went to Italy

¹⁵ Richard Walters, notes in *Samuel Barber: 65 Songs* (New York: G. Schirmer, 2010), 28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

in retreat and was in semi-seclusion. While there, these songs were the only lengthy work he wrote in the following two years after the failure, personally choosing these texts to reflect his isolation and inwardness.

The fourth song in the set, “Solitary Hotel,” was excerpted from James Joyce’s masterwork *Ulysses*. This novel was initially published in installments in an American journal, *The Little Review*, from 1918 to 1920, and later published in its entirety by Sylvia Beach in Paris in 1922. *Ulysses* follows the daily life of Leopold Bloom in Dublin, Ireland, and mirrors the hero Odysseus in Homer’s classical poem, the *Odyssey*.

3.1.5: Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein (1918 – 90) is known for his contribution to the musical theater repertoire with the all-time classic *West Side Story*. Nonetheless, he produced many other essentially American works such as the comic operetta *Candide*, a three-movement choral work on Hebrew texts, the *Chichester Psalms*, and a multifaceted *MASS* that is an amalgamation of different contemporary styles in a theatrical sacred work.

I Hate Music!

The song cycle “I Hate Music” was composed in 1942 – ’43, along with Bernstein’s own text. It was premiered in 1943 at the Public Library in Lenox,

Massachusetts by Jennie Tourel (mezzo) and Bernstein himself at the piano. Bernstein dedicated this cycle to his friend and flat mate, Edys Merrill, who supposedly cried out “I hate music!” while Bernstein was coaching singers and playing the piano. Bernstein confessed to Aaron Copland in a letter that this cycle was more in the style of Copland, to which he responded by saying: “I want to hear about your writing a song that has no Copland, no Hindemith, no Strav., no Bloch, no Milhaud and no Bartók in it. Then I’ll talk to you.”

The song cycle consists of five songs sung in the perspective of a ten-year-old girl named Barbara. According to Kimball, these songs are arranged like a palindrome, with the first and fifth song like “bookends” of the cycle that shows the personality of Barbara. The second and fourth songs are in irregular meters and in faster tempi. At the center lies the title song “I hate music!”¹⁷

It is necessary to note that Bernstein subtitles this work as “Five Kid Songs,” but writes the following as a direction to the performer: “In the performance of these songs, coyness is to be assiduously avoided. The natural, unforced sweetness of child expressions can never be successfully gilded; rather will it come through the music in proportion to the dignity and sophisticated understanding of the singer.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Kimball, 296.

¹⁸ Leonard Bernstein, *Song Album* (Milwaukee: Boosey & Hawkes, 1988), 8.

La Bonne Cuisine

La Bonne Cuisine was composed in 1947, and premiered the year after at Town Hall, New York, New York. Bernstein dedicated this set of songs to Jennie Tourel, a mezzo soprano, who was also the first performer of Baba the Turk in *The Rake's Progress* by Igor Stravinsky.

The texts were taken from an 1899 cookbook that Émile Dumont wrote, *La Bonne Cuisine Française: Tout ce qui a Rapport a la Table, Manuel-Guide pour la Ville et la Campagne* (Fine French Cooking: Everything that has to do with the Table, Manual Guide for City and Country). These four songs can either be sung in the original French texts, or the English translations done by Bernstein himself.

Jack Gottlieb, who wrote the notes to these songs in the published collection¹⁹, comments that most of these songs are complete recipes, except for “*Civet à Toute Vitesse*” where *muscade* (“nutmeg”) and *un verre d'eau-de-vie* (“a glass of brandy”) were omitted.

¹⁹ Jack Gottlieb, Notes on the Songs in *Song Album* (Milwaukee: Boosey & Hawkes, 1988), 4.

3.2: Recital II

3.2.1: Libby Larsen

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) is one of America's most prolific composers today, and the most performed in today's recital landscape. Her music is praised for its "dynamic, deeply inspired, and vigorous contemporary American spirit,"²⁰ and for being "accessible, fresh, modern and intelligent."²¹ She was a student of Dominick Argento, Eric Stokes, and Paul Fetler. Like Argento, she preferred to use prose texts: "While I set both poetry and prose, I am more drawn to prose because of its rhythmic freedom and honest emotion. Texts that reveal strong, colorful and fearless people, many times women, are especially attractive to me."²² Larsen continues to be active in the industry, being an advocate for contemporary music, and continues to write music through today.

My *Ántonia*

This song cycle was commissioned by soprano Jane Dressler at Kent State University, and premiered in June 2000 in Brownville, Nebraska. Larsen took excerpts from Willa Cather's American novel of the same title and adapted them to the texts of the seven songs. The novel tells a story from the viewpoint of Jim Burden, an orphan boy from Virginia, and *Ántonia* Shimerda, the elder daughter in a family of Bohemian immigrants. They were brought over to Nebraska to be pioneers towards the end of the

²⁰ Kimball, 331.

²¹ Gregory Zavracky, "A Guide to Libby Larsen's *My Ántonia*," *Journal of Singing* 74, no. 4, (March/April 2018): 393.

²² Libby Larsen, letter to Kimball, August 2, 1994, quoted in Kimball, 331.

19th century. Larsen said in a phone interview with Zavracky, “I knew *Ántonia* was going to be premiered by a soprano but I hear it as a tenor, so I had two ideal voices in my brain.”²³

“Anne Boleyn,” from Try Me, Good King

Try Me, Good King is a song cycle consisting of five songs, and texts taken from letters and last words of the first five wives of Henry VIII. Larsen describes these songs as a “monodrama of anguish and power.”²⁴ As one mnemonic way taught to remember the fates of these wives spells: “Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived.”

Larsen incorporates lute songs composed during the reign of Elizabeth I into each song, acting as the commentary of the emotional torment experienced by these doomed queens. On top of that, she also tells us that there are two musical gestures that are used to unify the cycle: repeated notes (recalls lute, psychological tension), and bell-tolls (punctuates each song, release spiritual meaning of words).²⁵

Anne Boleyn, the mother of Elizabeth I, was Henry VIII’s second wife who was executed on false charges of witchcraft, incest, and adultery. To reflect her high-strung personality, Larsen uses angular and declamatory vocal lines and harmonies with sudden changes in tempo.²⁶ Anne Boleyn’s lute song, John Downland’s “If my

²³ Gregory Zavracky, “Libby Larsen’s *My Ántonia*: the song cycle and the tonal landscape of the American prairie,” (DMA diss., Boston University, 2014), 25.

²⁴ Libby Larsen, notes in *Try Me, Good King* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kimball, 334.

complaints could passions move,” appears in the contrasting middle section juxtaposed with the text of a letter by Henry VIII to her.

ME (Brenda Ueland)

Brenda Ueland was a journalist, editor, freelance writer, and a teacher of writing. She was a native of Minneapolis, and described as “Joan of Arc, Robin Hood, Kathryn Hepburn, and a strolling minstrel all rolled into one” by her neighbor.²⁷ The autobiography was written when she was 47, thus only capturing the first half of her life.²⁸ Larsen was commissioned to write this cycle by the Schubert Club of St. Paul, Minnesota, and it was premiered in November 1987.

The cycle comprises eight songs and is organized in the chronological order of Ueland’s autobiography. The first and eighth songs are set in present time which serves as musical bookends of the cycle; the other songs are memories from childhood through while working as a single parent. The climax of the cycle happens in the seventh song, “Art (Life is Love)...,” where it presents Ueland’s motto in life ‘*memento vivere*’ (remember to live).²⁹ Larsen shares in her notes that while Ueland’s autobiography consists of insignificant memories of her life, it is these moments that shape us to be who we are in life.³⁰

²⁷ Harriet McCleary, “A Song Cycle by Libby Larsen: ME (Brenda Ueland),” *The NATS Journal* 51, no. 2 (November/December 1994): 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Libby Larsen, notes in *ME (Brenda Ueland)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

3.2.2: Dominick Argento

Predominantly a vocal composer, Dominick Argento (1927 – 2017) had a profound knowledge of the voice and incorporated tonality, atonality, and twelve-tone music into his writing. He is known for many of his operas including *Postcard from Morocco* and *Miss Havisham's Fire*. His acknowledgments include a Pulitzer Prize for *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, numerous grants, and several ASCAP awards. In an article Roger Pines wrote about Argento regarding his lyricism, he quotes the composer: “I’ve almost given up setting poetry, just because prose allows me more freedom musically, to make lines longer, to make them go in interesting directions. Poetry in a sense dictates the highs and lows, the duration, the rhythm. I find it liberating to work with prose.”³¹ In addition to that, he spoke at a keynote address for a NATS national convention about how he felt more connected to working with prose: “... principal speakers, ..., stop doing whatever it is they normally do ... they stop looking out over the world and look inward, into their own hearts and discover something there they had been too distracted to notice before or too bound by convention to admit.”³²

From the Diary of Virginia Woolf

Argento was originally commissioned to write a cycle for Jessye Norman at the Schubert Club in Minneapolis in 1974, but she canceled. A series of events occurred,

³¹ Roger Pines, “Dominick Argento: Writing American Bel Canto,” *Opera Monthly* 1, no. 8 (December 1988): 20-25, quoted in Kimball, 312.

³² Dominick Argento, keynote address, NATS national convention, 1987, quoted in Kimball, 312.

and she was ultimately replaced by the British mezzo Janet Baker. After Bob Moore, a friend of Baker and Argento, suggested Virginia Woolf's "The Waves," Argento stumbled upon *A Writer's Diary*, and discovered that he was more interested in this than the original idea. Looking for exactly which entries he would use was challenging, but he finally narrowed down his favorites to eight entries and arranged them chronologically from the earliest to the final entry. These entries are spaced roughly five years apart.

The final score was sent out to Boosey, Baker and Martin Isepp, Baker's pianist, for the premiere. They were both on separate musical tours and were not available to rehearse until they arrived in Minneapolis the week of the recital premiere. When the composer heard them perform through the entire cycle the first time, he was dumbfounded. This song cycle eventually earned the Pulitzer Prize in April, 1975.

Miss Manners on Music

Dr. Robert Martin, the husband of Judith Martin (a.k.a. Miss Manners), had wanted to commission Argento to write a song cycle for her sixtieth birthday. Argento quoted a substantial fee after a twenty-month correspondence, and Robert Martin agreed to it. Argento was sent four large anthologies of her writings, and while scanning through all of them, he happened to stumble upon several articles on music-related topics.³³ In a pre-performance talk on this cycle, held at the University of Maryland's

³³ Dominick Argento, *Catalogue Raisonné As Memoir* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2004), 181.

week-long festival “The Art of Argento” (where both the Martins were also present and modulated by Carolyn Black-Sotir), they talked about how the advice on how to behave (or not to) at the opera was particularly attractive. Argento mentioned:

“... and without being aware of it, she slowly imagines not only the bad audience but herself on that stage. My favorite line of the whole thing was ... ‘I would love to be an opera singer (and I have all the qualifications but voice)’ ... and I began to imagine, wouldn’t it be nice to write a piece of music with all of that information is given if you can sort of ease into suddenly singing something [quality, like à la] Puccini’s bottom drawer, little operatic aria. ... You’ll see Miss Manners transform herself into the opera singer that she always wanted to be. And once I read that, I thought that had possibility that I followed through the rest of the volume and found things on how to behave at the ballet, at a recital of contemporary music ...”³⁴

Professor Emeritus Linda Mabbs, spoke to Argento regarding the possibility of orchestrating this cycle, as the orchestrated version of his Six Elizabethan Songs were being performed in the same recital.³⁵ In fact, the premiere of the new arrangement was at this festival, scored for string quintet, percussion and celesta. He also commented on how her principles were very much aligned with his, and how he was “destined to meet” Judith Martin.³⁶

3.2.3: Letters Set

“A Letter,” from the Dickinson Songs – Lee Hoiby

A disciple of Gian Carlo Menotti at Curtis, Lee Hoiby (1926 – 2011) is known for his vocal works and operas. In an unpublished doctoral thesis by Robin Rice, he

³⁴ Pre-concert talk, University of Maryland, College Park, April 23, 2012.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

writes that Hoiby acknowledges Samuel Barber as his “spiritual guide, (his) mentor musically in a way, just by osmosis.”³⁷ Hoiby’s 1971 opera *Summer and Smoke* was declared by the New York Post as “the finest American opera to date.” Due to his lyrical nature in the vocal line, singers enjoy performing his songs.

“A Letter” was originally the first song from *Four Dickinson Songs*. Hoiby was later commissioned by Cynthia Miller to add a new song into the set as the first song. He then also renamed the set to *The Shining Place*, thus pushing “A Letter” as the second song of the cycle.³⁸ Composed in 1988 – ’89, the set consists of songs set to Dickinson’s poems and a letter sent to Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a literary critic for *The Atlantic Monthly*. This particular passage, with a frequently quoted opening, was taken from her second letter out of all her correspondences to Higginson. Her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, encouraged her to write to Higginson for his validity of her poetic works after he had written an article on the *Atlantic* inspiring young writers to “charge your style with life.”³⁹

“A Northeast Storm” – Juliana Hall

Juliana Hall (b. 1958) is another prolific composer specializing in art songs, monodramas, and vocal chamber works, and her music is described as “glistening, poignant” (Gramophone), “complex in conception and construction” (Planet Hugill, London), with “graceful, nuanced vocal lines” (Opera News). She has written over 60

³⁷ Robin Rice, “The Songs of Lee Hoiby,” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, 1993), 17, quoted in Kimball, 304.

³⁸ Christian Logan Morren, “Lee Hoiby’s Song Cycle *The Shining Place*, with Poetry by Emily Dickinson” (DMA diss., University of Oklahoma, 2010), 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

substantial works, such as *A World Turned Upside Down*, and *Syllables of Velvet*, *Sentences of Plush* – to name a few. She studied composition with Martin Bresnick, Leon Kirchner, Frederic Rzewski, and Dominick Argento.

59

Poco Rit.♩ = 52

don't say much a - bout it!

Poco Rit.♩ = 52

pp

Ped. 8va * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

62

mp

Vin - nie is at the in - stru - ment,

p

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

Fig. 6: Juliana Hall – *A Northeast Storm*, mm. 59-63

In this monodrama, Hall takes the text from a letter Emily Dickinson wrote to her brother, William Austin Dickinson, who was away from home. Emily described the activities that were happening in the drawing room at home amidst a raging storm, while their sister was at the piano entertaining the family. The letter ends with Emily stating that if her sister does not stop singing, she will start crying. Hall cleverly imbeds Chopin's Raindrop Prelude (Op. 28, No. 15) when Emily begins to write about her

sister at the piano in m.61 (Fig. 6). Together with Lori Laitman's "Dear Future Roommate," this song was commissioned by the Lyric Fest of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for a recital of letter songs in 2016.

"A Letter from Sullivan Balou" – John Kander

John Kander (b. 1927) is known mostly for his output in musical theater, commonly seen in the songwriting team Kander and Ebb. He graduated from Oberlin College and did his graduate studies at Columbia University where he studied with Douglas Moore.

This song uses the texts of a heartbreaking letter written by Sullivan Balou (1829 – 1861), an American lawyer and politician from Rhode Island, who served as a major in the Union Army during the American Civil War. In this famous letter, Ballou expressed his feelings to his 24-year-old wife, Sarah, on the eve of a battle against the Confederacy. This letter was probably never mailed but found in his trunk after he died in the battle.

Little has been written about this song; however, it is known to have been written in 1994, and performed by Renee Fleming with the Washington Opera Orchestra in a concert at the White House.

“Dear Future Roommate” – Lori Laitman

Lori Laitman (b. 1955) is known as a composer of the vocal arts. She has composed many operas, choral works, and numerous art songs. *Fanfare Magazine* described her as “one of the most talented and intriguing of living composers,” while *Journal of Singing* wrote: “It is difficult to think of anyone before the public today who equals her exceptional gifts for embracing a poetic text and giving it new and deeper life through music.” She is an alumnus of Yale College and the Yale School of Music.

Laitman was tasked by Lyric Fest of Philadelphia to find a humorous letter to set to music. Dana Gioia, Laitman’s regular collaborator, suggested that she use his son Mike’s application letter to Stanford. Laitman writes: “Mike’s sense of humor, language and evocative descriptions made this letter perfect for song. The rhythms of “My father is a poet” become a leitmotif in the piano, where it is used extensively and in various iterations – thus underscoring the idea that the “trials” of Mike’s childhood were a direct result of his father’s occupation.” She originally scored this song for baritone and piano in 2015. She revised that version in 2017 for tenor and piano and carried forward this revision for the baritone version as well.

3.3: Recital III

3.3.1: “Water Facts,” from *Water Songs* – Bruce Adolphe

Bruce Adolphe (b. 1955) is a composer, music scholar, and pianist, and is known to many Americans for his radio show *Piano Puzzlers* broadcast on National Public Radio (NPR) from 2002.

Water Songs is a collection of songs set to poems by Rumi, Katherine Barrett Swett, Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, James Joyce, as well as random facts about water from government statistics. When asked about his thoughts on the song “Water Facts” in a brief email correspondence, Adolphe writes:

“The reason I wrote the song *Water Facts* for Angel Blue — as part of a song cycle, of course — is that Angel had recorded my brief, funny song, *Valley Girl in Love* before we knew each other. ... Knowing I needed to come up with a humorous text, I thought that a list of facts might be fun, and since the song cycle is called *Water Songs*, water facts were the way to go. Once I compiled a list of facts from various websites, I picked my favorite water facts, knowing all along that I would end the song with the human brain being 73% water, which comes as no surprise. Musically, I went for a combination of chromatically inflected casual tonality, with discreet flourishes that would function as punctuation. The voice part is a mix of music that draws on recitative, cabaret, and dramatic aria. It can be performed seriously (which is still humorous) or with a sense of playfulness. It depends on the performing artists, of course.”⁴⁰

3.3.2: “Lincoln’s Final,” from *Civil Words* – Jennifer Higdon

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962) was originally a self-taught flutist, but only started composition at the age of 21. Despite the challenges, she is one of the prominent

⁴⁰ Bruce Adolphe, email conversation with composer, February 11, 2023.

composers of her time, winning a 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, and an International Opera Award for Best World Premiere for her opera, *Cold Mountain*. Fanfare Magazine praised her for having “the distinction of being at once complex, sophisticated but readily accessible emotionally.”

The song cycle “Civil Words” is set to texts from the American Civil War. The text in this song is taken from Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural Address, which starts from the famous words, “Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, ...”

3.3.3: Little Dream Pieces – William Kenlon

William Kenlon (b. 1983), an alumnus of The University of Maryland, College Park, is based in Washington, D.C., and specializes in chamber, choral and jazz music. These short songs are based on the texts that he would write down after having bizarre dreams the night before. He writes at the beginning of all five volumes comprising five songs each:

“The more I dream, the more I find that most dreams are not profound, life changing inspirations, but rather assemblies of odd, incongruous, and sometimes mundane images and ideas that are often more befuddling than enlightening. Little Dream Pieces exists as an ongoing project of setting simple, matter-of-fact accounts of such dreams for piano and medium voice.”⁴¹

⁴¹ William Kenlon, notes in *Little Dream Pieces* (2011 – 2016).

3.3.4: The Long View – Patrice Michaels

Patrice Michaels (b. 1956) is both a composer and soprano, as well as being extremely passionate in the collaborative arts. She has appeared in many recordings as a soprano and recorded the album *Notorious RBG in Song* with pianist Kuang-Hao Huang that features her own song cycle *The Long View*. She now serves the University of Chicago as the Director of Vocal Studies.

The song cycle, *The Long View*, paints a portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG), employing texts taken from various accounts and sources. “Advice from Morris” is based on words by Morris D. Ginsburg (RBG’s father-in-law) as related by RBG. The text in “On Working Together” is excerpted and adapted from “How the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals Got My Wife Her Good Job” by Martin Ginsburg, her spouse. This song cycle was conceived by Patrice Michaels, who is by chance also RBG’s daughter-in-law.

3.3.5: My Dearest Ruth – Stacy Garrop

Stacy Garrop (b. 1969) is a freelance composer based in Chicago, Illinois. She writes for many genres, including orchestra, opera, and solo instruments. Her musical aesthetic is “centered on dramatic and lyrical storytelling.”⁴²

“My Dearest Ruth” is melancholic and bittersweet. James Ginsburg, their son, wrote this about the letter:

⁴² “Biography,” Stacy Garrop – Composer, last updated March 28, 2023, <https://www.garrop.com/About/Biography/>.

“The letter on which *My Dearest Ruth* is based was my father’s last written statement. My parents celebrated their 56th wedding anniversary in my father’s room at John [sic] Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore on Wednesday, June 23, 2010. The following day, my mother called to say Dad had taken a turn for the worse. I flew to Baltimore the next morning (Friday) and met Mom at Dad’s room. The doctors came in and told us there was nothing more they could do – the cancer had progressed too far. All this time, Dad kept repeating one word: “Home.” So we made arrangements to bring him back to our apartment in Washington, D.C. While collecting his belongings from the hospital room, Mom pulled open the drawer next to Dad’s bed and discovered a yellow legal pad on which Dad had written this a week earlier. ...”⁴³

James continues to note that in the letter, Martin mentioned it was 56 years ago, but it was in fact 59 years ago that they first met. Together with Michaels’ *The Long View*, and Vivian Fung’s “Pot Roast à la RBG”, these songs were all commissioned in celebration of RBG’s 80th birthday.

3.3.6: “The Mountain,” from *Call Out* – Kamala Sankaram

Kamala Sankaram (b. 1978) is a current member of the composition faculty at Mannes College of Music and SUNY Purchase. She is known for her operas that fuses the operatic form with Indian classical music. These include *Thumbprint*, and *A Rose, Monkey and Francine in the City of Tigers*. She is also the composer responsible for the short opera performed over Zoom, *all decisions will be made by consensus*, and the world’s first virtual reality opera, *The Parksville Murders*.⁴⁴

⁴³ James Ginsburg, notes in *My Dearest Ruth* (Malvern, PA: Theodore Presser Company, 2020).

⁴⁴ “About Kamala,” Kamala Sankaram, <https://www.kamalasankaram.com/bio>.

Call Out is a song cycle for baritone, piano and cello, that uses texts from Twitter, an apology article on Gawker and, a quote by Rumi. Sankaram writes in her program notes:

“As we all know, the internet is paradoxical in that it has both facilitated connection and simultaneously made it harder for us to actually feel connected. “Call Out” is an exploration of the difficulties of finding connection online. The title is a reference to both “call out culture” and to the literal act of calling out to another person, and the piece itself follows the evolution of an online interaction. ... “The Mountain,” contains text based on Gawker’s apology to Justine Sacco, a woman whose poorly-timed tweeted joke was taken out of context, went viral, and destroyed her life and career. This piece also features a binary motive: the name Justine.”⁴⁵

3.3.7: Twitterkreis (Micro-Songlets from Very Late Capitalist Planet Earth) –

Gabriel Kahane

Gabriel Kahane (b. 1981), composer and singer-songwriter, son of the pianist and conductor Jeffrey Kahane, is well-known for his 2006 song cycle *Craigslistlieder*, eight texts from personal ads that he found off Craigslist. He graduated from Brown University with a bachelor’s degree in music, where he wrote his first musical.

His more recent creation, *Twitterkreis*, consists of twelve short songs on texts that he extracted from the Twittersphere. The tweets are from various Twitter users in today’s world, including Senator Mitt Romney, Hillary Clinton and Martha Stewart.

⁴⁵ Kamala Sankaram, notes in *Call Out: Song Cycle for Baritone, Piano, and Cello* (New York: Bright Shiny Things, 2018).

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Due to the nature of prose, many composers choose to steer clear of this genre. Poetry, especially that which was written before the 21st century, tends to still have a linguistic meter, to which it is generally easier to set music. However, if we look at the rising popularity of this particular form, there are more selections than there were in the mid-20th century. As Argento once said, setting music to prose allows for more musical freedom, as compared to the confines and structure of poetry. Composers such as Libby Larsen and Juliana Hall have followed in his footsteps to contribute more works in this form. They have also demonstrated that these songs have good staying power as they are like monodramas, hence allowing the vocalist to meld with the music on stage in a recital setting.

When it comes to programming voice recitals, whether it be collegiate or professional, these songs should not be treated any differently than their counterparts in the world of poetic settings. In this performance dissertation, these remain essentially art songs – music set to words – which composers have carefully crafted to create works of aural art, comparable though different to the vast body of poetically-set song repertoire. Adding music to these texts enhances the meaning and brings the text to life. An example of exciting programming using this repertoire is the recital performed at Lyric Fest in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 2-3, 2016, where the entire program consisted of different letters set to music. Some of these songs include “Zelda’s Dream” by Benjamin C.S. Boyle, “You must know...” by Thomas Lloyd, “Domesticity” from *Casa Guidi* by Dominick Argento, and the Letters selection from my second recital.

Alternatively, one could program a set of songs that are on the same topic or subject, as I have done with Patrice Michaels and Stacy Garrop. Song cycles using prose work wonderfully performed as a whole, for example, *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* or *The Long View*. They take the listeners on a journey through the life of the protagonist.

The survey with contemporary composers (which is appended to this document) yielded only nine responses, but they were insightful and mind-opening. Upon studying the feedback, it supports my theory that most (if not all) composers deal with prose texts like speech, following the natural inflections and stresses of the words. Many of them choose texts that resonate with them, often not compromising their own personal musical style for the texts. Rather than starting with the piano part, the vocal line seems to come first; the harmonies are a result of the text.

As a pianist and vocal coach, I have learned through the preparation and performances of these songs that the text is king. One must speak the text in rhythm as a fundamental step in preparing for any song. During rehearsals, the singer should also attempt to speak through the text with the pianist playing their part. This rehearsal technique serves a dual purpose: the pianist can focus on the subtleties of the spoken vocal line, such as inflection and breath marks, while the vocalist can pay attention to the musical nuances of the song. Moreover, discussing the interpretation of the text will help both musicians gain a deeper understanding of the song, leading to a successful and cohesive performance.

Through this dissertation, it has become apparent to me that prose art songs carry the same, and sometimes more, drama, characterization and emotional impact as

their poetic counterparts. With more of these works being created and performed at present, it is my hope that this type of repertoire will gain more popularity and staying power for generations to come, allowing it to be a truly American phenomenon in the art song universe.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Song Texts

The shorthand used in song texts:

[...] – texts that were removed in the song

The Bird and the Beast

Sir Ernest Gowers, from *The Complete Plain Words*, V. The Choice of Words (I)

The bird that I am going to write about is the owl. The owl cannot see at all by day, and at night is as blind as a bat.

I do not know much about the owl, so I will go on to the beast that I am going to choose. It is the cow. The cow is a mammal. It has six sides – right, left, an upper and below. At the back it has a tail on which hangs a brush. With this it sends the flies away so that they do not fall into the milk. The head is for the purpose of growing horns and so that the mouth can be somewhere. The horns are to butt with, and the mouth is to moo with. Under the cow hangs the milk. It is arranged for milking. When people milk, the milk comes and there is never an end to the supply. How the cow does it I have not yet [never) realized, but it makes more and more. The cow has a fine sense of smell; one can smell it far away. This is the reason for the fresh air in the country.

The man cow is called an ox. It is not a mammal. The cow does not eat much, but what it eats it eats twice, so that it gets enough. When it is hungry it moos, and when it says nothing it is because its inside is all full up with grass.

The Children's Letter to the United Nations

Public School No. 90, Queens, New York

War is fighting. People hate and take people's clothes away. They should think not to make a war. They shouldn't have guns. In Sunday-school they say: "Thou shalt not kill."

People have to be good. The thing is to make them very kind by giving them good training in this world. Why don't they love each other and why don't they help everyone and help to make some buildings for our families too, to have some more cows and horses and lambs, and apple trees and pear trees and peach trees too, and train the people to make things, to be a barber, to learn to be a barber and things like that?

Please ask God to kindly make us better, every girl and boy in all the world, the children across the ocean and all the Americans too.

Love in the Dictionary

Funk and Wagnalls Students' Standard Dictionary

Love:

A strong, complex emotion or feeling of personal attachment, causing one to appreciate, delight in, or crave the presence or possession of the object, and to please and promote the welfare of that object; devoted affection or attachment; specifically: the feeling between husband and wife; brother and sister; or lover and sweetheart; One who is beloved; a sweetheart; animal passion; the personification of the love-passion; Cupid; in some games, as tennis, nothing.

The Astronomers (An Epitaph)

Based on an inscription found in Allegheny, PA.

Susan Campbell 1863-1910

Brian Campbell 1862-1909

Astronomers

We have loved the stars too deeply
To be afraid of the night.

A Package of Cookies

Virgil Thomson (a letter to Richard Hundley, July 16, 1963)

Dear Richard

A package of cookies

lovely Danish cookies

And a thank-you note from me

a warmly enthusiastic thank-you note.

I wrote yesterday—

or rather mailed again a letter I made a mistake about.

I think I am— about to do

2 funny poems by Marianne Moore.

On principle, dinner Tuesday.

Affectionately

Virgil T.

Postcard from Spain

Richard Hundley

The weather is here!
Wish you were...beautiful.

I'm having a fabulous
loved splendid Lisbon,
but ah Madrid!

Soon on to Tangiers, London and Paris too,
See you, when I'm through.

Four Dialogues, or The Quarrel Sonata

Frank O'Hara

M: "Hurricane Kills Thousand in Altoona," –
"Mayor Buys Milk in Schenectady," –
"Behaviorism Taught in Late June,"
"A Slump Foreseen in Electricity."
Oh papers! Papers! papers! of my delight! Why wasn't the late edition ready tonight?

W: Oh blue grass of my ancestors, ouch! I beg your pardon sir, I'm not a couch!

M: Your foot? Your foot? The delicate toot of your hand on my arm's made all me a foot! What is your name? I must have you!

W: No!

M: What stop is this? Which one, can you see?

W: It's Sheridan Square, no, it's Avenue B.

M: No, darling, it's Grand Army Plaza and we're there!

W: Where? No, I'm not, Where?

M: There! My darling place, there! Will you come? It's where I've parked my car? We'll drive to the airport and park and park and park! Will you come? Oh be my love for a night in the air where the stars are like garters and all is fair!

W: No, I can't, I must have dinner with my mother, and afterwards I have to go to symphony with brother, and you must stop this or I'll probably smother and I am already engaged to be married to another.

M: Then you'll come?

W: Yes, I'll come.

W: What a lovely car! What a lovely parking lot!

M: You see? The stars are big as garters. There's a lot I have to say to you, my darling. Look at those garters!

W: You're burning like fire...

M: and it's you I desire...

W: but I'd burn in the fire...

M: and it's me you desire...

W: but I fear the fire...
 M: don't fear the fire...
 W: and I fear your desire...
 M: don't fear my desire...
 W: and I fear my own fire...
 M: and you fear your desire...
 W: but I fear most the fire... and not your desire...
 M: and not your desire... your fire...
 M/W: My fire... your desire... but you/I fear the fire
 M: my own fire burn in the fire
 W: Fire...

W: It's wonderful to be so happy together, it makes you drink tea and feel about the weather, it's marvelous still to be thrilled when you enter on top of a hill, think you are the center, are you happy with me, I'm happy with you, I look at a bee and it looks like a screw, you are the lord of all I survey, I'm not your bawd but you are my Bey, Ah!

M: Did you wrinkle this newspaper?
 W: Darling, I wouldn't!
 M: Did you think it a caper?
 W: Darling, you shouldn't!
 M: Do you have an idea of my kind of annoyance? It causes me pain! you create a disturbance. I wanted to look up my shares of insurance whether they thrive or languish in durance. Now I am livid! My love's in abeyance! Why don't you go away? and good riddance!
 W: If you say that one more time I'll scream! (Ah!)
 M: If you threaten once more that you're going to scream! This can't last it's no good, I have a past she has her mood. I was born for a different reason off Cape Horn in the stormy season, did you imagine I could adore when Chinese and Cajun pamper and bore, you win the bet I'm off to Siam, I'll climb to Tibet, the eternal I am. You are beautiful I am strong, you are dutiful I am wrong, I'm going to leave you, you must remain, I won't deceive you, I'm going to Spain
 W: You hateful man! Leave while you can!

W: I wonder if he ever sinks with fever head on knee
 M: I wonder if she ever drinks with Steven dansant tea
 W: what a blunder
 M: what a bounder
 W: does he never the deceiver think of me
 M: does he never try to grieve her talk of me
 W: is he well or is he ill, down in hell or up here still
 M: does she stare is she sweet trails her hair to her feet
 W: How I wish he were back
 M: How I wish I could attack
 W: what of the trouble
 M: this world this bubble

W: worse the lack
M: and go back
W: and my heart is growing grey, I'm very lonely in my way.
M: but the heart must go this way though it's lonely in its way.

Nuvoletta

James Joyce, from *Finnegans Wake*: Part I, Chapter 6

Nuvoletta in her lightdress, spunn of sisteen shimmers, was looking down on them, leaning over the bannistars and listening all she childishly could. [...] She was alone. All her nubied companions were asleeping with the squirrels. [...] She tried all the winsome wonsome ways her four winds had taught her. She tossed her sfumastelliacious hair like *le princesse de la Petite Bretagne* and she rounded her mignons arms like Mrs Cornwallis-West and she smiled over herself like ... the image of the pose of the daughter [...] of the Emperour of Irelande and she sighed after herself as were she born to bride with Tristis Tristior Tristissimus. But, sweet madonine, she might fair as well have carried her daisy's worth to Florida. [...]

Oh, how it was duusk! From Vallee Maraia to Grasyaplaina, dormimust echo! Ah dew! Ah dew! It was so duusk that the tears of night began to fall, first by ones and twos, then by threes and fours, at last by fives and sixes of sevens, for the tired ones were wecking, as we weep now with them. *O! O! O! Par la pluie!* [...]

Then Nuvoletta reflected for the last time in her little long life and she made up all her myriads of drifting minds in one. She cancelled all her engauzements. She climbed over the bannistars; she gave a childy cloudy cry: *Nuée! Nuée!* A lightdress fluttered. She was gone.

Solitary Hotel

James Joyce, from *Ulysses*, Part III

Solitary hotel in mountain pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel paper she writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary.

What?

In sloping, upright and backhands: Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel, Queen's Ho...

I Hate Music!

Leonard Bernstein (self-written)

My mother says that babies come in bottles; but last week she said they grew on special baby-bushes. I don't believe in the storks, either! They're all in the zoo, busy with their own babies! And what's a baby-bush, anyway!? My name is Barbara.

Jupiter has seven moons or is it nine? Saturn has a million, billion, trillion sixty-nine; everyone is a little sun, with six little moons of its own! But we have only one! Just think of all the fun we'd have if there were nine! Then we could be just nine times more romantic! Dogs would bay 'til they were frantic! We'd have nine tides in the Atlantic! The man in the moon would be gigantic! But we have one! Only one!

I hate music! But I like to sing: la-dee-da-dee. But that's not music, not what I call music. No, sir. Music is a lot of men in a lot of tails, making lots of noise like a lot of females; Music is a lot of folks in a big dark hall, where they really don't want to be at all; with a lot of chairs, and a lot of airs, and a lot of furs and diamonds! Music is silly! I hate music! But I like to sing: la-dee-da-dee.

A big Indian and a little Indian were walking down the street. The little Indian was the son of the big Indian; but the big Indian was not the father of the little Indian: You see the riddle is, if the little Indian was the son of the big Indian, but the big Indian was not the father of the little Indian, who was he? I'll give you two measure: ... His mother!

I just found out today that I'm a person too, like you: I like balloons; lots of people like balloons: But everyone says, "Isn't she cute? She likes balloons!" I'm a person too, like you! I like things that everyone likes: I like soft things and movies and horses and warm things and red things: don't you? I have lots of thoughts; like what's behind the sky; and what's behind what's behind the sky: But everyone says, "Isn't she sweet? She wants to know everything!" Don't you? Of course I'm very young to be saying all these things in front of so many people like you; but I'm a person too! Though I'm only ten years old; I'm a person too, like you!

La Bonne Cuisine

Émile Dumont, from "La Bonne Cuisine Francaise"

I. Plum Pudding

Deux cents cinquante grammes de raisins de Malaga,	250g Malaga or Smyrne grapes,
Deux cents cinquante grammes de raisins de Corinthe,	250g Corinthe grapes,
Deux cents cinquante gramm[es] de graisse de rognon de bœuf,	250g beef kidney fat,
Et cent vingt cinq gramm[es] de mie de pain émiettée,	(And) 125g breadcrumbs,
Soixante gramm[es] de sucr[e] en poudre ou de cassonade,	60g powdered or brown sugar,
Un verr[e] de lait; un demi verr[e] de rhum ou d'eau-de-vie,	A glass of milk; a half glass of rum or brandy;
Trois œufs, un citron!	3 eggs; a lemon!

Muscade, gingembre, cannell[e] en
poudre, mélangés
(En tout la moitié d'une cuillère à café),
Sel fin la moitié d'une cuillère à café.

Nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, mixed
(all together about half a teaspoon),
Half a teaspoon of finely ground salt.

II. Queues de Boeuf

Ox-tails

La queue de boeuf n'est pas un mets à
dédaigner. D'abord avec assez de queues
de boeuf on peut faire un pot-au-feu
passable.

Ox-tails is not a dish to be despised.
First of all, with enough ox-tails, you
can make a fair stew.

Les queues qui ont servi à faire le pot-
au-feu peuvent être mangées panées et
grillées et servies avec une sauce
piquante ou tomate.

The tails used to make the stew can be
eaten breaded and broiled, and served
with a spicy tomato sauce.

III. Tavouk Gueunksis

Tavouk gueunksis (poitrine de poule).
Faites bouillir une poule dont vous
prendrez les blancs; vous les pilerez de
façon à ce qu'ils se mettent en charpie;
puis mêlez-les avec une bouillie comme
celle ci-dessus du Mahallebi.

Tavouk Guenksis (breast of hen).
Put a hen to boil, and take the white
meat and chop it into shreds. Mix it with
a broth, like the one above for
Mahallebi.

IV. Civet à Toute Vitesse

Rabbit at Top Speed

Lorsqu'on sera très pressé, voici une
manière de confectionner un civet de
lièvre que je recommande:

When one is in a hurry, here's a way to
prepare rabbit stew that I recommend:

Dépecez le lièvre comme pour le civet
ordinaire.

Cut up the rabbit as for an ordinary
stew.

Mettez-le dans une casserole ou
chaudron avec son sang et son foie
écrasé, Une demi-livre de poitrine de
porc coupée en morceaux, une vingtaine
de petits oignons, un peu de sel, poivre,
..., un litre e demi de vin rouge ... Fait'
bouillir à toute vitesse. Au bout de
quinze minutes environ,
lorsque la sauce est réduite de moitié,
approchez un papier enflammé, de
manière à mettre le feu au ragoût.
Lorsqu'il sera éteint, liez la sauce avec
une demi-livre de beurre manié de
farine. Servez.

Put it in a pot or a bowl with its blood
and liver mashed! A half pound of
breast of pork (bite-sized pieces);
twenty or so small onions (a dash of salt
and pepper); a liter and a half of red
wine. Bring this quickly to boil. After
about fifteen minutes, when the sauce is
reduced by half, apply a fire, to set the
stew aflame. When the fire goes out,
add to the sauce a half a pound of butter,
worked with flour. Serve.

From the Diary of Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf, published as *A Writer's Diary*

Sunday, December 22nd (1940)

How beautiful they were, those old people – I mean father and mother – how simple, how clear, how untroubled. I have been dipping into old letters and father's memoirs. He loved her: oh and was so candid and reasonable and transparent – and had such a fastidious delicate mind, educated, and transparent. How serene and gay even, their life reads to me: no mud; no whirlpools. And so human – with the children and the little hum and song of the nursery. But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child's vision and so must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved; no

introspection.

[...]

Sunday, March 8th (1941)

[Just back from L.'s speech at Brighton. Like a foreign town: the first spring day. Women sitting on seats. A pretty hat in a teashop – how fashion revives the eye! And the shell encrusted old women, rouged, decked, cadaverous at the teashop. The waitress in checked cotton.] No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James' sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colours flying. [This I see verges on introspection; but doesn't quite fall in. Suppose I bought a ticket at the Museum; biked in daily and read history. Suppose I selected one dominant figure in every age and wrote round and about.] Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that it's seven; and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down.

Easter Sunday, April 20th (1919)

[... I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like] to come back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, [and yet steady, tranquil compounds with the aloofness of a work of art.]

Miss Manners on Music

Judith Martin (a.k.a. Miss Manners), from *Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*

VI. Manners at the Opera

Dear Miss Manners:

I am terribly upset about some people's deplorable conduct at the conclusion of a recent opera. Barely had the final curtain touched the stage, the opera stars not yet gone forward to take their bows, and throngs of what I consider extremely rude patrons started a fast exit up the aisles, supposedly to beat the crowds to the doors, parking lots, or after-theater suppers.

My being able to rise and applaud the players on stage is as much a part of an enjoyable evening at the opera as the actual performance, but when six people push their way past me to make their exits, and a near platoon is en route from the front rows, I am personally angered and goodness knows what the performers must think seeing a sea of backs.

I cannot believe that this is proper conduct, but I am at a loss on how either to halt this the exodus or to appease my anger. Would you please help?

GENTLE READER:

Well, actually, no. Miss Manners prefers to make things worse.

[...]

In fact, as a violent opera lover herself, Miss Manners (who just loves violent operas) endorses the lively school of audience reaction, rather than the genteel one that you represent. Uniformly respectful applause is the result of ritualizing the experience of attending an opera to the point that no real expression of opinion is permitted.

[...]

A less conspicuous method is to applaud when pleased and withhold applause when displeased, or to leave the theatre when unable to applaud. If Miss Manners were an opera singer (and she has all the qualifications but voice), she would prefer the occasional excesses of enthusiasm when ecstatic fans pulled her carriage through the streets (even if it also meant occasional obviously misguided disapproval) she would prefer that to hearing the same tepid politeness for her triumphs and her failures.

VII. Envoi

Dear Miss Manners:

Who says there is a “right” way of doing things and a “wrong”?

Gentle Reader:

Miss Manners does. You want to make something of it?

“Anne Boleyn,” from *Try Me, Good King*

Letter from Anne Boleyn, Queen of England, to Henry VIII, 6 May 1536;

Excerpts from two letters from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn;

Anne Boleyn’s speech at her execution, 19 May 1536

Text adapted by Libby Larsen

Try me, good king, ... and let me have a lawful trial, and let not my ... enemies sit as my accusers and judges ... Let me receive an open trial for my truth shall fear no open shame ... Never a prince had a wife more loyal in all duty, ... in all true affection, than you have ever found in Anne Bulen ... You have chosen me from low estate to be your wife and companion ... Do you not remember the words of your own true hand? “My own darling ... I would you were in my arms ... for I think it long since I kissed you. My mistress and friend ... “ Try me, good king ... If ever I have found favor in your sight – if ever the name of Anne Bulen has been pleasing to

your ears – then let me obtain this request ... and my innocence shall be ... known
and ... cleared.

Good Christian People, I come hither to die, ... and by the law I am judged to die ... I
pray God save the King. I hear the executioner's good, and my neck is so little ...

My *Ántonia*

Willa Cather, adapted by Libby Larsen

1. Landscape I: From the Train

We were talking about what it was like to be a child in a little prairie town
 buried in wheat
 in burning summers
 beneath a brilliant sky.

As the train flashed,
We were talking about childhood in a little prairie town
 blustery winters
 nothing but snow
 and the feeling that the world was left behind.

As the train flashed,
We were talking
 of windy springs
 and blazing summers
 and fall afternoons when the prairie was like the bush
 that burned with fire.

Oh, I wish I could be a little boy again!

As the train flashed,
We were talking
 of prairie towns
 and boyhood
 and *Ántonia*! My *Ántonia*!

2. *Ántonia*

“They can’t any of them speak English,”
Said the train conductor to me, the boy Jim.
“Except one little girl not much older than you, Jim, and she’s bright as a new dollar.
“She’s got pretty brown eyes too!”

And she did, my *Ántonia*!
When I first saw her, *Ántonia* came up to me
and held her hand out coaxingly
and soon we were running together

through the fields, laughing.

Ántonia! My Ántonia!

How many an afternoon we trailed along the prairie.

Laughing, she would point to a tree.

“Name? What name?” “Name?”

“Tree.” I answered.

One evening we climbed to the roof to watch the clouds of a storm,
one black cloud no bigger than a little boat
drifted out alone.

Grandmother called out to us to come down,

“In a minute we come!” Ántonia called back,

“In a minute!”

ME (Brenda Ueland)

Brenda Ueland, autobiography, adapted by Libby Larsen

3. Why I write this book

It is nearly ten o'clock in the morning, and it is July 6th, 1938 ... I sit here in my square room with green wallpaper. I look down on our front lawn spreading broad and green to the wooded bank. I look down on a thicket where criss-cross sumac rises, and above that a high leafy wall of elm trees and box elders. Below is the narrow dark smooth boulevard and Lake Calhoun. So here I am, trying to tell the story of myself. I quietly ask, pray, at intervals, to be truthful, simple, and not to put on airs.

4. Childhood

This is my first memory. ...

... I am running up and down our long porch with a child of my own age. ... As I run I see my reflection in the windows. ... I am a tiny child, in a thin white dress-up dress. I have a round head of short black hair. I have a thin gold chain around my neck and there is a tiny gold heart on it.

This is my next memory. ...

... I am in my mother's room in our big baby carriage ... Though I'm not the baby then ... From the ... carriage I looked into the mirror. I can see now what I saw plainly then. I had short ruffling black hair cut roundly like a boy's and dark eyes and tiny square teeth. And I felt disappointed about my looks ...

I remember my first day at kindergarten ... a lovely thing. The long low tables ... the galumphing games on the shiny floor ... We strung colored beads. We sewed with pretty wool on cards. We cut out colored paper and pasted it. A lovely thing!

... Mother had health ideas. She thought bananas were bad, and pie and vinegar. She thought we all should sleep late ... and go to bed early. ... We swam in the lake. ...

Oh, the lovely sunsets in the evening when the lake was yellow as glass! ... my parents and their friends would row on it. Their voices lifted up ... mingling one boat to another (in "Good Night Ladies"). It came over the water with the slow, musical clunk of the oarlocks.

"A Letter," from *A Shining Place*

Emily Dickinson, excerpted from a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1862)

[...]

You ask of my companions. Hills, sir, and the sundown, and a dog large as myself, that my father bought me. They are better than beings because they know, but do not tell; and the noise in the pool at noon excels my piano.

I have a brother and sister; my mother does not care for thought, and father, too busy with his briefs to notice what we do. He buys me many books, but begs me not to read them, because he fears they joggle their mind. They are religious, except me, and address an eclipse, every morning, whom they call their "Father."

But I fear my story fatigues you. I would like to learn. Could you tell me how to grow, or is it unconveyed, like melody or witchcraft?

[...]

A Northeast Storm

Emily Dickinson, excerpted from a letter to her brother, William Austin Dickinson (1851)

It might not come amiss, dear Austin, to have a tidings or two concerning our state and feelings. Our state is pretty comfortable, and our feelings are somewhat solemn. We are rather a crestfallen company, what with the sighing wind, the sobbing rain, and the whining of Nature.

We are enjoying this evening what is called a 'northeast storm' – a little north of east in case you are pretty definite. Father thinks it's 'amazin' raw,' and I'm half disposed to think that he's in the right about it, though I keep pretty dark and don't say much about it!

Vinnie is at the instrument, humming a pensive air concerning a young lady who thought she was 'almost there.' Vinnie seems much grieved, and I really suppose I ought to betake myself to weeping; I'm pretty sure that I *shall* if she don't abate her singing.

A Letter from Sullivan Ballou

Major Sullivan Ballou, Headquarters, Camp Clark, Washington, D.C., July 14, 1861

My Very Dear [Wife] Sarah:

Indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps to-morrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

[...] I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans upon the triumph of government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution, and I am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.

[...]

Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistibly on with all those chains, to the battlefield. The memories of all the blissful moments I have spent with you come [crowding] creeping over me, and I feel most [deeply grateful] gratified to God and to you, that I have enjoyed them so long. And [how] hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us.

I have, I know, but few claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, [nor that,] when my last breath escapes me on the battle-field, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have oftentimes been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears, every little spot upon your happiness, [...]

But, O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you in the [garish] gladdest days, and the darkest nights [amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours] always, always, and, if [the soft breeze fans] there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; [or] as the cool air [cools] fans your throbbing temple[s], it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me [dear] dead; think I am gone, and wait for [me] thee, for we shall meet again.

[...]

- Sullivan

Dear Future Roommate

Mike Gioia, essay written in a college application to Stanford

Dear Roommate,

Don't worry about us getting along. I've lived with crazy people all my life. My father is a poet, and his artsy friends – eccentric writers, boisterous musicians, and

neurotic painters – could populate a whole season of bad sitcoms. And my good-hearted mother continually invites these people to stay with us. Just last month a visiting Oxford professor was brewing tea on our kitchen stove. “Oh, my!” I heard him say oh-so politely. Turning around, I expected to see spilled Earl Grey and soggy crumpets, I instead found him holding a washcloth in full flame. I hurriedly extinguished it just in time to see the quaint professor calmly walk away unfazed and unscathed. Last summer we had a young singer from Harvard living with us, but it sounded as if we had put up a barbershop quartet. He loved to march around the house – day and night – singing Broadway hits while keeping the beat with steady stomping. My folks hardly noticed. Most of their friends act this way. I won’t even mention the first time they took me to Macbeth. It wasn’t until the lights dimmed I learned the entire play was in Tlingit, a native Alaskan tongue. What I am trying to say is that I look forward to living with a sane person for a change. No odd habits or quirks of yours will bother me. I will have seen much worse, from academic kitchen arsonists to human jukeboxes. I think we’ll get along just fine.

Sincerely,
Mike Gioia

“Water Facts,” from *Water Songs*

Facts from various websites

To create one pint of beer takes twenty gallons of water. A jellyfish and a cucumber are each ninety-five percent water. The Earth’s temperature is regulated by water. Sixty-six percent of the human body is water. Seventy-three percent of the human brain is water.

“Lincoln’s Final,” from *Civil Words*

Extracted from Abraham Lincoln’s 2nd inaugural address, March 4, 1865

“... Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. ... With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan... to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations.

Little Dream Pieces

Dream accounts by the composer

I. Shoelaces

She knelt down in front of me and started to tie my shoes tighter, not knowing I like them loose so I can put them on and take them off easier.

VII. Columbia University

“Don’t check your e-mail now – if you get bad news, you’ll ruin the party.”

XIV. Six Shots

My father and I had a disagreement that could only be resolved by a duel. We each had six shots. We fired them all into the ground.

XX. Shoehorn

I stayed in a hotel in Frankfurt that had, in each room, a shoehorn. I'd recently broken my own shoehorn, so I took their shoehorn. I couldn't believe the bastards sent me a bill for the shoehorn.

XXII. The Fox

In a small bedroom with a low ceiling,
Three of us were talking when we were interrupted by a sound –
Rustling, scratching, clawing –
A fox came bursting through the drywall.
Its bright red body was a blur as it ran about the room
In a frenzy.
We all sat and observed in complete silence.

The Long View

III. Advice from Morris

Morris D. Ginsburg, circa 1954, as related by RBG, adapted from The Journal of the Section of Litigation, American Bar Association, Vol:37 No.2, Winter 2011

Ruth, if you don't want to go to law school, you have the best reason in the world... But if you really want to go to law school, you will stop feeling sorry for yourself, and you will find a way to do it.

Your attitude should be, 'I will somehow surmount this, I will find a way to do what I want to do.'

IV. On Working Together

Martin D. Ginsburg, Excerpted/adapted from "How the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals Got My Wife Her Good Job", delivered posthumously by RBG, August 27, 2010

Thank you.

My field is tax law. Instead of speaking on that exceedingly amusing subject, I shall speak on the only significant thing I have done in my long life with Honorable Ruth. It is the one case in which we served together, and it is how the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals – and I – got my wife her very good job.

When I practiced law in New York City and Ruth taught at Rutgers in Newark, we worked the evenings at home. Her room was bigger. In my little room one night I

came upon a one-page brief, written by Charles Moritz, a *pro se* litigant, with a most persuasive argument:

“If I were a dutiful daughter instead of a dutiful son, I would have received the tax deduction. This makes no sense.”

Well, I went to the big room next door, handed the case to my spouse and said, “Read this.” With a warm and friendly snarl, she said, “I don’t read tax cases.” I said, “Read this one,” and went back to my little room. Not five minutes later, Ruth stepped into my little room, and, with the broadest possible smile said, “Let’s take it!” And we did.

Mister Moritz was claiming a six-hundred-dollar deduction for his dependent mother. We won the Tenth Circuit, but the Government claimed that this decision cast doubt on literally hundreds of federal statutes differentiating solely on the basis of sex. They petitioned for cert, but cert was denied. And with their list of hundreds of statutes – spit out by a shiny new mainframe computer – their list became the fuel for Ruth’s career: her *new* career as an appellate advocate – and this, of course, led to her *next* career on the higher side of the bench.

So, as you can see, in bringing that tax case to Ruth’s big room forty years ago, I changed history. For the better. And, therefore, I shall claim, I thereby rendered significant service to our Nation. All in all, great accomplishments from a case where the tax in dispute totaled exactly two hundred ninety-six dollars and seventy cents.

Thank you.

My Dearest Ruth

Martin Ginsburg, letter to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, June 17, 2010

My Dearest Ruth –

You are the only person I have loved in my life, setting aside, a bit, parents and kids and their kids, and I have admired and loved you almost since the day we first met at Cornell some 56 years ago. What a treat it has been to watch you progress to the very top of the legal world!!

I will be in JH Medical Center until Friday, June 25, I believe, and between then and now I shall think hard on my remaining health and life, and whether on balance the time has come for me to tough it out or to take leave of life because the loss of quality now simply overwhelms. I hope you will support where I come out, but I understand you may not. I will not love you a jot less.

Marty

“The Mountain,” from *Call Out*

Sam Biddle, article on Gawker, “Justine Sacco is Good at Her Job, and How I Came to Peace with Her”, December 20, 2014, adapted by Kamala Sankaram

The internet is a mountain, and if you climb that mountain, waiting for you at the top will be the person with whom you need to make peace. I climbed my mountain and a woman was there. Justine. Justine. Twitter disasters are a quick source of outrage. And outrage is traffic. It’s natural. If we could only put one more wrong-headed head on a pike, we could heal this world. Each outrage post was the one that would make a difference. Not knowing anything about Justine. I took her cluelessness at face value, and hundreds of thousands of people did the same: instantly hating her, because it’s easy and thrilling to hate a stranger online. There wasn’t any conversation to be had. No objective to reach. No conclusion to draw. Smashing a piñata, smashing, isn’t just for the candy. It feels great to swing your arms and feel a thud.

Twitterkreis

Tweets by various Twitter users

1. *Fleischlied für Mitt Romney*

“My favorite meat is hot dog, by the way. That is my favorite meat. My second favorite meat is hamburger and everyone says, “oh, don’t you prefer steak?” It’s like, I know steaks are great, but I like hot dog best, and I like hamburgers next best” – @mviser, quoting @mittromney

2. Martha Stewart

“Just got home. Let out the dogs. Within minutes they had cornered, attacked, and killed an opossum. Had to wash little bloody mouths. Life on farm.” – @marthastewart

3. God’s Perfect Killing Machines

“The reason cats are so pissy is they’re God’s perfect killing machines but they only weigh 8lbs and we keep picking them up and kissing them” – @arr

4. Marxist Peanut Allergy (for Robert Schumann)

“Is there anything more capitalist than a peanut with a top hat, cane, and monocle, selling you other peanuts to eat?” – @skullmandible

5. Body Positivity

“Dolls teach girls very unrealistic body standards: a Russian doesn’t have to have many tiny Russians inside her to be beautiful.” – @MeganAmram

6. Euphemism

“My ex broke up with me under the guise of “wanting to move to Pittsburgh,” which is a terrible thing to call his keyboardist’s pussy.” – @Rachele_F

7. Hillary's Social Media Game Leaves Something to be Desired

"How does your student loan debt make you feel? Tell us in three emojis or less." – @HillaryClinton

8. Marie Kondo

"The year is 2035. Marie Kondo holds up the condemned man to the crowd. "Does this man spark joy?" The crowd jeers, "No he does not!" She nods silently and throws him into the pit." – @BabadookSpinoza

9. Nihilist Arby's

"Be born, suffer, hunger, drain the bodies, slice the flesh, add horsey sauce, toil, mourn, die, be forgotten: Eat Arby's." – @NihilistArbys

10. Food Court Salad Whale Song

"If multiple women sit separately in a food court, each quietly eating a salad, do not interrupt us. We are silently communicating through salads, like whale song." – @LizHackett

11. Ladies, If He...

"Ladies, if he:

- only responds after you double text
- doesn't care about your snap streak
- refuses to shave
- is a staunch abolitionist
- returns to Ohio after serving only one term

He's not your man. He's 19th president Rutherford B Hayes." – @KylePlantEmoji

12. *Fleischlied für* Mitt Romney: Part II

"So this is National Hot Dog Day, and as you know, hot dog is my favorite meat. And I have a good one here, sliced in half, with some pickles, onions and ketchup, which is the way I prefer it. So, enjoy a hot dog." – @SenatorRomney

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaires

Bruce Adolphe

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

1. The Obedient Choir of Emotions (SATB, piano)
2. Water Facts (from the song cycle Water Songs)

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

The text comes from the book *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* by Antonio Damasio, Pantheon Books, New York, 2010. I received a commission from the New York Virtuoso Singers, directed by Harold Rosenbaum. To celebrate the ensemble's 25th anniversary, they commissioned twenty-five composers for a recording project on Soundbrush Records. I had collaborated with the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio on a piece called *Self Comes to Mind* for cellist Yo-Yo Ma (in 2009) before the book *Self Comes to Mind* was published, and I had previously used texts by Antonio as inspiration for purely instrumental works. For this commission, I decided to look for a quote from the book *Self Comes to Mind* that could serve as a choral text. I chose the paragraph that begins "No set of conscious images of any kind ever fails to be accompanied by an obedient choir of emotions and consequent feelings" because it uses the image of "an obedient *choir* of emotions" to describe a biological state from a neuroscientific viewpoint, and also because later in the paragraph Antonio uses two other musically suggestive terms, *modulation* and *reverberation*. This was enough to spark my imagination.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

My musical vocabulary is tonally based and chromatically inflected, with many partial modulations (resulting in gradually evolving tonalities) and I enjoy exploring a variety of enharmonic connections. My influences are wide-ranging,

and I suppose the more obvious ones include Janacek, Stravinsky, Brahms, Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, and Gesualdo. I would never modify my vocabulary or approach to composition to set a text. That would imply that the text is the wrong choice for my music. What I require from a text is compelling imagery that is precisely expressed.

In setting the text by Antonio Damasio, I noticed that I would need two approaches, one for the more scientific, descriptive prose style and another for the more poetic, emotional depictions. In general, Antonio's writing is an appealing mix of scientific clarity and poetic beauty. For example, phrases like these are of the first type: "No set of conscious images of any kind ever fails to be accompanied by..."; "...as long as the same conscious object remains in sight...". And these phrases are examples of the poetic, emotional language: "As I am looking at the Pacific Ocean dressed in its morning suit, protected by a soft, gray sky..."; "...as long as my reflections keep them in some sort of reverberation...". For the descriptive prose style, I used a rhythmic, somewhat pointillistic patterning in the piano that allowed me to set the text in a heterophonic manner, giving the possibility of mixing precise declamation with shifting timbres. For the more emotional and poetic phrases in the text, I wrote image-specific, evocative phrases, such as creating a feeling of ocean waves in the piano during the lines about the Pacific Ocean and "majestic beauty." My favorite moment is the end of the piece, where the word "reverberation" suggested patterns and partitionings in the choir that allowed me to combine both approaches to text-setting I had been using.

Another point: generally, I used heterophony to unite the choir as one "speaker" for the scientific language and homophony for the emotional passages. However, to keep the piece unified rather than fragmented by the text, I found ways for these approaches to intersect and overlap.

As for choosing the instrumentation, the commission allowed for any combination or subset of voices within the total SATB ensemble, and piano was optional. I chose to use the full SATB choir simply because it offers the richest and most varied possibilities. For me, the piano was essential for two reasons: it allows for rhythmic energy and textures separate from the choir; it amplifies the harmonic possibilities beyond the four voices.

Daron Hagen

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).
 - The entirety of “Songs of Madness and Sorrow” is prose, consisting of newspaper articles, interviews, oral histories, extracts from books, diaries, and advertisements. See here:
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54764c1be4b0df3acf4e03b6/t/61e422e25ee8a16e2b620bda/1642341090246/MADNESS-LIBRETTO.pdf> (pay particular heed to the foot notes).
 - The Bixby Letter is a letter.
 - Rapture and Regret are prose excerpts from novels.

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

I always select texts myself. Pre-Internet, I used the New York Public Library for research; post-Internet I scan for things about the subject I am interested in assaying. I look for psychological verifiability and emotional verisimilitude. Sometimes prose is preferable to poetry because, not despite of it prolix, and / or “artless” nature.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.
 - I don’t feel particularly influenced by anyone; I wouldn’t know how to describe my musical language.
 - If any alteration is required, I alter the texts to suit my music.
 - Here is an essay about setting text to music that answers your question about how I set text: <https://www.daronhagen.com/blog/tunes>

- Your last two questions are too vague for me to answer. Which works? What emotions? It seems to me that it is the stuff of your dissertation to discover and elucidate these things.

Adolphus Hailstork

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

Songs of Love and Justice (texts by Martin Luther King)

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

Sent to me by Marilyn Thompson, a singing professor at Hampton University

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

My language is lyrical and tonal. No changes needed.

Juliana Hall

(*Note: Although texts by Shakespeare are known to be poetic, despite it being in a play, I have included the extensive insight that Hall has provided in this questionnaire about the cycle *O Mistress Mine*.)

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

***AHAB* (2020)**

– monodrama for baritone or bass-baritone and piano on a libretto by Caitlin Vincent

***A Northeast Storm* (2015)**

– song for soprano and piano on a letter of Emily Dickinson

***Godiva* (2019)**

– monodrama for soprano or mezzo-soprano and piano on a libretto by Caitlin Vincent

***I Can No Other Answer Make* (2016)**

– song for tenor and piano on a text from a play by William Shakespeare

***Letters from Edna* (1993)**

– 8 songs for mezzo-soprano and piano on letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay

***Old* (from *Quarantine Bitch* – 2021)**

– song for mezzo-soprano and piano on an English-language haiku by Christina Kelly

***O Mistress Mine* (2015)**

– 12 songs for countertenor and piano on texts from plays by William Shakespeare

***Sentiment* (2017)**

– monodrama for unaccompanied soprano on a libretto by Caitlin Vincent

***Sentiment* (2020)**

– monodrama for unaccompanied mezzo-soprano on a libretto by Caitlin Vincent

Syllables of Velvet, Sentences of Plush (1989)

– 7 songs for soprano and piano on letters of Emily Dickinson

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

For the questions below, I'd like to discuss my 12-song countertenor cycle *O Mistress Mine* (2015) and my tenor song *I Can No Other Answer Make* (2016). These are both comprised solely of settings of texts taken from various plays of William Shakespeare and represent the only works I've ever written on dramatically-based sources.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

O Mistress Mine (2015) was conceived as a set of love songs for renowned countertenor Brian Asawa, who – after hearing several of my songs – asked me to write him a piece. This is my first work for this voice type, in which a male singer sings in the mezzo-soprano or even soprano range more usually sung by women (yet still possessing a male sound, and producing an ethereal and mysterious, other-worldly tone color very different from other male or female voice types).

My husband found the texts for Brian's piece, ultimately choosing twelve texts from ten Shakespeare plays, since the countertenor voice attained prominence in musical performance during Shakespeare's lifetime. The choice of Shakespeare also seemed clear, because he is one of mankind's most probing writers on the topic of love, which for him always seems to be at the heart of human relations; even when his characters are plotting war or foul deeds, they are also pledging their love and their troth to those who share their undertakings. The feeling of human connection between one person and another is portrayed, studied, and elucidated by Shakespeare in a kaleidoscopic vision comprising an almost infinite variety of types and styles of love that are at once both personal and universal.

The chosen texts are all quite famous passages, set to music by hundreds of composers over the past four centuries, evidence of their universal appeal and timeless insight into our humanity. They were ordered within this cycle to give a natural development to the topic, forming a narrative arc illuminating the ever-changing nature of love, from the time we first encounter it as youths to our awareness as we age of its many varying qualities. Shakespeare's words evoke the

joy of experiencing love, but also touch upon its deeper complexities as the most profound, and perhaps the most difficult, of all human experiences.

The songs in ***O Mistress Mine*** are:

- 1 – Lawn as white as driven snow (*from* The Winter’s Tale)
- 2 – O happy fair! (*from* A Midsummer Night’s Dream)
- 3 – If love make me forsworn (*from* Love’s Labour’s Lost)
- 4 – Who is Silvia? (*from* Two Gentlemen of Verona)
- 5 – O, mistress mine (*from* Twelfth Night)
- 6 – If music be the food of love (*from* Twelfth Night)
- 7 – Take, o take those lips away (*from* Measure for Measure)
- 8 – Tell me where is Fancy bred (*from* The Merchant of Venice)
- 9 – Come away, come away, death (*from* Twelfth Night)
- 10 – This is a very scurvy tune to sing (*from* The Tempest)
- 11 – Blow, blow, thou winter wind (*from* As You Like It)
- 12 – Fear no more the heat o’ th’ sun (*from* Cymbeline)

Opening the cycle, *Lawn as white as driven snow* is a peddler’s song highlighting youthful love, its expression through the giving of gifts, and a litany of the wonderful gifts young lads might give their sweethearts. The four songs at the center of the cycle – *O mistress mine*, *If music be the food of love*, *Take, o take those lips away* and *Tell me where is Fancy bred* – all present a change from youthful delight to a darker and more worldly understanding of love’s power to torment the heart. By the time we reach the end of the cycle in *Fear no more the heat o’ th’ sun*, we find that love has deepened and grown to a place where even death cannot break it.

O Mistress Mine is my largest work at 42 minutes in length, and I have a particular fondness for this work, because in it I think I was able to bring something fresh and original to Shakespeare’s timeless words within a narrative arc that truly formed a cycle presenting an emotional journey from beginning to end.

During the last thirty years of his life, I enjoyed a friendship with my mentor, the renowned vocal composer Dominick Argento, that included much correspondence. He also felt the strength of ***O Mistress Mine***, writing to me “It is , in my opinion, the finest cycle of yours that I know, all the more impressive being one of your longest. Furthermore, it is truly a cycle, not just a collection of songs. For that, I believe you told me, David gets the credit for selecting the texts and arranging the

order that gives a natural development to the topic. creating an organic whole. Your music supports that organization splendidly while giving a sense of great variety yet maintaining a feeling of easy cohesion, like Shakespeare's texts themselves....A point that impresses me most of all is how appropriate the text, as well as the music, is for a countertenor. There is a subtle aura of restraint about the entire work that dignifies it.” Though he was amazingly supportive of me, this was nevertheless remarkably high praise from Dominick, who never shied away from expressing any misgiving he may have felt in regard to any piece I wrote.

I Can No Other Answer Make (2016) is a very short song demonstrating another type of love, that of simple thanks for kindness shown to one. In this case, I wrote it for the great tenor and champion of American art song, tenor Paul Sperry. Paul has been a staunch supporter through many years, having taught my songs at the Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music. He has directed singers to me that have resulted in premieres and recordings, and he has on several occasions invited me to teach classes at the Manhattan School and coach young singers on my songs. By 2016, I felt that I really wanted to express to Paul how very much he means to me, and how very grateful to him I am for all he’s done for me personally and for the blossoming of American art song in recent decades. Once again, my husband found a sweet and simple four-line text from Shakespeare’s play, *Twelfth Night*, that perfectly expressed my thanks, in language as modern as anything written today.

Through composing *O Mistress Mine* and *I Can No Other Answer Make*, as well as a set of five large baritone settings of sonnets called *Love’s Pilgrimage* (also on the topic of love), I’ve found Shakespeare to be extremely suitable for setting to music. The depth of understanding of our human condition immediately makes his texts appealing and highly relevant, and as sheer poetry his language is like pure music in and of itself.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

My musical language is what I call “extended tonality”; it is tonal in that the music moves from one tonal center to another continually depending on how the text moves me to express it, but it is also “extended” in that it goes beyond being “in a key” (which is why none of my music is notated with key signatures). It is in no way, however, atonal or non-tonal.

Composers who have influenced me run the gamut. As far as song and other vocal music, I'm very partial to composers like Thomas Adès, Dominick Argento, Samuel Barber, Benjamin Britten, Tom Cipullo, George Crumb, Jonathan Dove, Ivor Gurney, Jake Heggie, Lee Hoiby, Charles Ives, Lori Laitman, Libby Larsen, Peter Maxwell Davies, Stephen McNeff, Nico Muhly, Gian Carlo Menotti, and Alan Louis Smith, as well as composers like Francis Poulenc, Erik Satie, Franz Schubert, and Hugo Wolf. I also really like the music of Elliott Carter, György Ligeti, Elena Ruehr, Arnold Schoenberg, Laura Elise Schwendinger, Joan Tower, Errollyn Wallen, Anton Webern, and Bernd Alois Zimmermann.

Much of the music I write shows the influence of my first twenty years of musical study as a pianist, and includes the piano music of J.S. Bach, Bela Bartok, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Robert Schumann, as well as twentieth century masters including Claude Debussy, Bohuslav Martinu, Maurice Ravel, Frederic Rzewski, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Galina Ustvolskaya. This influence manifests itself as rather more intricate piano parts than one ordinarily finds in most songs.

In writing *O Mistress Mine* and *I Can No Other Answer Make*, my approach to setting text was the same as in every other composition I've written; no modification of my musical language was necessary to set these wonderful texts. My process is this: I first read a text, making sure to look up all words about whose meaning I'm not entirely sure or those that may have multiple meanings. After reading – since in song the text will be sung, not read – I speak the text over and over until I get a sense of how it feels in my mouth, so I can have at least a rudimentary sense of how that text might be experienced by a singer. Repetition of text helps me to find the musical aspects of the text, the actual consonant and vowel sounds involved, the ups and downs, the rhythms of the words, phrases that need to be sung in a certain way in order to be clearly understood, the degree of lyricism involved, and so on.

After becoming as intimately acquainted with the text as possible, I sit down to the piano and improvise piano music as I improvise singing. This is the most natural way for me to write, since I'm a pianist. Drafts of the music go very fast; I can usually write a song in a day or two, getting it down on paper with pencil in what Frederic Rzewski used to call "crashing through." When I have a complete piece, or sometimes even before, I begin entering the music from the paper into software (Sibelius) and from there I begin the essential process of editing: is every note right, every dynamic effective, every line something that's enjoyable for a singer to sing, is every word and phrase going to be able to be heard clearly and cleanly? This really slows the process down, but this is where a modest song becomes a good one, and a good song becomes a great one.

Once the piece has been engraved, edited, and proofread, I give it to my husband (who is a professionally trained musician and has worked in electronic publishing for many years, including page layout applications similar to music notation software). He performs a complete layout designed to produce a final product,

with clarity of my intentions as a composer and cleanliness of notational presentation being his major emphases. He also proofreads the work for possible problems or errors in notation. Once he completes these tasks, he sends it back to me, so that I can perform another round of proofreading and, if necessary, editing. Between the two of us, we can go through half a dozen rounds of proofreading, corrections, editing, and page layout.

Clarity and cleanliness are always my priorities, because text comes before music in song and other vocal writing. Singers with great diction are wonderful when they come along, but any singer can be helped by the composer if that composer sets the chosen texts with a goal of the audience hearing the words clearly and the presentation being clean and natural.

In general, the moods and textures I've written into the scores of these songs and hopefully notated clearly enough for performers to understand what my intentions were, fall into several categories. First, I want every mood and texture to be conducive to text being heard and understood clearly and cleanly by a listener. Second, since these texts are from works of drama, I wanted to have moods and textures that conveyed the sense of live drama one feels when witnessing a Shakespeare play. Next, I wanted the music to have what Dominick called "a subtle aura of restraint...that dignifies it" – a sense of heightened reverence, perhaps, for the beauty of this incredible text and for the depth of meaning it communicates. Each song, too, has its own story to tell and I hope my writing has created an atmosphere that gives the listener a sense of the physical attributes of the particular characters in the songs, their actions, and the physical environments in which they are acting out their parts.

As I mentioned earlier, the countertenor voice felt most appropriate for *O Mistress Mine*. Brian Asawa's singing was heavenly in its marvelously soft and glowing beauty, as well as in his magnificent technique that made every note he sang feel effortless and natural. It had the qualities of clarity and cleanliness that I love, without ever feeling sanitized; his voice was warm and gentle, so human, and since I was writing the piece for him it seemed only natural that the texts be about the oh so human experience of love, and that they come from a time when Brian's voice type blossomed in the musical world.*

In the case of *I Can No Other Answer Make*, the choice of tenor was clear because I was writing it as a gift for Paul Sperry (himself a tenor). Tenor, too, felt right because the text, while simple and sincere, could very naturally be set in highly lyrical terms that felt just right for a tenor.

* I should mention that Brian Asawa passed away at age 49, just a few months before he and I were to perform the premiere of *O Mistress Mine* at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival in August of 2016. While I am sad I never had the opportunity to hear Brian sing his cycle, I am grateful to countertenor Darryl

Taylor for his offer to give the piece its first performance. Darryl also has a very beautiful voice, and a very natural and highly imaginative musicality. He learned this enormous piece in a very short time and sang a splendid premiere of it, followed a few days later by a wonderful recording session in which he and I made a recording of the piece on the MSR Classics label (catalog no. MS1603). I'm grateful to Brian for his enthusiasm for my music and for inspiring me as I composed ***O Mistress Mine***, and I'm equally grateful to Darryl for completing the project in such style.

Gabriel Kahane

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

Craigslistlieder (2006), Twitterkreis (2018-2019), Gabriel's Guide to the 48 States (2013), emergency shelter intake form (2018),

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

When I moved to New York in 2003, Craigslist was ubiquitous. It was the place to find apartments, bicycles, cheap furniture, hookups, you-name-it. At some point in early 2006, I decided that I wanted to write a piece called *Craigslistlieder*, which would explore the relationship between public and private spaces, which in turn seemed to be evolving as the internet came of age. I spent hours reading ads and eventually arrived at the eight used in the cycle.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

Never ask a composer to describe their musical language! That's your job! (I'm teasing, but seriously.)

That said, *Craigslistlieder* is an early work, maybe even my Opus 1, if I were to catalog my music, and as such, I think it's a piece in which I'm trying on various aesthetic costumes. But I think that what has remained a constant in my music, even as I've gotten older and more assured in my own voice, is a desire to always have the text drive the setting. So much of vocal writing, at least for me, is intuitive. I don't think about text setting in a cerebral way, with the possible exception of aspects having to do with comic timing, that is to say, making sure that text is set spaciouly enough to allow for laughter, trying to predict the rhythm of a joke, etc.

I would also say, at the risk of being combative, that your question about moods achieved or depicted through musical motifs is a bit of a red herring. I think that if a composer sets out to translate into music something that can be expressed verbally (e.g. pain, sorry, joy, remorse), the music obviates its own need for existence. The numinous quality of music stems precisely from refusal to be translated or interpreted literally.

The same is true even when text is in play. Much of my music, at least, on its surface, contains all kinds of juxtapositions of character, where, say, a text is “dark” and the music is “light.” But seldom is this a calculation.

The bottom line, for me, is respect for text and intuition. Ideally, everything else falls into place.

William Kenlon

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

Little Dream Pieces, Vol. 5, Op. 65 Nos. 1-5 (2016, 7'30")
Danna's Dreams For D'Anna, Op. 55 Nos. 1-3 (2014, 11')
Little Dream Pieces, Vol. 4, Op. 53 Nos. 1-5 (2013-2014, 8'30")
Little Dream Pieces, Vol. 3, Op. 43 Nos. 1-5 (2012, 6')
Little Dream Pieces, Vol. 2, Op. 37 Nos. 1-5 (2012, 7'30")
Little Dream Pieces, Vol. 1, Op. 24 Nos. 1-5 (2011, 6')

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

The *Little Dream Pieces* texts are original—they are matter-of-fact descriptions of short, odd dreams that I had around the time of composition. The texts of *Danna's Dreams For D'Anna* came about at the suggestion of pianist John McDonald, who was collaborating with mezzo D'Anna Fortunato and working alongside Danna Solomon. He suggested a *Little Dream Pieces*-like project written with and for the two similarly-named artists.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

Musical language: A conductor friend of mine told me not too long ago, "William, your music often takes us on a rather sad journey and never really brings us back." This description is both amusing and accurate: generally, I compose vocal and instrumental chamber music that expresses deep, unfulfillable longing with a lyrical sense that draws upon my experience as a singer of late Romantic song literature. This emphasis on pathos in melody is set atop and amidst a harmonic language that synthesizes other things I find interesting and moving: jazz, Brazilian music, and the coloristic approaches of Debussy and Messiaen. Some other influences that creep in from time to time are

minimalism—of both the '70s-repetitive and silence-as-sound varieties—and the use of quarter-tones or other exceptionally small (microtonal) intervals.

Other questions: I did not feel a need to alter my style to accommodate the text, since my melodic sense is largely informed by vocal music already. My usual process for setting text (poetic or otherwise) to music is to decide in advance which syllables demand to be downbeats, and then imposing some kind of formal structure (AABA, etc.) onto the text. My use of musical motifs is generally to give my works a sense of unity and coherence, and to connect ideas or textual recurrences with particular expressive devices. I do not usually set metrical text in a metrical way, and I don't really observe rhyming schemes, so my poem and non-poem processes are essentially the same. The voice types I write for are generally specified by the commissioners of the works, but generally I try to make each piano/vocal piece available in a high and low key. It's harder and more time-consuming to transpose chamber works so I usually just leave those in the original key (unless I'm paid for going to the trouble!).

Lori Laitman

(*Note: As I was in touch with Laitman, she brought to my attention her new work *Into Eternity*, a letter set to music and dedicate to a Holocaust survivor she met at Indianapolis Opera's production of *Vedem*. I have updated this response with the answers marked *.)

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

Beauty (2018) — text is an excerpt from *The Poet*, published in *Essays: Second Series* (1844) by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Scored for soprano, bass-baritone, cello and piano.

Without the Power to Vote, Take Pity, Relic, The Most Ignorant and The 19th Amendment (from the *Are Women People?* song cycle) (2016)

Without the Power to Vote, Take Pity, Relic and The Most Ignorant are fragments from an 1894 speech by Susan B. Anthony. The 19th Amendment is taken from The United States Constitution.

Scored for SATB Vocal quartet and Piano 4-Hands **OR** SATB Vocal Quartet *a cappella*.

Dear Future Roommate (2015, rev. 2017)

Scored for either tenor or baritone voice with piano. This was my first (and remains my only) “letter” song.

Text from Mike Gioia’s fake letter to a future roommate as part of his application to Stanford University.

And I Will Bring Them (2001, rev. 2003, 2009, 2017).

Scored for either soprano, tenor, counter-tenor or contralto with piano.

Text from Isaiah 56:7. This is my only Biblical setting.

The War God’s Horse Song (2006, rev. 2017) from my *River of Horses* song cycle: This text is from a traditional Najavo song, and I don’t think you could consider the text poetry — but I’m not entirely sure.

The songs for which I wrote the text are not poetry. These include:

Sleep, Little Child (2003) — for any voice type and piano

Short Songs for Edward (2017) for soprano and piano

- Avocado and Goat Cheese on Toast
- If You Have to Make a Poo
- Sometimes You Get a Boo-Boo
- Please and Thank You

Dreaming (1991). There are a variety of versions:

soprano/piano

soprano/baritone/piano

soprano/mezzo-soprano/piano

SATB/piano

***Into Eternity** (2022)

This letter is by Vilma Grunwald, July 11, 1944 — and most unusual. She was about to be transported to Auschwitz along with one of her sons — but found paper (a rarity), wrote the letter, gave it to a sympathetic guard, who passed it along to her husband (a doctor, also imprisoned)....

see this link for details: <https://perspectives.ushmm.org/item/letter-from-vilma-grunwald-to-kurt-grunwald>

Scored for mezzo-soprano and piano

The arias from my operas are from libretti not poems. Same with the songs from my oratorio **Vedem**. Please let me know if you are interested in those.

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

An important note: I have a strong preference for setting poetry rather than text — which is why I have so few settings that use text in my catalogue. Text contains too many extraneous words for my style of composition.

For *Beauty*, I was asked to set a portion of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *The Poet*.

The commissioners had another section of the essay in mind, but when I read the essay, the portion that I chose (which was near the end) seemed most poetic and most suited to my style of composition.

This is the excerpt I chose:

“Wherever snow falls, or water flows, or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds, or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love, there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldest walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble.”

The repetitions of “wherever” made this portion more poetic, and thus provided more of a sense of musical structure to my ear.

+++++

For the songs from *Are Women People?*, I chose all the texts. My original starting point was the poetry of Alice Duer Miller. But to counterbalance the light-hearted nature of her satirical poems, I felt that excerpts from Susan B. Anthony’s speech, which were also quite witty, provided a counterbalance that allowed me to use the SATB forces in a different way — with all forces working together (as opposed to the dramatic device of pitting women against the men in the Miller). For the ending, I felt that The 19th Amendment, which gave women the power to vote, was the fitting conclusion to this cycle about suffrage.

*In March 2022, Indianapolis Opera presented a staged version of my Holocaust oratorio *Vedem*. In attendance was Holocaust survivor Frank Grunwald and his wife Barbara. I learned about the letter from this event, and asked for permission to set it. I wanted to set it to honor Frank.

David Starkey, the General Director of Indianapolis Opera, has told me that if I set it, they would like to be the ones to premiere it.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

My musical language is tonal and my approach to setting words remains the same, whether I’m composing an art song, opera, oratorio, etc. Here’s a brief description:

My compositional approach is multi-layered, and all my inspiration stems from the words themselves.

I begin with the vocal line, figuring out the best rhythms to honor the natural stresses of the words. All melodies are custom crafted to suit the voice and to emphasize the most important words in a phrase with the goal of illuminating and magnifying the meaning of the words. I never know which direction the words

will take me, and I discover the structure as I proceed. Leitmotifs are often used in both my songs and opera, as well as the technique of word painting, in an effort to further illuminate the text.

I use harmonies to comment on the emotional content of the subtext, with very fluid changes to the tonal centers in order to match the varying moods of the text. Although I have some idea of the harmonies I will eventually use, they are not fleshed out until the vocal line is complete. My accompaniments are often quite challenging and also fairly independent from the vocal line, as they are generally focused on examining the text from a different vantage point. Other musical decisions, such as texture, timbre, range, meter, even absence of sound — are made with the intent of providing additional layers of textual commentary. The final product is a complex web of sound that reveals my interpretation of the words.

Regarding instrumentation:

Dear Future Roommate was commissioned by Lyric Fest of Philadelphia and I was writing specifically for baritone Keith Phares and pianist Laura Ward, who premiered the work on April 2, 2016. Later, I adapted the song for tenor, as I was recording with tenor Vale Rideout.

Are Women People? — This instrumentation was specifically asked for by Sylvie Beaudette at Eastman, who arranged the commission. The idea to include an extractable *a cappella* segment of the work was mine.

Beauty — Jamie-Rose Guarrine, who arranged for the commission, specifically requested a work for soprano, bass-baritone, cello and piano.

Dreaming — I created many versions as this has become a popular encore song.

Short Songs for Edward — honestly, it could be sung by other voice types, but in recording, we used Maureen McKay, so I left it for soprano.

Sleep, Little Child — this lullaby can be sung by a variety of voices as the range is limited.

Thomas Lloyd

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

You must know.... – a setting for voice and piano of a letter from Amelia Earhart to her fiancé George Putnam on the morning of their wedding, February 7, 1931; commissioned by Lyric Fest through a generous gift from Lauren and Craig Meyer and first performed by Katherine Pracht, mezzo soprano, and Laura Ward, piano on April 2 and 3, 2016.

(Recording here: <https://www.thomaslloydmusic.com/you-must-know>)

Ben Unleashed for five solo voices (SSATB) and piano; commissioned by Lyric Fest of Philadelphia and first performed at the Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia, October 14, 2012

(<https://www.thomaslloydmusic.com/ben-unleashed>).

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

I found the texts for both on my own. *You must know...* was for a program of song settings of letters. I was drawn to the tension in Earhart's letter between her conflicting desires for independence and intimacy, in a way that was quite ahead of her time for a woman. *Ben Unleashed* was written as a humerus closer for a concert of American-themed music.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

My compositional approach is to find or create a mode that matches the affect of the text and then try to adapt it freely to the rhythm and expressive inflection of the words themselves. For *You must know...* I chose a 12-tone row with some angular, expressive intervals with the hope of capturing Earhart's combined sense of detachment and intensity of emotion.

The approach to *Ben Unleashed* was primarily concerned with the playful juxtaposition of diverse texts, with clear contrasts of texture and tone and supporting the understanding of the text by having the voices often singing alone without the piano. The vocal quintet was determined by the number of solo performers on that particular concert.

Michael Rickelton

1. List several of your vocal works with texts that are not poems. Please note that, for the purpose of this research, I am excluding texts that are liturgical (e.g. Gloria, Alleluia), translations from foreign languages (e.g. Japanese haiku), non-lexical vocables (gibberish), folksong texts, or free-form poems. You may include chamber settings of works. If possible, please include the year of composition (for accuracy of information in the report of my dissertation).

I am sorry that it has come to this – 2018
Living With the Loss of a Child – In progress 2023

For the following questions, you may choose to select one or more of your above works to elaborate on.

2. How did you find the text? Did you come across the text yourself, or was it presented to you for a commission? If you found it, what inspired you to set it to music?

Living With the Loss of a Child – For years during my afternoon drive home I would listen to Baltimore’s 105.7 “The Fan” (Baltimore’s local sports talk radio). Around the same time everyday a young Baltimore sports fan, Mo Gaba, would call into the show to talk with the hosts. He always seemed so full of life and you could hear the enthusiasm in his voice. He became a regular guest on the broadcast. I would soon learn that Mo had spent most of his life in the hospital battling multiple cancer diagnoses, the first of which occurred at the age of 9 months. The sound of Mo’s voice and his interactions with Scott and Jeremy became familiar parts of my afternoon, then came March 2020. I no longer left the house so I stopped tuning into the radio on my drives home (there were no drives home). Then in July 2020, I read of Mo’s passing, only hours after his induction into the Baltimore Orioles Hall of Fame. I didn’t know Mo personally, but his voice, his excitement and positivity passively graced my radio as I drove home everyday for the better part of seven years. Mo impacted an entire city and we felt his absence, yet none of us could have been impacted more by his life, and therefore his death, than his mother. As I sat reading multiple articles about Mo I kept returning to his mother and what she was feeling and thinking, knowing that it is something I could never imagine feeling myself. Mo Gaba was 14 years old.

I began thinking of writing a piece as my own way to honor Mo. I searched for texts from the perspective of a mother and came across Suzanne Leigh’s blog *The Mourning After Natasha*. Suzanne too lost her child to cancer. Her blog entry “Living With the Loss of a Child: Update at 14 Weeks” spoke about the experience in a way that was direct. What attracted me to this writing was that it was not filtered through any poetic device – it was simply someone speaking

about their experiences, emotions, and questions. This is not one's dramatized version of loss but their uninhibited free form response to tragedy.

3. Briefly describe your musical language, including your influences. Did you have to modify your language to tailor it to the text? How did you go about setting the music to the text? Are there any moods or textures you were hoping to depict or achieve from any musical motifs? If applicable, explain why you chose the instrumentation (including the type of voice) for the vocal work.

I don't know if composers are the best people to describe their own musical language, although certainly every composer is aware of some of their own tendencies. I tend to write music that is rooted in the horizontal more than the vertical. I don't really think in chords, but in lines that result in vertical sonorities. I typically hear lines rooted in modality, but I write tonal and atonal music, sometimes within the same piece. For me, the counterpoint becomes the driving mechanism, although I would say all my music maintains some aspect of tonal function if not explicitly tonal. I also like the extremes – incredibly dense music and incredibly sparse music. I have too many musical influence to name but some important influences are Thomas Luis de Victoria, Beethoven, Ives, Tavener, and Nine Inch Nails.

I don't think I've ever altered my own musical language to fit a text. If I felt I had to then I wouldn't set the text. For *Living With the Loss of a Child*, I knew the piece needed to live somewhere in the middle of aria and recitative. It needed to maintain it's direct, speech like cadence. The difficulty with a text that is not intended to be sung is that there are often times long phrases that may be tough to shape musically and word choices that are not the easiest to sing. For me it comes down to finding the right balance between melodic gestures showing musical direction, and slight changes of pitch to show the speaking cadence. For instance, in this piece you will find phrases with only one repeated pitch with a rise or fall at the speaking cadence, and sparse use of "singing melody" as a way to enhance certain words or phrases (see attached photo) Although written for voice and piano, this is not at all traditional art song, this is vocal chamber music – a duet that happens to include a voice. The piece is written for Sonya Knussen, a wonderful mezzo-soprano, and there will be a version written for higher voice soon after the completion of the version for mezzo.

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Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2004.

Composer Dominick Argento wrote this autobiography in the form of a catalogue to his works, talking about how these works came to fruition, and connecting these events to his life.

Dalzell, Susan. *Poetry 101: From Shakespeare and Rupi Kaur to Iambic Pentameter and Blank Verse, Everything You Need to Know about Poetry*. Stoughton, MA: Adams Media, 2018.

A simple guide to the fundamentals of poetry. Dalzell tackles the history of poetry and gives examples throughout the timeline and different types of poetry.

Devine, A.M., and Stephens, Lawrence D. "The Psychology of Rhythm," in *The Prosody of Greek Speech*, 85-156. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Rhythm and meter discussed in this chapter in the context of the Greek language.

Friedberg, Ruth C. *American Art Song and American Poetry*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981.

This set of books in three volumes follows the origins of the truly American Art Song, discussing American poetry and art song composers.

Kennedy, X.J., and Gioia, Dana. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 8th ed. New York: Longman, 2002.

A detailed textbook on both prose and poetry. This is also written by Dana Gioia, who is a frequent collaborator of Lori Laitman and a father of Mike Gioia.

Kimball, Carol. "American Song." In *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, 245-350. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2005.

Kimball's general guide to the American art song repertoire aids both the pianist and the singer in understanding the songs and/or the cycles. This is a helpful source for writing program notes or looking for songs for recital programming.

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