



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Music and Theatre

***Storms and Stars:
Songs for Soprano by Jodi Goble***

Shelby Van Nordstrand
soprano
Jodi Goble
piano

Tuesday, February 7, 2024
7:30 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall

Program

Valentines from Amherst (Dickinson) (2015)

Jodi Goble (b.1974)

1. Come slowly, Eden!
2. Wild nights! wild nights!
4. Within my reach!
5. Nobody knows this little rose
6. My river runs to thee

Song-Lost World (Noguchi) (2020)

1. Song in air
3. Within the fog
4. At night
5. My song is sung
6. Spring

Sea Creatures (2022)

1. Sea (Mansfield)
3. I would bathe in the sky's blue (Bartlett)
4. Young Sea (Sandburg)
5. Gulls (Bryher)
6. The world below the brine (Whitman)
8. Sand-Memory (McCreary)

The Soprano's Revenge (Goble) (2023)

Program Notes and Texts

Valentines from Amherst (Emily Dickinson) (2015)

This cycle began as the single song “Come slowly, Eden,” written as a stand-alone piece to complete a mixed-composer set of Dickinson songs for a student’s recital. It’s hard for me to leave a single song on its own —they just seem lonely to me, and I also know it’s much easier to program art songs on a recital when they come with built-in friends. So when Shelby and I first started talking about collaborating on a cycle written for her voice, I decided to form that cycle around my orphan song.

The texts in this cycle are all passionate love poems. Dickinson (1830-1866), widely regarded as one of the United States’ major poets, was portrayed after her death as a virtual recluse with no significant social life or romantic relationships, in what we now know was a deliberate erasure of her personal life intended to preserve her literary legacy and reputation. As a result, this part of her catalog was for many decades thought to be either metaphorical or rooted in imagination rather than experience. Forensic scholarship from the past decade suggests that her letters and writings were edited by her executors after her death to obscure her romantic connections to other women, including a lifelong love affair with her childhood friend and eventual sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert.

Valentines is the first cycle I wrote specifically for Shelby, and we have been performing it together now for nearly ten years. At the time of the premiere, the cycle consisted of a four-song subset, which we performed for the first time at the Ames Town and Gown Musicales on a snowy February night. That performance felt special all on its own, but we had no idea then that it would lead to such a long-lived and fruitful collaboration.

Come slowly – Eden!
Lips unused to Thee –
Bashful – sip thy Jasmines –
As the fainting Bee –

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums –
Counts his nectars –
Enters – and is lost in Balms.

Wild nights - Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -
To a Heart in port -
Done with the Compass -
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -
Ah - the Sea!
Might I but moor - tonight -
In thee!

Within my reach!
I might have touched!
I might have chanced that way!
Soft sauntered thro’ the village-
Sauntered as soft away!
So unsuspected Violets
Within the meadows go-
Too late for striving fingers
That passed an hour ago!

Nobody knows this little Rose
It might a pilgrim be
Did I not take it from the ways
And lift it up to thee.
Only a Bee will miss it –
Only a Butterfly,
Hastening from far journey –

On its breast to lie –
Only a Bird will wonder –
Only a Breeze will sigh –
Ah Little Rose – how easy
For such as thee to die!

My River runs to thee—
Blue Sea! Wilt welcome me?
My River waits reply—
Oh Sea—look graciously—
I’ll fetch thee Brooks
From spotted nooks—
Say—Sea—Take Me!

Song-Lost World (Yone Noguchi) (2020)

Yone Noguchi (1875-1947) was born near Nagoya, Japan, and emigrated to San Francisco in 1893, with hopes of becoming a writer. The relationships he established with the Bohemian community of writers and artists in the Bay Area- and the favorable reception of his first two published books of poetry- led to further opportunities and travel, first to Chicago and then on to New York City, where he wrote his best-known work, a semi-autobiographical novel called *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl*. Noguchi returned to Japan in 1904 to take a position as a professor of English at Keio University, but never achieved the same level of literary success in Japan that he had enjoyed in the United States. Most of his published books are written in English.

Noguchi's writing style was idiosyncratic and revolutionary for his time: meterless, rhymeless free verse, combining the English language with formal structures common to Japanese lyric poetry and fearlessly coining new, evocative, image-rich English words and phrases ('ghostily', 'moon-night', 'heart-sea', 'deep deepless deepness'). His works was enormously influential to Imagism, a movement of poetry that flourished in the United States and England in the 1920s and counted among its members the poets Sara Teasdale, Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

While many of the Imagists are household names today, Noguchi fell into relative obscurity in the decades following his return to Japan and is only now beginning to receive credit for the movement he inspired. His scandalous private life (open bisexuality, secret marriage to an American woman, an illegitimate child) caused public opinion to turn against him; the xenophobia and anti-Asian/anti-Socialist sentiment that was rampant in America in the early twentieth century also contributed to his erasure from the canon. Scholars of queer history, transnational literature, and Asian studies have begun in the last few decades to resurrect his work and legacy, but he is still best known today as the father of mid-century sculptor Isamu Noguchi, designer of the iconic Noguchi Table.

The poems are chosen from across three volumes of Noguchi's work (*From the Eastern Seas, From East to West, The Pilgrimage*), and were set in late summer 2020, after it was clear that we would not return in the fall to life and art as we knew it to exist pre-COVID. It did not occur to me at the time that the texts were linked in any particularly meaningful way, but taken as a whole, it's fairly clear that they form a love letter to live music, and a lament for its (temporary) loss.

Song in Air

Like a rainbow, All the color,	And when she more suddenly falls, What a song-lost world!	The shadow of the half-sphere Curtains down closely against my world
All the music, And all the touch, She suddenly rises Over the breast of shadow. How the world turns to a song!	When I am lost In the deep body of the mist on a hill, The universe seems built With me as its pillar. Am I the god upon the face Of the deep, nay, deepless Deepness in the beginning?	Like a doorless cage. Listen, frogs in the pond, (The world is a pond itself) Cry out for the light, for the truth! The curtains rattle ghostily along, Bloodily biting my soul, The winds knocking on my cabin door With their shadowy hands.
She is liberation and life, Hers is a nerve-thrill, Not a thought or truth. Mystically she breathes in and out	At night the Universe grows lean,	

My song is sung, but a moment ...
The song of voice is merely the body, (the body dies),
And the real part of the song, its soul, remains after it is sung;
Yea, it remains in the vibrations of thy waves of heart-sea
Echoing still my song,
And through my soul thou soarest out of thy dust and griefs.

Spring, Wingèd Spring,
A laughing butterfly,
Flashes away,
Rosy-cheeked Spring,
Angel of a moment.
The little shadow of my lover perfumed,
Maiden Spring,
Now fades the shadow,

the golden shadow,
With all the charm.
Spring,
Naughty sweet Spring,
A proud coquette.
Born to laugh but not to live,
Spring, flying Spring!
A beautiful runaway,
Leaves me in tears,
But my heart follows after,
Till I catch her next March.
Spring,
Spring!

Sea Creatures (various poets) (2022)

Sea Creatures was inspired by Katherine Mansfield's poem *Sea*, which I found delightfully creepy and menacing in all the best possible ways. I sent it to Shelby and got a video back an hour later of her singing the first three pages (and accompanying herself on the piano!!), along with the word *YESSSSSSSS*. That gave us our theme for the new cycle and led the two of us on a months-long hunt for more texts strong enough to match the Mansfield (culminating on New Year's Day 2022, with both of us madly paging through Project Gutenberg and archival issues of *Poetry Magazine* and texting one another possibilities).

We left that brainstorming session with a few dozen poems on the list, which I eventually winnowed down to eight total. We'll perform six of them for you tonight: the Mansfield; the marvelously dreamy "I would bathe in the sky's blue," which poet Helen Birch Bartlett titled simply *Opiate*; Carl Sandburg's "Young Sea," which starts off stormy and tempestuous and then mellows into lapping calm; Winifred Bryher's funny, cheeky, too-cute "Gulls" (check out Shelby's Instagram @shelbyvn for outtakes of the seagull noise!); the epic prose-poem "The world below the brine," in which Walt Whitman paints us a picture of everything lurking beneath the surface; and — to close it all out — Frederick McCreary's "Sand-Memory," which even without a note of music sang me a chilly lullaby that January afternoon: the sea is beautiful, the poem tells us, but we can't forget that we are only a blip on its eternal surface:

*The sand remembers and crouches and waits.
It is old as the old sea, and knows no peace till the width of the low tide.*

The Sea (Katherine Mansfield)

The Sea called—I lay on the rocks and said:

“I am come.”

She mocked and showed her teeth,
Stretching out her long green arms.

“Go away!” she thundered.

“Then tell me what I am to do,” I begged.

“If I leave you, you will not be silent,
But cry my name in the cities

And wistfully entreat me in the plains and forests;
All else I forsake to come to you—what must I do?”

“Never have I uttered your name,” snarled the Sea.

“There is no more of me in your body

Than the little salt tears you are frightened of shedding.

What can you know of my love on your brown rock pillow....

Come closer.”

I would bathe in the sky's blue (Helen Birch Bartlett)

I would bathe in the sky's blue,

I would overflow the world with my laughter and my love,

I would vanish like a circle upon the water.

But I would not move

To accomplish these

Or any other

Things.

Young Sea (Carl Sandburg)

The sea is never still.
It pounds on the shore
Restless as a young heart,
Hunting.

The sea speaks
And only the stormy hearts
Know what it says:
It is the face
of a rough mother speaking.

The sea is young.
One storm cleans all the hoar
And loosens the age of it.
I hear it laughing, reckless.

They love the sea,
Men who ride on it
And know they will die
Under the salt of it.
Let only the young come,
Says the sea.

Let them kiss my face
And hear me.
I am the last word
And I tell
Where storms and stars come from.

***Gulls* (Winifred Bryher)**

Baby gulls who cannot walk,
Whose feathers are ungrown,
Hop to tufts of camomile
From lattices of stone.

The wind smooths where the back dips
Wings of shaded straw;
Blue and coral-banded shells
Stick between each claw.

Tumbling with the grace of seals
From the far spit of land,
They scurry from their own wide beaks
Reflected on the sand.

***The World Below the Brine* (Walt Whitman)**

The world below the brine,
Forests at the bottom of the sea, the branches and leaves,
Sea-lettuce, vast lichens, strange flowers and seeds,
the thick tangle, openings, and pink turf,
Different colors, pale gray and green, purple, white, and gold,
the play of light through the water,
Dumb swimmers there among the rocks,
coral, gluten, grass, rushes, and the aliment of the swimmers,
Sluggish existences grazing there suspended,
or slowly crawling close to the bottom,
The sperm-whale at the surface blowing air and spray
or disporting with his flukes,
The leaden-eyed shark, the walrus, the turtle,
the hairy sea-leopard, and the sting-ray
Passions there, wars, pursuits, tribes, sight in those ocean-depths,
breathing that thick-breathing air, as so many do
The change thence to the sight here, and to the subtle air
breathed by beings like us who walk this sphere,
The change onward from ours to that of beings who walk other spheres.

***Sand-Memory* (Frederick McCreary)**

Softly the sea with its handfuls of moonlight,
Taking them into the beach dusk,
Sifting them over the dark sand,

Slowly in wide curves.

Softly and gently the sea
Scattering moon-bubbles
Handfuls and armfuls on dusk-darkened beaches,
Over and over,
Telling stories of moonspray and night-dripping wings,
Over and over and over.

And the sand says nothing,
The sand remembers and crouches and waits.
It is old as the old sea,
And knows no peace till the width of the low tide.

***The Soprano's Revenge* (Goble) (2023)**

This bit of silliness came about because Laura Strickling
sked me to write her a joke song to close out her recital
at Songfest last summer. "I just want a song that's a string
of dumb jokes," she said. "People like to laugh."

The opera fans in the audience will note the multiple
musical quotations (there are six, for those of you
who are counting). If you don't recognize any of them,
I hope it's funny anyway.

Upcoming Events

Cobus du Toit Flute Recital

Thursday, February 8, 2024 at 7:30 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall

Music Major Auditions

Thursday, February 15 to Saturday, February 17: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall

Iowa Statesmen

Sunday, February 25, 2024 at 1:30 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall

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