

COMPOSER NOTES AND TEXTS

8 SOLOS

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.

—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.

—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.

—Jeffrey Parola

Cum masculino non commisceberis coitu femineo quia abominatio est.

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

— Leviticus 18:22 -

Cassandra (for soprano) We, as rational and thinking beings, are often plagued with our own ignorance, and in response to this ignorance seek insight. What happens, then, when we seek knowledge too soon or from sources not quite so benevolent?

*...and the towers of Man shall fall as in gray dusky hollows
bequeathed unto a child innocent and the truth of the hierophant's
words will be revealed to the whores sinful and sweeter
still shall the songs of yore rise in the void of the delving
burning of knowledge left to us by...*

Please stop...

*those who travel distant ways...I've seen enough...and the
wealth of
empires crumble beneath the hands sent forth to carry...*

I've seen too much...

*there was so much I wanted to say to you, so much so much
so much
So how goes my favorite grandson? and words of gold and
lead shall fall on deaf ears
as Have you ever been in a car accident? if so, please call
the law offices
of I saw you with that whore! I'm better than she ever could
be!
Why won't you Love is a many splendored Aaaaaaah!*

*I don't want to see anymore! Please stop!
I don't want to see anymore! Forget I ever asked this of...*

*but you asked so nicely! Forgive me Father you asked for
sight,
for I have but, in your haste you did sinned. It has been
seventeen
days since my last not ask for wisdom. confession.*

Please stop! Please stop! Please stop...

—Hau-Wei Chang (2009)

...**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—

—Jason Gerraughty

*O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the doting
[...]
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 [...] heartfelt, silent, hum-
ble 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 wan-
dering foam: I and you!*

*I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Dan-
aan 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;*

*And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea;--
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?*

—Percy Bysshe Shelley (1803-1822)

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.

*Oh, father! My father,
How long must I wait?
Will you help me
With your blessings
To build my own kingdom?
Will you help me
Or do you fear me, father?*

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

*Behold, father behold,
I am your son!
How long must I wait?
Behold, what you have done;
You gave me wings of wax and thread,
You kept me weak to feed your strength.
Oh, father, am I your son
Or your sacrifice?
My blood spilled for your own?*

*Oh, father! My father,
How long must I wait?
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