An Eastern Ballad (for high soprano) is somewhat atypical for a Ginsberg poem, in its brevity and conventional rhyme scheme. Narrative economy and a dreamlike quality are what attracted me to this work.

—I. Charlie Gurke

I speak of love that comes to mind:
The moon is faithful, although blind;
She moves in thought she cannot speak.
Perfect care has made her bleak.

I never dreamed the sea so deep,
The earth so dark; so long my sleep,
I have become another child.
I wake to see the world go wild.

—Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997)

Sea Lily (for high soprano) by American imagist poet H.D., is from her first book, “Sea Garden.” I am very impressed and moved by this poem and its depiction of both strength and femininity.

—I. Simon Hutchinson

Reed, slashed and torn,
but doubly rich --
such great heads as yours
drift upon temple-steps,
but you are shattered
in the wind.
Myrtle-bark
is flecked from you,
scales are dashed from your stem
sand cuts your petal,
furrows it with hard edge,
like flint
on a bright stone.
Yet though the whole wind
slash at your bark,
you are lifted up,
aye -- though it hiss
to cover you with froth.

—H.D

Quia abominatio est? (for soprano) is a short, dramatic scene featuring a woman obsessing over a verse in Leviticus, horrified by the implications of the phrase. The addition of the question mark in the title by the composer, while unrelated to the Latin grammatical context, represents her internal response to the written verse as she struggles to read it, and embodies the psychological action of the entire piece.

—I. Jeffrey Parola
...And Thereafter (for tenor) I wrote this piece wishing to show off the range and expressiveness of the tenor voice. Since I prefer working with living poets, I used a text by Hau-Wei Chang.

—Krista Abrahamson

I have discovered the thunder in still moments.
The raindrops land with such a sound, as steel a-shatter.
And, having felt both lover’s warmth and empty beds, know again the latter.
The thunder at my door begs my leave.
It must wait.
My empty bed needs knowing still.

—Hau-Wei Chang

The Cloths of Heaven (for tenor) In this short, but elegantly descriptive poem, Yeats’ lover wishes to present a gift of inestimable value to his lady, but is unable to provide anything other than himself and his own dreams. These he lays before her at his own risk with the plea that she “tread softly.”

—Timothy Francis

Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths, Enwrought with golden and silver light, The blue and the dim and the dark cloths Of night and light and the half-light, I would spread the cloths under your feet: But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

—from The Wind Among the Reeds

by William Butler Yeats

A Winter Triptych (for baritone) As the title suggests, this work illustrates winter in three scenes. The text is based on works by Japanese poets Ryusui, Hashin and Soseki Natsume.

In all this coolness is the moon also sleeping? There, within the pool!

There is no sky now no empty earth – but somehow snowflakes fall on oaks.

In a winter night forest, winds howling in rage with no leaves to blow.

—Aaron Pergram

Snap (for baritone) “Insanity is often the logic of an accurate mind overtaxed.” –Oliver Wendell Holmes—

O sweet spontaneous earth how often have the dotting [...]
often have religions taken [...]
thee upon their buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive - from O sweet spontaneous by e. e. cummings
Wild nights! Wild nights!
Were I with thee, [...]
Futile the winds To a heart in port, [...]
Rowing in Eden!

—from Wild Nights! Wild Nights! by Emily Dickinson

You ask whether your verses are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. [...] You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you [...] Don’t write love poems [...] So rescue yourself [...] heartful, silent, humble sincerity [...] use the Things around you [...]

—from Letters to a Young Poet: No. 1 by Rainer Maria Rilke (translated by Stephen Mitchell)

Inverted in the [...] Sweet April! many a thought Is wedded unto thee, as hearts are wed; Nor shall they fail, till, to its autumn brought, Life’s golden fruit is shed.

—from An April Day by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

2 DUOS

Beauty’s Birth (for 2 sopranos) The profundity of this succinct and pithy poem written by my own father haunts me; I cannot walk through sand or hold my children without thinking of its lessons. It is here set to music, bearing a dedication to my son, Beckett, born this January, whose bones support both the shape of his beauty and his miraculous birth.

—Sam Richards

Beach rocks jutting up from liquid churn Pebbles in the sea.
Cheek bones beneath my lover’s face, What are they to me?
Hard things shape and hold in place The softness of the earth.
Bones and stones support the shape That rends all beauty’s birth.

—John H. Richards
The White Birds (for mezzo-soprano and baritone) This is a love song about two people who are desperate to leave their world behind and become transformed together. It is meant to be both sad and beautiful.

—Christopher Prosser

I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea!
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee;
And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the rim of the sky,
Has awakened in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,
Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall of the dew:
For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;
Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

—from The Rose by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

2 TRIOS

Love’s Philosophy (for 2 sopranos and tenor) I first read Love’s Philosophy, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, as an amorous young teenager and connected with the descriptive yearning of a love unrequited. I recently rediscovered the poem as I prepared for this workshop and found new meanings within it as a husband and father.

—Seth Stewart

The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean;
The winds of heaven mix forever,
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle;--
Why not I with thine?
See! the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven,
If it disdained it’s brother;

Father, How Long Must I Wait? (for 2 baritones and bass) is an exploration of the power dynamics between fathers and sons. I composed the text and the music simultaneously, drawing on archetypal imagery from mythical and biblical stories of kings and their sons in order to transform the old storyline of violence and competition into a new archetype of empowered confrontation and reconciliation.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley (1803-1822)

Father, behold my land,
The strength in my hands,
Behold my children,
Behold my wife,
And see how they behold me.

Father, behold your son,
A man who will be king.
Father, I would make you proud,
And you would rest in me.

—Ethan Gans-Morse