

Notes on Three Performances

by

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ABSTRACT

Two recitals and an operatic role were presented in lieu of a written dissertation.

The program notes on these performances, “Hubris”, “Mostly About Love”, and “Journey to Wenlock Edge” detail the technical development and interpretive awareness necessary to present an authentic artistic product consistent with the scholarly expectations of a doctoral student at the University of Michigan. Each of these performances work together to produce an experiences that is thematically, linguistically, and technically diverse. While there is not a central narrative connecting the performances, each one reflects a different aspect of the human condition.

Recital 1: In lieu of a recital, the role of Nate in *Highway One, U.S.A.* by William Grant Still was performed on April 15th, 2019 at 4pm in McIntosh Theatre, Ann Arbor, MI. Louise Toppin, director; Jabarie Glass, conductor.

Recital 2: “Mostly About Love” March 10th, 2020, 7:30pm, Stamps Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI.
Taylor Flowers, Piano

Program: “Mandoline,” Claude Debussy; “Green,” Claude Debussy; “Pace non trovo,” Franz Liszt; “Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht,” Gustav Mahler; “Ging heut’ Morgen über’s Feld,” Gustav Mahler; “Ich hab’ ein glühend Messer,” Gustav Mahler; “Der Engel,” Richard Wagner; “Im Treibhaus,” Richard Wagner; “Worth While,” Harry Thacker Burleigh, “The Jungle Flower,”

Harry Thacker Burleigh; “Kashmiri Song,” Harry Thacker Burleigh; “Among the Fuchsias,”

Harry Thacker Burleigh; “Till I Wake,” Harry Thacker Burleigh.

Recital 3: “Journey to Wenlock Edge” May 29th, 2020, 7pm, The Advenir, Cayce, SC.

Helen Meacham, Piano

Program: “On Wenlock Edge,” Ralph Vaughan Williams; “From Far, from Eve and Morning,”

Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Is My Team Ploughing,” Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Oh, When I Was

in Love with You,” Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Bredon Hill,” Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Clun,”

Ralph Vaughan Williams; “Prayer,” H. Leslie Adams; “Drums of Tragedy,” H. Leslie Adams;

“The Heart of a Woman,” H. Leslie Adams; “Night Song,” H. Leslie Adams; “Sence You Went

Away,” H. Leslie Adams; “Creole Girl,” H. Leslie Adams; “Peter Go Ring Dem Bells,” John

Daniels Carter; “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” John Daniels Carter; “Let Us Break

Bread Together,” John Daniels Carter; “Ride On King Jesus,” John Daniels Carter.

CHAPTER I

Hubris: A Character Analysis of the Role of Nate from William Grant Still's

Highway One, U.S.A.

William Grant Still's *Highway One, U.S.A.* through lush melodies and characteristically romantic orchestration, tells the story of a couple (Mary and Bob) whose quiet and relatively peaceful life is upended by the sudden arrival of Bob's brother, Nate. On her death bed Bob made a promise to his mother to look out for and support Nate; a promise that has likely taken many forms over the years but most recently involved financing a degree (most likely in philosophy or classical literature as evident by Nate's mention of the works of Arthur Shopenhauer and Walt Whitman in scene two).

As the owner/operator of a filling station Bob's income is meager, thereby necessitating a great deal of fiscal restraint in order to afford Nate's education. Mary looks to the day of Nate's graduation with optimism as a herald of the end of their struggle, only to have those hopes dashed when she learns that the last four years of sacrifice have culminated in nothing more than one more mouth to feed. This revelation sets in motion a sequence of events that would encompass a number of verismo opera dramatic themes that include deception, infidelity, murder (the last two of which end up foiled; inexplicably in the case of the latter), and eventually resolution.

Still sets the opera in an intentionally unspecified small town off of U.S. highway 1. This particular highway runs from Key West, Florida to Fort Kent Maine, spanning over 2,000 miles,

sixteen states, and countless cities/towns along the way.¹ He does narrow this location slightly via the original title for the opera (*A Southern Interlude*), however there is still a great deal left to the imagination. This sort of ambiguity might prove advantageous in regards to diverse casting, as factors like race and other specifics in regards to appearance become less important. However, it can make the task of building a psychological profile slightly more difficult. In regards to the factors that drove Nate to attempt murder though, it might be helpful to first explore his childhood, the dynamics between him and his brother Bob, and his relationship to the town in which he grew up.

The opera's libretto was written by Verna Arvey, an American pianist and writer, and William Grant Still's wife.² The libretto for this opera is not drawn from a preexisting literary work, making the synopsis on the second page of the score the only source material with which to build a profile for Nate. That said, a great deal of context must be drawn from Mary and Bob's words in reference to his character.

The first reference to Nate occurs on page eight when Bob mentions to Mary that he must "Keep his mouth shut when educated folks are around" so that Nate will not be ashamed. This statement gives us crucial insight into two key aspects of the dynamic between the brothers: 1. Bob views himself as significantly less intelligent than Nate thus creating an inferiority complex in Bob that would continue to skew his decisions in dangerous ways. 2. Despite this complex, Bob still holds a great deal of affection for his brother and, on some level, yearns for acceptance in his brother's eyes; a fact that is confirmed in the second scene when Bob prepares to make a

¹Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division : Federal Highway Administration. U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, 1997.

²Arvey, Verna,. In *One Lifetime*. University of Arkansas Press, 1984.

final sacrifice for his brother by taking responsibility for his wife's murder at Nate's hands. The foundation for this heavily skewed power dynamic was likely laid very early on in the brothers' lives.

The opera is set in "the present" which at the time of its completion would have been 1963. At the point we enter the opera, Nate and Bob's mother had been dead for years now making her an unreliable reference point for their ages. Neither Bob nor Nate's ages are mentioned directly, however there are a few contextual bits of information in the score that allow these ages to be approximated reasonably, in a manner that will be elaborated upon further. The establishment of their ages becomes important when attempting to establish motivation for the charge issued to Bob by the ailing mother on her death bed.

In scene one, Bob explains to Mary why he feels compelled to continue his support of Nate. He explains that his actions are not just for Nate, "but for mother...She had a dream of a son with great learning, a child who would send our name forth over all the world, whose words would command respect, whose deeds would win wide acclaim...her life had no other meaning." This statement establishes that neither Bob nor his mother were formally educated. Bob also goes on to say that on her death bed, she made him promise to "help Nate make his way in the world, to serve his keen brain with my (Bob's) brawn." The fact that she says this on her death bed gives us an important clue in establishing the age disparity between the brothers. At this point, she seems to have concentrated her hopes on Nate, suggesting that Bob is already past the age at which one might begin extended study at an institution of higher education. Moreover, her request that Bob support Nate suggests that Bob is already financially self-sufficient or at the very least, employed.

It is clear from the words of the unnamed mother that Nate was intellectually precocious at a young age. At the time of her death he has not yet had the chance to fulfill or fall short of her hopes for him suggesting that he has not yet reached the age of eighteen but is likely no younger than seven, as it would have been difficult to confirm any heightened cognitive ability before this age.³ All these factors considered, the age gap between Nate and Bob could be approximated to between ten and thirteen years. At the start of the opera, Nate has just graduated from college making him approximately twenty one years of age which would subsequently place Bob in his early to mid thirties. Based on Bob's age, we can also assume that their mother was likely born sometime between 1900 and 1910 which is significant because of her limited access to education as a woman, and as a single parent. This fact provides context for her heightened motivation in regards to the cultivation of Nate's intellect. In her early attempts to accomplish this, she may also have inadvertently contributed to what would later develop into pronounced narcissism.

Given that nearly the entire town and church community show up to see Bob off as he prepares to retrieve Nate from college, one could reasonably deduce that said town is a small one. In the ensuing chorus, the towns people praise Mary and Bob and expound upon their roles in the tight knit community stating that they are dependable, morally upright, loyal and generally good people. They are, as Mary states in scene 2 "sincere and wise in a homely way" but that they have no other virtues in response to a statement by Nate that these people bore him. In reality, Nate's relationship to these people likely runs a bit deeper than surface level boredom.

Raising children in a community this size likely proved helpful for the mother, as she had multiple persons looking out for and helping to take care of those children. For a child like Nate

³Gelman, Susan A., editor. *Childhood Cognitive Development*. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015.

though, this might have proven to be a very isolating and uncomfortable experience. As previously established, Nate showed advanced cognitive ability from a young age which might have made connecting with his peers a challenge. Being gifted academically can make a child feel different from their peers and may even lead to bullying and depression.⁴ Studies have shown that the more intellectually gifted a child is, the greater the risk of social difficulties and unhappiness.⁵ This theory is further corroborated in scene two when, in response to Mary's statement that people don't understand him, Nate says "That's true. I can't feel at ease with other people, and it's hard to be alone". At this moment, we begin to see the seed that would eventually flower in the the form of rage. It establishes to the viewer that Nate has not fully resolved the feelings of isolation and loneliness he felt as a child.

By scene two, Mary's hatred for Nate is already firmly established. This is due in no small part to her heart rending aria that closes out the first scene in which she describes the endless burden Nate has been on her and Bob's life and the frustration she feels as expressed via a climactic high B flat on the final repetition of the phrase "How I hate him!". That said, the statements of admiration she delivers to him in scene two very clearly reads as sarcasm to the audience. At his level of intelligence, one would assume that this sarcasm would be easily detected. However, Nate's elevated sense of self keeps him from being able to recognize these statements for what they are and as a result, he does something that he likely never has before: he lets someone in. With each word of praise, Nate grows simultaneously more comfortable and more bold. His narcissism does not allow room for empathy in regards to how whatever actions

⁴Sojourner, Aaron., and Wiswall, Matthew J. Early Childhood Care and Cognitive Development. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020.

⁵ Ibid

he might take with Mary might affect his brother. It does not allow room for rational thought with how the two of them would live in the event that they did run away together (Nate has no job and Mary's only income comes from helping out with Bob's filling station). Most dangerously though, it does not leave room for a reality in which Mary might say no. Due to his lack of social experience and emotional intelligence, he is probably not equipped to deal with rejection of this sort. This is what leads to Mary's attempted murder.

We are able to reasonably deduce that Bob believes himself to be (at least in regards to formal education) inferior to his brother. However, I feel that it is just as likely that Nate harbors a great amount of jealousy and resentment for Bob. In his scene two aria "What Does He Know of Dreams?" Nate, boldly and actively declaims to Mary that the man she married is nothing more than a simpleton. Supported by full, lush orchestration, Nate states (with utmost hatred and disgust) exactly why his brother's life and work mean nothing to him. In a fashion that could be considered "authentically romantic" in its operatic scope, Nate establishes his hatred for his brother and his role as the opera's sole antagonist.

Considering all that Bob has done for him, Nate's feelings as expressed in this aria do not really make sense. While Bob may have had misgivings about Nate, he has always supported him (both financially and emotionally) nonetheless. Bob even puts his and Mary's plans on hold to continue supporting Nate post-graduation prompting multiple claims from Mary that Nate is "All he thinks of" and that she sometimes feels that Bob loves Nate more than he loves her. The only logical explanation for such extreme negative emotions on Nate's part is that he's jealous.

The idea that Nate could be jealous of someone he thinks so little of might at first seem counterintuitive. That is, until you consider the points raised earlier in regards to Nate's

narcissistic personality and personal struggles with loneliness and social acceptance. Despite Bob's supposed lack of intelligence and vision, he has managed to obtain two things that for all of his intelligence, skills, and degree, Nate hasn't: the love and admiration of his friends, neighbors, and community, and the love of a kind and beautiful woman who sees him for who he is (including his faults) and loves him anyway. In addition, Bob has managed to build a life for himself and his wife without a college degree. To see his brother (whom he has viewed as inferior for so long) succeed where he has failed is infuriating to him.

This is where Nate's preoccupation with Mary comes into play. Presumably it is clear to Nate from memories of his childhood experiences that winning over his community is not going to happen, which is probably why he has settled for hating them instead. But Mary is different. She is the jewel in the crown that is the simple, yet beautiful life Bob has built. Nate has long regarded her as a prize of which Bob is unworthy (as corroborated in a line of text from his second aria: "You're too fine for such a dull person".) However, when Nate thinks that she has developed genuine feelings for him, she becomes something else entirely. She becomes a way out of the purgatory he has lived in for the vast majority of his life and at the same time, a way to hurt Bob thus providing an outlet for the resentment that has built up in him over the years.

When Nate finally makes his move, he is sure of himself and his actions making Mary's swift rejection all the more jarring. She strikes him forcefully, calling him a fool. He is stunned by the blow but more so by the series of events that are unfolding. He reacts almost like a child in response to what, to the audience was an inevitable and clearly foreseeable outcome. He quickly tries to put things together in his head occasionally uttering rebuttals to Mary's statements that her words were sarcasm and that she loves her husband still. She speaks at length

about his selfishness and the fact that he has brazenly wasted their resources and manipulated Bob into taking care of him. However, it is the following statement that makes Nate lose control: “What makes you think anyone could love a weakling like you?” This exposes another underlying issue and point of deep insecurity for Nate.

While we’ve only focused on the intellectual and social aspects of the antithetical relationship between Bob and Nate, that relationship also encompasses their physical appearance. Very early on in the opera, Bob says to Mary that he promised to serve Nate’s “Keen brain with his brawn” which is the first mention of a distinction in physical size between the brothers. However, Nate was likely still a child at the time and that difference could easily have been accounted for by the age differential. However, Mary goes on to say that “He (Nate) uses his weakness to gain an easy life” suggesting that even in adulthood, Nate is a slight man.

Growing up, Nate probably recognized that he was smaller in stature than a lot of the boys his age, a fact that would have been exacerbated by the fact that he had an older brother who was as large and socially adept as Bob. He would have leaned into his academic prowess to compensate. However, in the town in which he grew up, he would have quickly learned that those things didn’t mean as much to the people there as some of Bob’s more genuine qualities. All of these factors combined to form a neurosis that Nate suppressed by excelling in his academic work, all while harboring resentment toward Bob.

At the moment when Mary suggests that no one could love someone like Nate, the weight of all of these unresolved psychological issues sweeps over him all at once. Mary then begins to laugh boisterously at him sending Nate into a blind rage. After stabbing Mary, Nate quickly comes back to his senses and attempts to justify his actions to Bob by telling him that Mary had

flirted with him. Under pressure, he admits the truth and once again plays on Bob's promise to his mother in an effort to escape the consequences of his actions. This ploy might have worked if Mary had not miraculously (and inexplicably) survived the stabbing. With her testimony, Nate is identified as the assailant and carried off by the town's sheriff along with an angry mob of towns people.

It is easy to paint Nate's character as an unredeemable villain, especially given his marked lack of redeeming qualities. However I don't think it is that simple, especially when the factors that led to this act are taken into account. It is my firm believe that Nate suffered from mental illness, something that did not receive the level of credence and care in the 1960's that it does today. Moreover, I wonder how differently Nate's life might have turned out if he had had counseling for the issues he struggled with as a child, including the fractured relationship he had with his brother. Under those circumstances, this story could have ended much more happily not only for Nate, but for the entire family.

CHAPTER II

Mostly About Love: An Artistic Exploration of Love from its Youthful Beginning

to its Often Tragic End.

Program

Darius A. Gillard, tenor

Taylor Flowers, piano

March 10th, 2020

7:30pm

Stamps Auditorium

I.

Mandoline

Green

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

II.

Pace non trovo

from *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

III.

Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht

Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld

Ich hab' ein glühend Messer

from *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

INTERMISSION

IV.

Der Engel

Im Treibhaus

from *Wesendonck Lieder*

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

V.

Worth While

The Jungle Flower

Kashmiri Song

Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949)

Among the Fuchsias
Till I Wake
from *Five Songs of Laurence Hope*

As an artistic motivating force, there are few concepts more powerful or diverse than love. Over the course of history, countless works of art expressed through a myriad of media have been inspired and brought to fruition as a direct result of this often complicated emotion. A great number of the pieces selected for this recital are a direct result of actual love affairs between the composers/poets and women they have known. Others, merely a musical expression of the idea.

This recital's title was drawn from a song grouping initially intended to be performed just after intermission; Virgil Thomson's "Mostly About Love". A playful meditation on love as many have experienced it in their youth, this set seemed to be the perfect leavening agent in an otherwise dark concert. Though this set would eventually be removed, the title was retained as it still very accurately described the content of the recital.

In its place, a number of other songs were added that mirror its dramatic quality for the sake of diversity and thematic continuity. These pieces span a broader range of style, language, and technical difficulty and reflect more thoroughly, the journey of love through its many stages. Further analysis of each piece has yielded an interesting historical tapestry that displays the human condition in its purest and most relatable form.

Having provided the poetry for both songs in the first set, Paul Verlaine's tumultuous life is an excellent example of how such a life can inspire art. While Verlaine did marry and have a child with Mathilde Mauté, the great volume of his output was produced after he'd left the two of

them to pursue a torrid love affair with an admirer of his early work, Arthur Rimbaud. Many of his best works were written from a cell in Mons where he'd been imprisoned after firing two shots at Rimbaud in a jealous (and by all accounts, drunken) rage. The pieces in this first set may not present a direct link to an actual affair in the poet's life, however they undoubtedly encapsulate the freedom and fluidity with which he lived and loved.

Mandoline: This setting of the popular Verlaine text was composed in 1882 when the young Debussy was just twenty one years old. In this piece, Debussy's gift for impressionistic writing is on full display beginning in the opening bar where he uses the piano to imitate the tuning of the mandolin in open fifths. Throughout the song, the composer actively manipulates texture via specific instructions in regards to legato and staccato designations in the vocal line. The codetta of "la's", which does not exist in the original poetry was added by the composer.

Text	Translation
Les donneurs de sérénades	The galant serenaders
Et les belles écouteuses	and their fair listeners
Échangent des propos fades	exchange sweet nothings
Sous les ramures chanteuses.	beneath singing boughs.
C'est Tircis et c'est Aminte,	Tircis is there, Aminte is there,
Et c'est l'éternel Clitandre,	and eternal Clitandre is there,
Et c'est Damis qui pour mainte	and Damis who for many a cruel maid
Cruelle fait maint vers tendre.	writes many a tender song.
Leurs courtes vestes de soie,	Their short silken doublets,
Leurs longues robes à queues,	their long trailing gowns,
Leur élégance, leur joie	their elegance, their joy,
Et leurs molles ombres bleues,	and their soft blue shadows,
Tourbillonnent dans l'extase	Whirl madly in the rapture
D'une lune rose et grise,	of a grey and roseate moon,
Et la mandoline jase	and the mandolin jangles on
Parmi les frissons de brise.	in the shivering breeze.

Green: Paul Verlaine was a favorite of Debussy's in regards to poets whose work he preferred to set, specifically in the early stages of his career. Green, number five from the

Ariettes oubliées (Forgotten Airs) is another example of this poetry set to music. Verlaine was known to have given English titles to a number of his poems on occasion (Spleen, also from the forgotten airs and Nevermore). This song is written in a relatively uncomplicated ABA form, but features a deceptively difficult piano accompaniment marked by rapidly descending arpeggiated figures, living up to its designation *Aquarelles I* (watercolor).

Text	Translation
<p>Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches. Et puis voici mon cœur qui ne bat que pour vous. Ne le déchirez pas avec vos deux mains blanches. Et qu'à vos yeux si beaux l'humble présent soit doux. J'arrive tout couvert encore de rosée. Que le vent du matin vient glacer à mon front. Souffrez que ma fatigue à vos pieds reposée Rêve des chers instants qui la délasseront. Sur votre jeune sein laissez rouler ma tête Toute sonore encore de vos derniers baisers; Laissez-la s'apaiser de la bonne tempête, Et que je dorme un peu puisque vous reposez.</p>	<p>Here are the fruits, the flowers, the fronds, and the branches. An here too is my heart that beats only for you. Do not tear it with your two white hands. And may the humble gift please your lovely eyes. I come all covered still with the dew frozen to my brow by the morning breeze. Let my fatigue, finding rest at your feet, Dream of dear moments that will soothe it. On your young breast let me cradle my head Still ringing with your recent kisses; After love's sweet tumult grant it peace, And let me sleep a while, since you rest.</p>

Pace non trovo: While Liszt was born in Hungary, he was very much an international citizen of Europe as is apparent by his multilingual song compositions. While his song output (nearly 90 pieces) would eventually be overshadowed by his orchestral and piano music, a great number of his works for voice are still valued for their lyricism and operatic scope. The *Tre sonetti di Petrarca* are a shining example of this. Pace non trovo specifically, employs the use of several characteristically “Lisztian” devices that include romantic bel canto melodies, declamatory phrases, and soaring arias that culminate in a tempestuous meditation on the duality of love (specifically the poet’s love for Laura de Noves). While a solo piano version does exist, it is important to note that this collection was originally conceived as a song set for tenor.

There is not a great deal of documented information about Laura de Noves other than her lineage (daughter of Audibert de Noves, a knight and Ermessenda de Noves, his wife). She was married at the age of fifteen and was by all accounts a faithful wife. She was first seen by Petrarch in April of 1327 during a mass at the church of Saint-Claire d'Avignon. He would go on to spend the next few years dropping in on her at the courts and speaking of his love for her which he quantified as platonic at the time. After her death however, Petrarch's work would begin to reflect a much more intimate love in reference to Laura who proved to be one of the greatest and most enduring of his artistic influences.

Text

Pace non trovo, et non ò da far guerra;
 e temo, et spero; et ardo, et son un ghiaccio;
 et volo sopra 'l cielo, et giaccio in terra;
 et nulla stringo, et tutto 'l mondo abbraccio.
 Tal m' à in pregion, che non m' apre né serra,
 né per suo mi riten né scioglie il laccio;
 et non m' ancide Amore, et non mi sferra,
 né mi vuol vivo, né mi trae d' impaccio.
 Veggio senza occhi, et non ò lingua et grido;
 et bramo di perir, et cheggio aita;
 et ò in odio me stesso, et amo altrui.
 Pascomi di dolor, piangendo rido;
 egualmente mi spiace morte et vita:
 in questo stato son, donna, per voi..

Translation

I find no peace, and yet I make no war:
 and fear, and hope: and burn, and I am ice:
 and fly above the sky, and fall to earth,
 and clutch at nothing, and embrace the world.
 One imprisons me, who neither frees nor jails me,
 nor keeps me to herself nor slips the noose:
 and Love does not destroy me, and does not loose me,
 wishes me not to live, but does not remove my bar.
 I see without eyes, and have no tongue, but cry:
 and long to perish, yet I beg for aid:
 and hold myself in hate, and love another.
 I feed on sadness, laughing weep:
 death and life displease me equally:
 and I am in this state, lady because of you.

Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht: Mahler's total song output was less than fifty pieces, and certainly the most influential of them lie in his orchestrated song cycles; one of the earliest examples of which being the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer). These songs chronicle the descent of a jilted lover into madness upon the discovery that the woman he loves will be married to another. They were written in the wake of Mahler's unrequited attraction to Johanna Richter, a soprano he met during his tenure as principle conductor of the city opera

house at Kassel, Germany. In this first selection, Mahler establishes the Wayfarer's sadness and mental fragility with an ABA form that oscillates between E minor and F major respectively.

Text	Translation
Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht, Fröhliche Hochzeit macht, Hab' ich meinen traurigen Tag! Geh' ich in mein Kämmerlein, Dunkles Kämmerlein! Weine! wein'! Um meinen Schatz, Um meinen lieben Schatz! Blümlein blau! Blümlein blau! Verdorre nicht! Verdorre nicht! Vöglein süß! Vöglein süß! Du singst auf grüner Heide! „Ach, wie ist die Welt so schön! Ziküth! Ziküth!“ Singet nicht! Blühet nicht! Lenz ist ja vorbei! Alles Singen ist nun aus! Des Abends, wenn ich schlafen geh', Denk' ich an mein Leid! An mein Leide!	When my love has her wedding-day, Her joyous wedding-day, I have my day of mourning! I go into my little room, My dark little room! I weep, weep! For my love, My dearest love! Blue little flower! Blue little flower! Do not wither, do not wither! Sweet little bird! Sweet little bird! Singing on the green heath! 'Ah, how fair the world is! Chirp chirp! chirp chirp!" Do not sing! Do not bloom! For spring is over! All singing now is done! At night, when I go to rest, I think of my sorrow! My sorrow!

Ging heut Morgen über's Feld: In the second song of the cycle, the Wayfarer attempts to pull himself out of the impending depression that looms. In what to many reads as denial, he expounds upon the beauty of the day and the world at large. With sprawling chromatic lines, Mahler paints a vivid picture of the bounteous fields and wild life of which the Wayfarer speaks. Over a dissonant pedal, he poses the question "Nun fängt auch men Glück wohl an?" (Now, won't my happiness begin, too?) to which he answers "Nein! Nein! Das ich mein, Mir nimmer, simmer blühen kann!" (No! No! That which I seek, can never, never more blossom for me!). This sets the stage for a full descent into madness in the third song of the cycle.

Text	Translation
Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld, Tau noch auf den Gräsern hing; Sprach zu mir der lust'ge Fink: „Ei du! Gelt? Guten Morgen! Ei, Gelt? Du! Wird's nicht eine schöne Welt? Zink! Zink! Schön und flink! Wie mir doch die Welt gefällt!“ Auch die Glockenblum' am Feld Hat mir lustig, guter Ding', Mit den Glöckchen, klinge, kling, Ihren Morgengruß geschellt: „Wird's nicht eine schöne Welt? Kling! Kling! Schönes Ding! Wie mir doch die Welt gefällt! Und da fing im Sonnenschein Gleich die Welt zu funkeln an; Alles, alles, Ton und Farbe gewann! Im Sonnenschein! Blum' und Vogel, groß und klein! „Guten Tag! Guten Tag! Ist's nicht eine schöne Welt? Ei, du! Gelt? Schöne Welt!“ Nun fängt auch mein Glück wohl an? Nein! Nein! Das ich mein', Mir nimmer, nimmer blühen kann	I walked across the fields this morning, Dew still hung on the grass, The merry finch said to me: 'You there, hey – Good morning! Hey, you there! Isn't it a lovely world? Tweet! Tweet! Bright and sweet! O how I love the world! And the harebell at the field's edge, Merrily and in good spirits, Ding-ding with its tiny bell Rang out its morning greeting: 'Isn't it a lovely world? Ding-ding! Beautiful thing! O how I love the world! And then in the gleaming sun The world at once began to sparkle; All things gained in tone and colour! In the sunshine! Flower and bird, great and small. 'Good day! Good day! Isn't it a lovely world? Hey, you there?! A lovely world! Will my happiness now begin? No! No! The happiness I mean Can never bloom for me!

Ich hab' ein glühend Messer: The third song begins loudly and percussively with firmly struck E minor chords accented by arpeggiated figures rippling up through the right hand of the accompaniment. Repetitive, dissonant chords amplify the Wayfarer's grief as he exclaims: "I have a burning knife in my breast...that cuts so deep into every joy..." In a brief section of dynamic restraint he begins to hallucinate, seeing the blue eyes of his lover in the sky and her blonde hair in the blowing yellow grain of the field. With utmost urgency and a thundering

tremolo figure in the left hand of the piano accompaniment, he expresses his desire to “lay upon the black bier”, never again to open his eyes to the light of day.

Text	Translation
Ich hab' ein glühend Messer, Ein Messer in meiner Brust, O weh! O weh! Das schneid't so tief In jede Freud' und jede Lust, So tief! so tief! Es schneid't so weh und tief! Ach, was ist das für ein böser Gast! Nimmer hält er Ruh', Nimmer hält er Rast! Nicht bei Tag, Nicht bei Nacht, wenn ich schlief! O weh! O weh! O weh! Wenn ich in dem Himmel seh', Seh' ich zwei blaue Augen steh'n! O weh! O weh! Wenn ich im gelben Felde geh', Seh' ich von fern das blonde Haar Im Winde wehn! O weh! O weh! Wenn ich aus dem Traum auffahr' Und höre klingen ihr silbern Lachen, O weh! O weh! Ich wollt', ich läg' auf der schwarzen Bahr', Könnt' nimmer die Augen aufmachen!	I've a gleaming knife, A knife in my breast, Alas! Alas! It cuts so deep. Into every joy and every bliss, So deep, so deep! It cuts so sharp and deep! Ah, what a cruel guest it is! Never at peace, Never at rest! Not by day Nor by night, when I'd sleep! Alas! Alas! Alas! When I look into the sky, I see two blue eyes! Alas! Alas! When I walk in the yellow field, I see from afar her golden hair Blowing in the wind! Alas! Alas! When I wake with a jolt from my dream And hear her silvery laugh, Alas! Alas! I wish I were lying on the black bier, And might never open my eyes again!

Der Engel: Both *Der Engel* and *Im Treibhaus* belong to a larger work by Wagner known as the *Wesendonck Lieder*, duly named for the poet, Mathilde Wesendonck. This grouping was originally entitled *Five Poems by an Amateur Set to Music for a Woman's Voice by Richard Wagner*, likely in an attempt to suppress the circumstances under which this collaboration came to be (Wagner and Wesendonck were engaged in an affair while he and his wife Minna were

renting a small house connected to the Wesendonck mansion where Mathilde and her husband lived). In this song, Wagner beautifully paints a picture of the soul ascending to heaven via lightly textured accompaniment and dotted chordal figures.

Text	Translation
In der Kindheit frühen Tagen	Early in my days of childhood,
Hört ich oft von Engeln sagen,	Angels, I oft heard it said,
Die des Himmels hehre Wonne	Left the blissful joys of Heaven
Tauschen mit der Erdensonne,	For the light of Earth instead.
Daß, wo bang ein Herz in Sorgen	When a heart fills with dread sorrow,
Schmachtet vor der Welt verborgen,	Shuns the world and disappears,
Daß, wo still es will verbluten,	When its wish to bleed in silence
Und vergehn in Tränenfluten,	Dissolves into a flood of tears,
Daß, wo brünstig sein Gebet	When its prayer at its most fervent
Einzig um Erlösung fleht,	Begs for nothing but release,
Da der Engel niederschwebt,	Then the angel will come down to
Und es sanft gen Himmel hebt.	Raise it up to Heaven's peace.
Ja, es stieg auch mir ein Engel nieder,	Once an angel flew down to me;
Und auf leuchtendem Gefieder	He, on wings that shimmer, soft,
Führt er, ferne jedem Schmerz,	Leads me far away from suffering,
Meinen Geist nun himmelwärts!	Gently bears my soul aloft.

Im Treibhaus: Two of the *Wesendonck Lieder* were designated by Wagner as studies for his opera *Tristan und Isolde* (Träume and Im Treibhaus). Thick with lush harmonic structures and a bounty of chromatic line, this piece anticipates the style of the opera in a number of ways. Wagner uses his mastery of dynamic writing to bring alive the intrinsic beauty of the descriptive text which seems to focus on nature.

Text	Translation
Hochgewölbte Blätterkronen,	High-vaulted crowns of leaves,
Baldachine von Smaragd,	Canopies of emerald,
Kinder ihr aus fernen Zonen,	You children of distant zones,
Saget mir, warum ihr klagt?	Tell me, why do you lament?
Schweigend neiget ihr die Zweige,	Silently you bend your branches,
Malet Zeichen in die Luft,	Draw signs in the air,
Und der Leiden stummer Zeuge	And the mute witness to your anguish

Steiget aufwärts, süßer Duft.
Weit in sehndem Verlangen
Breitet ihr die Arme aus,
Und umschlinget wahnbefangen

A sweet fragrance rises.
In desirous longing, wide
You open your arms,
And embrace through insane predilection

Öder Leere nicht'gen Graus.
Wohl, ich weiß es, arme Pflanze;
Ein Geschicke teilen wir,
Ob umstrahlt von Licht und Glanze,
Unsre Heimat ist nicht hier!
Und wie froh die Sonne scheidet
Von des Tages leerem Schein,
Hüllet der, der wahrhaft leidet,
Sich in Schweigens Dunkel ein.
Stille wird's, ein säuselnd Weben
Füllet bang den dunklen Raum:
Schwere Tropfen seh ich schweben
An der Blätter grünem Saum.

The desolate, empty, horrible void.
I know well, poor plants,
A fate that we share,
Though we bathe in light and radiance,
Our homeland is not here!
And how gladly the sun departs
From the empty gleam of the day,
He veils himself, he who suffers truly,
In the darkness of silence.
It becomes quiet, a whispered stirring
Fills uneasily the dark room:
Heavy drops I see hovering
On the green edge of the leaves.

Worth While: While most recognized as the first to set spirituals in an art song setting for concert singers, Burleigh has produced a wealth of song literature that numbers somewhere close to 150 songs. The *Five Songs of Laurence Hope* to which these last five pieces belong is just one example of the high quality song groupings produced by the composer. In the first song *Worth While*, the narrator ponders whether or not the pain of loss was worth the joys of love. With an ending that is near-operatic in its scope, he declares “No matter the price, we would pay it again! We have had, we have loved, we have known!”

Text

I asked of my desolate shipwrecked soul
“Wouldst thou rather never have met
The one whom thou lovedst beyond control
And whom thou adorest yet?”
Back from the senses, the heart, the brain,
Came the answer swiftly thrown,
“What matter the price? We would pay it again,
We have had, we have loved, we have known!”

The Jungle Flower: This second song establishes a theme of flowers that reoccurs at various points until the conclusion of the song set. It has the most limited range of the five, never venturing higher than F4, but is no less giving in terms of dramatic context. Here the narrator reflects on the kindness of fate in the days before his love departed.

Text

Thou art one of the jungle flowers, strange and fierce and fair,
Palest amber, perfect lines, and scented with champa flower.
Lie back and frame thy face in the gloom of thy loosened hair;
Sweet thou art and loved — ay, loved — for an hour.
But thought flies far, ah, far, to another breast,
Whose whiteness breaks to the rose of a twin pink flower,
Where wind the azure veins that my lips caressed
When Fate was gentle to me for a too-brief hour.

Kashmiri Song: Like all of the other songs in this set, number three is in a minor key, likely meant to sharpen the feelings of loss. The poetry also intensifies here as the narrator states that he would rather have been killed by his lover than to have seen her depart. This speaks to the tumult of the poet's actual life. Adela Florence Nicholson, who wrote under the pseudonym "Laurence Hope" had struggled with mental health for the majority of her life and promptly committed suicide by poisoning following the death of her husband. Over the course of their union, her husband had introduced her to various cultural aspects of India which likely inspired the title of this poem.

Text

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?
Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far,
Before you agonize them in farewell?

Oh, pale dispensers of my Joys and Pains,
Holding the doors of Heaven and of Hell,
How the hot blood rushed wildly through the veins
Beneath your touch, until you waved farewell.
Pale hands, pink tipped, like Lotus buds that float
On those cool waters where we used to dwell,
I would have rather felt you round my throat,
Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!

Among the Fuchsias: This languid yet sensuous melody perfectly expresses the temptation felt by the narrator at the prospect of engaging in an unsanctioned love affair. The theme of flowers continues in the mention of the Lotus (this specific flower having been mentioned in the previous song). It ends with a climactic exclamation: “Ah why is a thing so sweet so wrong, as thy temptation is?”

Text

Call me not to a secret place
when daylight dies away,
tempt me not with thine eager face
and words thou shouldst not say.
Entice me not with a child of thine,
ah, God, if such might be,
for surely a man is half divine
who adds another link to the line
whose last link none may see.
Call me not to the Lotus lake
where drooping fuchsias hide,
what if my latent youth awakes
and will not be denied?
Ah, tempt me not for I am not strong
(thy mouth is a budded kiss)
My days are empty, my nights are long;
ah, why is a thing so sweet so wrong,
why is a thing so sweet so wrong
as thy temptation is?

Till I Wake: The fifth and final song, Till I Wake closes out this set strongly. Of the five, it is the most technically demanding and has the widest range (topping out at B flat 4). The piece begins on a diminished 7th chord and proceeds with a gently flowing, upward arpeggiated figure. The theme of flowers continues with a reference to yellow roses bent low in the wind. Burleigh employs a favorite rhythmic device in the form of syncopated block chords, harkening back to the first song of the set. He closes out the piece firmly, at the very last moment transitioning to a major key.

Text

When I am dying, lean over me tenderly, softly...
Stoop, as the yellow roses droop
In the wind from the south;
So I may when I wake – if there be an awakening –
Keep what lulled me to sleep –
The touch of your lips on my mouth.

CHAPTER III

Journey to Wenlock Edge: A Meditation on the Brevity of Life, the Transience of Love, and the

Diversity of the Human Condition.

Program

Darius A. Gillard, tenor

Helen Meacham, piano

May 29th, 2020

7:00pm

The Advenir

I. On Wenlock Edge

On Wenlock Edge

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

From Far, From Eve and Morning

Is My Team Ploughing

Oh, When I Was In Love With You

Bredon Hill

Clun

INTERMISSION

II. NightSongs

Prayer

H. Leslie Adams (b. 1932)

Drums of Tragedy

The Heart of a Woman

Night Song

Sence You Went Away

Creole Girl

III. Cantata

Peter Go Ring Dem Bells

John Daniels Carter (1932-1981)

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Let Us Break Bread Together
Ride On King Jesus

Over the course of history, countless poets and philosophers have contemplated the fleeting nature of life through their work. Such contemplation has occurred and reoccurred in the minds of men and women since our collective beginning and has sparked more expansive internal and external dialogues on the meaning of life, its joys, its hardships, and the hereafter. Presented through three complete song sets (*On Wenlock Edge* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Nightsongs* by H. Leslie Adams, and *Cantata* by John Carter), this recital explores a number of those themes.

As implied by the concert title, *On Wenlock Edge* serves as the centerpiece and unifying work of the three sets offered. Composed for tenor, piano, and string quartet, Vaughan Williams masterfully sets the poetry of A. E. Housman to vivid and thought provoking melodies resulting in a chamber work of incredible artistic quality. As previously said, the Housman poem *On Wenlock Edge* is a meditation on the brevity of life. In this poem he contemplates that brevity as two individuals, existing centuries apart look upon the same wood as it is ravaged by the wind. A quiet solace falls over both with the realization that the raging storm will at some point come to an end. The other two song cycles echo various facets of this statement: *Nightsongs* in its exploration of the various shades of loss and heartbreak, and *Cantata* which restates through the affirmation of God that the storm of life will not last for ever.

On Wenlock Edge

Completed in 1909, *On Wenlock Edge* would become one of Ralph Vaughan Williams' lesser performed, but most interesting compositions. Set to the poetry of Alfred Edward

Housman, it explores various themes with each song highlighting a different facet of the narrator's perception of life and love. The song cycle is comprised of six selections from Housman's 1896 collection *A Shropshire Lad*. While only moderately popular at first, the collection quickly amassed a large base of readers resulting in multiple settings over the years following its publication.

This collection is made up of sixty-three individual poems that display various repeated themes. Due in part to the sheer volume of poems, there doesn't appear to be a linear connection between them all. The poems are written in various persons; first, third, and include multiple dialogues between the narrator and other persons. While the narrator isn't named, the original title of the work (*Poems of Terence Hearsay*) provides grounds for a reasonable deduction that Terence is who the "I" refers to in the poems that happen to be written in first person.⁶

The second and official title of the work suggests a connection to the Shropshire county. However, Housman's experience with it is limited as he never resided in or spent significant time there prior to the publication of the work. However, he did reside in neighboring Worcestershire and is responsible for the cultivation of the literary reputation of Shropshire and the romanticization of it as the epitome of rural England.

As a result of its natural lyricism, nearly all of this collection (about fifty five poems) have been set to music by composers that include Arthur Somervell (*Song Cycle from A Shropshire Lad*), Graham Peel (*Four Songs of a Shropshire Lad*), Charles Fonteyn Manney (*A Shropshire Lad: A Song Cycle*), Earnest John Moeran (*Ludlow Town*), and George Butterworth

⁶ Johnson, Lawrence George. *A Shropshire Lad in Song: Three Tenor Song Cycles Based on A.E. Housman's "A Shropshire Lad": "On Wenlock Edge" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Land of Lost Content" by John Ireland, and "Ludlow and Teme" by Ivor Gurney.* 2009.

(Six Songs of a Shropshire Lad and Bredon Hill and Other Songs).⁷ Most of these composers constructed a dramatic arc by setting selections from it out of order. Vaughan Williams' approach is similar and equally effective as he builds a narrative around the speaker's perception of life and love.

On Wenlock Edge: Written in iambic pentameter with an abab rhyme scheme, the piece highlights a storm that is reoccurring but not eternal. Vaughan Williams begins this piece with a series of triplets in each instrument with a forte agitato marking. Each note of every triplet has a tremolo marking, mimicking the high winds that batter the distant wood. The narrator senses the danger in his opening statement "On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;". The wood stands on Wrekin hill in the distance which the narrator references on page three. The text goes on to reference Uricon or Uriconium, a Roman settlement that stood on the same grounds (now the village of Wroxeter) around the seventh century. The narrator speaks on how the winds would tear through the wood even in that time. He envisions a lone Roman looking upon the destruction, the thoughts of worry that consume him, and the fact that both the Roman and his worries are now ash beneath his own feet. The piece concludes as the winds recede and die via a slow moving chromatic motive in the three upper strings.

Text

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;

His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;

The gale, it plies the saplings double,

And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger

⁷ Banfield, Stephen (17 January 1989). *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 234–236. ISBN 978-0521379441.

When Uricon the city stood:
'Tis the old wind in the old anger,
But then it threshed another wood.

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
At yonder heaving hill would stare:
The blood that warms an English yeoman,
The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,
Through him the gale of life blew high;
The tree of man was never quiet:
Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:
To-day the Roman and his trouble
Are ashes under Uricon.

From Far, From Eve and Morning: The text of this piece is written in first person, meditating further upon the winds of life and change. As a stark contrast to the opening number, this piece begins with a series of rolled cords in piano only and a soft and solemn statement in the voice over a sustained E major chord. Strings enter on the next page in a primarily supportive function as indicated by the colla voce marking and their homorhythmic format. The range of the song is limited, never venturing above E4. It takes on various harmonic permutations before settling comfortably back into E major with a rolled tonic cord. E major is an intrinsically bright key and provides aural support for the shift to optimism displayed in the text.

Text

From far, from eve and morning
And yon twelve-winded sky,
The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither; here am I.

Now - for a breath I tarry
Nor yet disperse apart -
Take my hand quick and tell me,
What have you in your heart.

Speak now, and I will answer;
How shall I help you, say;
Ere to the wind's twelve quarters
I take my endless way.

Is My Team Ploughing: Here, Vaughan Williams re-embraces the tense atmosphere established in the opening number via an ominous four bar introduction in D minor. The text outlines a conversation between a dead man and his yet living friend, with the deceased speaker's dialogue being designated by quotations. Ominously and in compliance with the pianissimo quasi da lontano marking, the narrator poses a question over a sustained D minor cord establishing the fact that said narrator is speaking from beyond the grave. He poses multiple questions to his living friend about life as he knew it before his death. The living friend's responses drive home the point that life carries on in never-ending forward motion. When asked about the dead man's girl, the living friend responds that she "lies not down to weep" and is "well contented" suggesting that she has moved on. In this piece, Vaughan Williams omits the third and fourth verses of text. This is likely due to the fact that these two verses bring a sense of levity to the text that slows the dramatic motion established by the music.

Text

“Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?”

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

“Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?”

Ay the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

“Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?”

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

“Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?”

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

Oh, When I Was In Love With You: In number four of the set the speaker talks about how love can cause us to alter aspects of who we are for the sake of acceptance or perhaps from fear of rejection. In its absence though, he does revert back to the root of who he is with the statement: “And miles around they’ll say that I am quite myself again”. It continues on in D minor but with less severity. A brisk down beat is established via a pizzicato chord in all strings, accompanied by a lightly textured piano line. This piece is also the only one of the set that features a solo violin line in which the instrument brightly recaps the final statement of the voice.

Text

Oh, when I was in love with you,
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave.

And now the fancy passes by,
And nothing will remain,
And miles around they ’ll say that I
Am quite myself again.

Bredon Hill: This piece is most often interpreted as a meditation on the loss of love, a topic many were all too familiar with in the wake of World War 1 which began less than twenty years after the publication of the *Shropshire Lad* collection. Beginning with a series of parallel seventh chords, the first stanza speaks about summertime on Bredon (a hill in Worcestershire) and the clarity of the bells which ring out over it. The narrator goes on to personify these bells as a voice beckoning his lover to church, which she declines in order to stay with him. He states that he and his lover will only answer the call if the bells beckon them to the altar for their wedding day. However, his lover dies abruptly as evident by the statement: “My love rose up so

early and stole out unbeknown”. The bells call out to the narrator yet again in a tone that, once beautiful, has now become a deafening assault upon his ears. The poem cycles through the seasons, beginning in summer when the narrators love was new and strong, and ending in winter with snow falling down on Bredon as grief descends upon the heart of the narrator. The final stanza features a descending triplet passage, reoccurring every three beats in the second violin and viola over which the voice cries “Oh, noisy bells be dumb, I hear you...” He does eventually answer the call and comes to the church not as a groom but as a mourner.

Text

In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky.

The bells would ring to call her
In valleys miles away;
"Come all to church, good people;
Good people come and pray."
But here my love would stay.

And I would turn and answer
Among the springing thyme,
"Oh, peal upon our wedding,
And we will hear the chime,
And come to church in time."

But when the snows at Christmas
On Bredon top were strown,
My love rose up so early
And stole out unbeknown

And went to church alone.

They tolled the one bell only,
Groom there was none to see,
The mourners followed after,
And so to church went she,
And would not wait for me.

The bells they sound on Bredon,
And still the steeples hum,
"Come all to church, good people," --
Oh, noisy bells, be dumb;
I hear you, I will come.

Clun: As in "Is My Team Ploughing" Vaughan Williams takes some liberties with the poetry, omitting the first verse and changing the original title from "Clunton and Clunbury" to "Clun". The poetry addresses death through the eyes of a man who has lived a long life. The rivers mentioned in the second stanza represent the never ending forward motion of life referenced in "Is My Team Plowing" juxtaposed to its simultaneous transience. The tumultuous harmonies and rhythmic figures that reoccur throughout the cycle are finally and peacefully put to rest with an open A major chord in the final measure.

Text

Clunton and Clunbury,
Clungunford and Clun,
Are the quietest places
Under the sun.

In valleys of springs of rivers,
By Ony and Teme and Clun,
The country for easy liver,
The quietest under the sun.

We still had sorrows to lighten,
One could not be always glad,

And lads knew trouble at Knighton
When I was a Knighton lad.

By bridges that Thames runs under,
In London, the town built ill,
'Tis sure small matter for wonder
If sorrow is with one still.

And if as a lad grows older
The troubles he bears are more,
He carries his griefs on a shoulder
That handselled them long before.

Where shall one halt to deliver
This luggage I'd lief set down?
Not Thames, not Teme is the river,
Nor London nor Knighton the town:

'Tis a long way further than Knighton,
A quieter place than Clun,
Where doomsday may thunder and lighten
And little 'twill matter to one.

Nightsongs

H. Leslie Adams' collection *Nightsongs* is comprised of six songs but unlike the previous song cycle, it features the poetry of multiple poets that include Leslie Morgan Collins, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Clarissa Scott Delany, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson. This song group (as the composer preferred to call it) was published in 1978, however it was composed fairly early on in his career in 1961. With texts drawn from black poets of the Harlem Renaissance, these pieces display a number of thematic elements focused on different aspects of the black experience.

The work was originally entitled *Six Songs on Poetry by African Americans* and later, *African American Songs*. However in an effort to encourage its performance by non-black

singers, the title was changed to *Nightsongs* per the suggestion of countertenor Darryl Taylor, due to the thematic commonality of the songs which Taylor believes “suggests night moods and subjects involving nocturnal activities.”⁸ Adams was very explicit about the musical effects he desired in the performance of his songs and therefore wrote detailed instructions in the musical score. Having been published in three keys, nuance becomes attainable for a wider array of voice types; although, the original keys are best suited for high voice.

Prayer: Set to the poetry of Langston Hughes, this piece opens the song group with contemplative simplicity. Of the all these pieces, Prayer is the most harmonically straight forward. Block chords in G flat major support the speaker as he voices his uncertainty in regards to his lot in life. The text is repeated with an mild increase in rhythmic motion and intensity on the second page. This text accurately reflects the ambivalence of the poet who by all accounts did not support the concept of organized religion and had a strained relationship with Christianity in particular.

Text
I ask you this,
Which way to go?
I ask you this,
Which sin to bear?
Which cron to put
Upon my hair?
I do not know,
Lord God,
I do not know

Drums of Tragedy: Originally titled *Fantasy in Purple*, Adams uses this text by Langston Hughes to create a musical expression of the angst and sadness of impending death. Fully aware

⁸ Taylor, Darryl *Journal of Singing*; Jan/Feb 2008; 64, 3; Music Periodicals Database pg 317

of that impending death, the speaker resolves to march toward it with the pulsing thump of the drums personified by the heavily syncopated rhythms in the accompaniment. Utilizing a ternary form, the appropriately placed climax of the piece occurs on the line referencing the blowing of one blaring trumpet, topping out at B double flat 4.

Text

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.
And let the choir sing a stormy son
To drown out the rattle of my dying breath.

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
And let the white violins whirl thin and slow.
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun
To go with me to the darkness where I go.

The Heart of a Woman: The third song of this grouping tells through the poetry of James Weldon Johnson the story of so many black women whose dreams have taken a back seat to circumstance and the needs of their families. Known for the writing of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, Johnson's text to a listless, rocking melody that perfectly encapsulates the restlessness in the heart of the woman referenced. That restlessness is eventually disrupted by full and dynamic climax in the last stanza as the poet describes the plight of someone who is desperately trying to lay down their ambitions.

Text

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,
As a lone bird, soft-winged, so restlessly on,
Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
And enters some alien cage in its plight;
And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars
While it breaks, breaks, breaks

on the sheltering bars.

Night Song: Clarissa Scott Delany originally titled this piece *Interim*, however, Adams changed it's title to the namesake of the song group. Delany published just four poems, the last of which happened to be *Interim*. She died of kidney disease the same year at the age of twenty six. In the text Delany speaks about night as it should be, "a time for rest and sleep", as well as the reality of night for her which exists as a medium for her pain and grief. Adams animates this feeling with a series of restless chord progressions that chromatically entwine. At the close of the poem, the narrator proclaims "Another day will find me brave, and not afraid to dare!" Adams repeats the final phrase with a climactic high A.

Text

The night was made for rest and sleep,
For winds that softly sigh,
It was not made for grief and tears,
So then, why do I cry?

The wind that blows through leafy trees
Is soft and warm and sweet;
For me the night is a gracious cloak
to hide my soul's defeat.

Just one dark hour of shaken depths,
Of bitter black despair—
Another day will find me brave,
And not afraid to dare!

Sence You Went Away: This piece features a second setting of a James Weldon Johnson text. It is also the only text in the song group to utilize dialect. Adams uses a slow, contemplative melody and flowing piano figures to capture the dull and persistent ache of loss. The text progressively intensifies in its grief, stanza by stanza and incorporating the use of modulation just before the final stanza. In the final sentence "Seems lak to me a tear stays in my eye..."

Adams writes in a decrescendo over the word tear. While difficult to execute for some voices, it brings a heightened vulnerability to the closing stanza.

Text

Seems lak to me de stars don't shine so bright,
Seems lak to me de sun done loss its light,
Seems lak to me der's nothin' goin' right,
Sence you went away.

Seems lak to me de sky ain't half so blue,
Seems lak to me dat ev'rything wants you,
Seems lak to me I don't know what to do,
Sence you went away.

Oh, ev'rything is wrong,
De day's jes twice as long,
De bird's forgot his song
Sence you went away.

Seems lak to me I jes can't he'p but sigh,
Seems lak to me ma th' oat keeps gittin' dry,
Seems lak to me a tear stays in my eye
Sence you went away.

Creole Girl: Adams sets this text by Leslie Morgan Collins to a virtuosic piano accompaniment that instantly evokes a feeling of life and dance. The piece begins with a boisterous and rhythmic piano figure over which the narrator poses a series of questions to the Creole Girl about the French, Spanish, and African aspects of her heritage. In the B section, Adams adopts a slower tempo and a more fluid piano line as compliment to the intrinsic melancholy of the questions being posed. The original piano figure returns with intensity as both piano and voice barrel toward an electrifying climax.

Text

When you dance, do you think of Spain,
Purple skirts and clipping castanets,
Creole Girl?

When you laugh, do you think of France,
Golden wine and mincing minuets,
Creole Girl?

When you sing, do you think of young America,
Grey guns and battling bayonets?

When you cry, do you think of Africa,
Blue nights and casual canzonets?

When you dance, do you think of Spain,
Purple skirts and clipping castanets, Creole Girl?

Cantata

Completed in 1959, *Cantata* is irrefutably John Daniels Carter's most performed and well known work. While Carter has produced a handful of other works, this happens to be the only one in print. This work draws heavily upon the established tradition of the spiritual, however Carter's approach presents the listener with some unique and original musical ideas. His highly sophisticated harmonic language on full display, Dr. Allison Smith describes it as "controlled dissonance, quartal harmonies and chord clusters working together to obscure tonality."⁹

In Carter's own words as described to reporter Alan Kriegsman during an interview concerning his appointment to the position of Composer-in-Residence of the Washington D.C. National Symphony: "*Cantata* in a five movement suite for voice and orchestra (or piano), cast in such forms as rondo and toccata. It makes use of traditional Negro melodies, but they are considerably transformed by the idiom of the suite. The spiritual, "Ride On, King Jesus," for example, appears in 5/4 meter."¹⁰ He went on to reference the *Siete Canciones Populares* by

⁹ Smith, "A Study of English-Language Sacred Solo Literature," 182.

¹⁰ Kriegsman, "Symphony Gets Composer-in-Residence," G10, Kriegsman, "Twin Peaks," C7.

Manuel De Falla, stating that he'd attempted to achieve something similar with this work. The work would go on to be performed in its early days by a number of notable African American singers that include George Shirley, Bernadine Oliphant and Leontyne Price.

As previously stated, the work is divided into five movements: A piano prelude, rondo, recitative, air, and toccata. While the spirituals that provide the text for these movements do not have a pre-existing thematic connection, Carter does an excellent job of building a dramatic arc over the course of work. Beginning with a slow and measured introduction, he cycles through a full range of dramatic content, eventually ending with a charged declamation of triumph in the final movement.

Peter Go Ring Dem Bells: The piano prelude that serves as the first movement transitions seamlessly into this piece via three chords. The initial statement of the voice "Peter go ring dem bells" occurs in recitative like fashion before the rondo proper is established via a rhythmic piano figure on the next page. This statement is repeated over multiple variations of said piano figure with its 4+4+2 rhythmic pattern periodically lining up with the word "bells". An interlude accentuates the importance of the piano line and solidifies its function as more active than supportive. The piece ends on a high A4, to be crescendo'd over the piano postlude.

Text

Peter go ring dem bells.
Oh, Peter go ring a dem bells.
Bells! Bells! Bells! Bells!
Ring a dem bells.

Peter go ring a dem bells.
Oh, Peter go ring a dem bells.
Oh, Peter go ring a dem bells today.

Peter go ring a dem bells.
Oh, Peter go ring a dem bells.
I heard from heaven today.

Wonder where my mother has gone?
Heard from heaven today.
Peter ring dem bells.
Ring a dem bells.
Bells! Bells! Bells!
Ring a dem, ring a dem bells.

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child: This spiritual has been set by a number of notable composers such as H.T. Burleigh and Moses Hogan, however Carter's realization of this piece evokes a sense of wayward hopelessness that few other were able to capture. Designated "Recitative", this piece begins with a stark statement of the melodic theme in octaves which corresponds with the emptiness the narrator is experiencing. The second verse intensifies this effect via a series of extended chords placed high on the staff. The climax occurs on a G4, followed by an eerie conclusion via a series of chords.

Text

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
a long way from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
a long way from home.

True believer,
a long way from home

Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees: This 'air' is perhaps one of the most harmonically interesting of the suite. Also a frequently set spiritual, Carter makes some striking choices with harmonic structure. The piece is written in A flat major, but Carter utilizes A flat minor along with a series of 9th's and 13th's (more frequently utilized in jazz compositions) to

produce an effect that is unique to this genre. The dramatic climax occurs on the word “praise” with the high A flat 4 stepping down to G flat, creating a broadening of tone and a visual effect of a supplicant falling to their knees in worship. This prayers concludes with a floated and sustained E flat 4 over a restatement of the theme in the piano line, which the voice repeats an octave down.

Text

Let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees wid my face to da rising sun,
Oh, Lord have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees wid my face to da rising sun,
Oh, Lord have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees wid my face to da rising sun,
Oh, Lord have mercy on me.

Amen.

Ride On, King Jesus: The fifth and final movement, designated “Toccata”, is arguably the most demanding of the suite, both for voice and piano. Most arrangements of this piece take a broad and stately approach. Carter’s interpretation however, begins with a highly rhythmic piano figure in 5/4 whose aural effect is more akin to a horse riding into battle. Once this pace commences, it never slows and continues to barrel relentlessly towards an incredibly demanding climax: seven high A flats in rapid succession down to F 4 which is sustained over a frenetic piano postlude.

Text

Ride on King Jesus,
no man can a hinder me.
Ride on King Jesus,
ride on, no man can a hinder me.

He is king of kings.
He is Lord of Lords.
Jesus Christ, first and last,
no man works like him.

King Jesus rides a milk white horse,
no man works like him.
The river of Jordan He did cross,
no man works like him.

Ride on King Jesus,
no man can a hinder me.
Ride on King Jesus, ride on,
no man can a hinder me.
Ride on Kind Jesus. Ride on.
Ride on. Ride!

No man,
can a hinder me.

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