

TEASDALE'S VOICE: SELECTED SONG CYCLES FOR SOPRANO BY MODERN
COMPOSERS RICHARD PEARSON THOMAS, LORI LAITMAN, AND SIMON SARGON.

by

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Introduction

Sara Teasdale's life was brief, yet her impact lasted long after her passing. She emerged as a prominent literary figure in the early 20th century. Teasdale's poetry reflects the spirit of the times, characterized by a blend of romanticism and modernism. Her words were influenced by two different eras of time. She was born and raised in the late 1800s with structured Victorian sensibilities, and she mainly wrote in the early 1900s with progressive societal ideas. Her verses often carry a tinge of sadness, reflecting her personal challenges. Despite this, there's a quiet strength and a recognition of life's beauty. As we explore Sara Teasdale's poetry, we delve into the realm of emotion, love, and the human spirit. She encourages us to ponder time's passage and seek comfort and significance amid life's complexities. Teasdale's poetry has stood the test of time, still inspiring modern composers of art songs in their creations.

What aspects of Sara Teasdale's poetry are so captivating that composers still choose to set it to music today? Why should art songs set to her words remain a staple in recitals and voice studios? To explore these questions, examining the poet's life—her background, upbringing, and the diverse influences that molded her literary creations is crucial. This deeper understanding is essential for fully grasping her poetic style and its appeal to art song composers.

This research examines three contemporary song cycles explicitly composed for the soprano voice, all featuring poetry by Teasdale. Three modern composers currently active in the field were chosen. Specifically targeted were their compositions released within the past 30 to 40 years. I will evaluate the works of Richard Pearson Thomas, Lori Laitman, and Simon Sargon and analyze their unique methods of composing art songs inspired by Teasdale's poetry. Three song cycles for soprano will be evaluated: Richard Pearson Thomas' "Spring Rain," Lori

Laitman's "The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs," and Simon Sargon's "Let It Be You."

I examined the interplay between the text and music, I dedicated careful attention to the musical significance of each song. I intend to explore the unique style of each composer within the selected song cycles and analyze how they convey Teasdale's emotions. The treatment of the poet's words in music will be a central focus of my analysis as I evaluate the emotional depth of each piece. Additionally, I conducted a musical analysis, prioritizing the singer's melody line and examining any significant harmonic elements that enhance the text settings.

My melodic analysis includes range, tessitura, the direction of phrases (ascending/descending), phrase length, vowel usage, complexity, and the role of accompaniment. These analytical points aid in determining the overall difficulty level of each piece, as well as their pedagogical advantages and disadvantages.

Through the collaborative efforts of each composer with Sara Teasdale's poetry, audiences are allowed to delve into her verses freshly and profoundly, thereby enriching the connection between poetry and music. In a vast repertoire filled with thousands of songs, both old and new, it's common for the same compositions to be repeatedly performed. However, I feel it is important for more singers to experience the relatable, yet profound emotions conveyed in Sara Teasdale's poetry. Moreover, sopranos should be acquainted with new song cycles available for performance.

The modern song cycles selected for this research are relatively lesser known, underrepresented, or infrequently performed. As such, this study aims to promote their utilization by singers and voice instructors. It's my hope that, through this project, more singers will know and perform these pieces.

Chapter 1: Sara Teasdale (1884 – 1933)

Sara Teasdale was an American poet born in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 8, 1884. As a prominent literary figure of the early 20th century, she published nine books of poetic collections and gained much respect for her emotional and romantic writings. Teasdale's life bridged two significant eras of time. Born in the late 19th century, she experienced the traditional expectations of Victorian society. Women were mainly seen as wives, mothers, and homemakers, with limited education and career options outside the home. Their rights and independence were restricted, and they had fewer political and legal rights than men. The ideal Victorian woman was expected to be virtuous, modest, and focused on family and domestic responsibilities. Amidst these societal restrictions, many women actively participated and often excelled in the arts. From 1837 to 1901, many successful female poets emerged, and Teasdale found herself in an environment influenced by renowned poets such as Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson. Their accomplishments played a vital role in challenging gender stereotypes and clearing a path for increased acknowledgment and advancement of women in the arts. These poets paved the way for Teasdale's own literary journey, instilling within her a reverence for the written word and a commitment to artistic expression. Coming of age in the late 1800s, Teasdale had the influence of these Victorian poets to prepare her for the early 20th century, a period characterized by significant social change and modern ideas.

Teasdale's poetry departs from the rigid structure of Victorian verse. Literary modernism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked by a departure from traditional forms and conventions as writers sought to experiment with new techniques, styles, and themes.

Teasdale embraced modernism's experimental and innovative approaches but retained many characteristics of Romanticism. Her poems are profoundly emotional, including themes of love, nature, and individualism reminiscent of the Romantic era. Such heartfelt emotion makes her work beautifully sincere and inspires a sense of introspection in her readers. Teasdale skillfully blends tradition and innovation. She explores timeless themes while experimenting with new ideas, showcasing poetry's ever-changing yet enduring nature.

Early Life and Education

Sara Teasdale grew up the daughter of middle-aged parents, the youngest of four children, an unplanned addition to the family. She was a “shy, excruciatingly sensitive” child who often struggled with poor health.¹ Although she came from a comfortable, middle-class family with two caring parents and three siblings, Sara frequently found herself lonely. Her sickly nature² and the considerable age gap between her and the next oldest sibling often left Sara on her own. During her lonely hours, she developed a “lively imaginative life that focused upon romance and individual heroism.”³ Because she was often ill as a child, Sara was schooled at home until the age of 10. She feasted greedily upon literature, favoring Arthurian romances and medieval dramas⁴ while also savoring the words of American writers like Louisa May Alcott and Emily Dickinson. Her secluded life, marked by loneliness and poor health, coupled with an inclination towards creative writing, would set her on a trajectory towards literary excellence reminiscent of Victorian women poets such as Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and

¹ Margaret Haley Carpenter, *Sara Teasdale: A Biography* (New York, NY: Schulte Publishing Co., 1960), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 1

³ Cheryl Walker, *Masks Outrageous and Austere: Culture, Psyche, and Persona in Modern Women Poets*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Sara Teasdale was “born into a later generation destined to revolt against the Victorian conventions in an explosive quest for freedom.”⁵

Sara Teasdale's family never regarded her as unwanted; however, she was raised with careful anxiety by her two devoutly religious, aging parents.⁶ It seemed as if she could want for nothing. Her sheltered domestic life and strong family values, including the importance of moral correctness, greatly influenced her poetry later in life.

The Potters

Teasdale’s parents recognized her keen intelligence and special talent for writing when she was young and thus expected her to focus on traditional academic pursuits when she became a young teenager. Once her homeschooling was complete, Teasdale attended Mary Institute, a private school for girls in St. Louis, where her talent for writing and poetry continued to develop. Her formal education continued at Hosmer Hall, another private school in St. Louis, where she further honed her literary skills.⁷ During her time at the school, her poems began to gain recognition but wouldn’t be published until later.

Teasdale became friends with other young ladies with similar artistic interests. Ten women, all interested in numerous creative endeavors, including literature, sculpture, music, acting, painting, and photography, banded together to form a group known as the Potters.⁸ Williamina Parrish, an exuberant girl who excelled in photography and other artistic areas, became the natural leader of the pack. Along with Sara Teasdale, other members included Vine

⁵ William Drake, *Sara Teasdale, Woman, and Poet* (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1979), 1.

⁶ Carpenter, 15.

⁷ Carol Schoen, *Sara Teasdale* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 6.

⁸ Ibid.

Colby, Inez Dutro, Celia Harris, Grace Parrish, Guida Richey, Caroline Risque, Petronelle Sombart, and Edna Wahlert.⁹ These young women were serious about improving their creative abilities and met regularly to write, act, paint, draw, and share their love of the arts. Each girl was well acquainted with the classics and was keenly aware of modern artistic movements.¹⁰ The Potters were particularly drawn to medieval times, likely because it exemplified an era when “people could experience emotion freely, which greatly opposed the expectations of emotional control during the Victorian Era in which they were raised.”¹¹ One of Teasdale’s earliest published poems was titled “Guenevere,” after the medieval female character from the literature she so deeply loved.¹²

Teasdale also greatly revered the ancient Greek poet Sappho, who was known for her lyrical poetry, written to be sung with musical accompaniment.¹³ Much of Sappho’s best-known surviving works tell stories of passionate love and recount the experiences of ancient female figures like Aphrodite. Other significant influences on the women of the group were modern actresses like Eleonora Duse, Julia Marlow, Olga Nethersole, Maude Adams, and Nazimova.¹⁴ Eleonora Duse was a renowned Italian actress in the late 19th and early 20th centuries known for her powerful and emotional performances. Sara Teasdale was deeply inspired by Duse’s artistry. The women of the Potters appeared to draw inspiration from other passionate women, both from the past and present. Such inspiring figures embodied beauty and passion and were often tragic victims of love.¹⁵ Motivated to join the ranks of other passionate and dedicated women, the

⁹ Carpenter, 35.

¹⁰ Schoen, 6.

¹¹ Andrea Mueller, “Lori Laitman and Sara Teasdale: a performer’s guide to The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs, Mystery, and The Years” (D.M.A. diss., Louisiana State University, 2009), 11.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Schoen, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Potters worked hard to create an illustrated monthly magazine comprised entirely of “original literary and artistic creations...”¹⁶ Entitled "The Potter's Wheel," the magazine was faithfully published from November 1904 to October 1907, and it was there Teasdale's poetry made its debut in print.

This close-knit group of girls lived lives filled with delightful camaraderie. They dedicated much of their time together to artful endeavors and even established their own club residence. It was a small building in the back garden of Williamina Parrish's residence that had previously been inhabited by many cats.¹⁷ Despite its humble location and disrepair, the girls devoted many hours to renovating the place into what would become Potter House. Precious months of enjoyment were spent in that little place. Sara and her companions spread their artistic joy to the local community, and as the notoriety of *The Potter's Wheel* grew, Sara Teasdale's poetry began to gain traction.

Early Publications

Her first significant publication was a collection of sonnets and poems published in 1907 by Poet Lore Company.¹⁸ “Since the sonnets honoring Eleonora Duse made up the first and most impressive part of the volume, she called her book *Sonnets to Duse and Other Poems*.”¹⁹ These sonnets honor the actress's talent by exploring themes of passion and the fleeting nature of fame and beauty. In addition to the sonnets dedicated to Duse, the collection includes poems that touch on themes such as love, nature, and the human experience. The collection, showcasing Teasdale's

¹⁶ Carpenter, 36.

¹⁷ Ibid, 91.

¹⁸ Ibid, 98.

¹⁹ Ibid.

lyrical style and emotional depth, was well-received by critics. While it garnered some attention, it did not bring her widespread recognition. Today, it is considered one of Sara's least accomplished works. However, it was a jumping-off point, and she would find greater success through several collections she had yet to write.

The real breakthrough came in 1911 with the publication of her second collection, *Helen of Troy and Other Poems*. This collection received widespread critical acclaim, bringing her significant success as a poet. Her work resonated for its emotional intensity and elegant simplicity. One reviewer from the *New York Times* praised the book for having the “authentic accent of genius,”²⁰ and another from *The Smart Set* wrote, “It is the very simplicity of the thing, indeed, that gives it its charm.”²¹ It seems readers were drawn to the relatable yet passionate voice of the young poet. During this time, Teasdale regularly attended events with the Poetry Society of America in New York City, rubbing shoulders with many notable poets of the day. She would later become an esteemed officer of that organization.

Love and Marriage

Teasdale had several romantic interests in her early 20s, between 1908 and 1912, none of which blossomed into serious attachment. Then, in 1913, she began a correspondence with fellow poet Vachel Lindsay, and the two formed a significant connection over the following year. Lindsay was a prolific correspondent. He wrote Teasdale many letters regarding his admiration for her and his passion for life. Sara was intrigued and excited by Vachel's friendship and found much satisfaction in his association. The two poets traveled together around the

²⁰ Ibid. 141

²¹ Ibid.

United States, and eventually, their friendship grew into romantic affection. Despite their similarities and increasing love, Lindsay's zest for life often exhausted Teasdale's faculties. Also, he was poor. Teasdale had been raised in a wealthy family and had grown accustomed to a different lifestyle from the one Lindsey chose.²²

Teasdale became acquainted with a businessman named Ernst Filsinger in 1914. Filsinger began to court her affections. She received them amiably and returned his admiration and respect. Filsinger started to make his intentions of marriage known to Teasdale when Vachel Lindsey began writing to her about marriage. For months, Teasdale struggled with choosing between the two men she loved, ultimately choosing to accept Ernst Filsinger's proposal over Vachel Lindsay's.²³

Ernst Filsinger and Sara Teasdale were married on December 19, 1914. Although Vachel Lindsay was devastated by Teasdale's choice, he remained a frequent correspondent, even a good friend. The newly married couple lived together happily for many years. However, Filsinger's job often took him away from Teasdale for long periods of time, and over the years, Teasdale's mental health began to decline. The marriage was dissolved in 1929 when Teasdale's request for divorce from Filsinger was granted.²⁴

Literary Success

Her subsequent books, *Rivers to the Sea* (1915) and *Love Songs* (1917), further solidified her place as one of the leading poets of her time. In 1918, Teasdale won the Poetry Society of America Prize for *Love Songs*, the best collection of poems published that year. In the poetry

²² Carpenter, 169-197.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

world, this award is comparable to a Pulitzer Prize.²⁵ This prestigious award cemented her status as a significant figure in American literature.

Sara Teasdale's poetry captivated readers and received critical acclaim throughout her career. She compiled two anthologies: *The Answering Voice* (1917), a group of love songs by well-known women poets, and *Rainbow Gold* (1922), a collection of poems for children.²⁶ Later books of poetry such as *Flame and Shadow* (1920) and *Dark of the Moon* (1926) revealed a more mature side of Teasdale's writings and her decline into depression. Her work resonates with a wide audience by delving into themes of love, death, nature, joy, sorrow, and the complexities of human emotions. Teasdale's early success as a poet laid the foundation for her enduring legacy as one of the most celebrated and beloved poets of the early 20th century.

Health Struggles and Tragic Death

Health struggles and personal challenges profoundly impacted Sara Teasdale's emotional well-being. She battled bouts of depression and experienced difficulties in her relationships. Teasdale's emotional struggles were evident in her poetry, where she often expressed feelings of loneliness, melancholy, and the complexities of love.

Within a span of just a few years, both of her parents passed away. Coupled with this severe loss, her failed marriage in 1929 and the suicide of Vachel Lindsay in 1931 sent Teasdale into a downward mental spiral. Tragically, on January 29, 1933, Sara Teasdale took her own life by ingesting a lethal dose of sleeping pills. She was just 48 years old at the time. Teasdale's untimely death shocked the literary community, as she was a celebrated and beloved poet of her

²⁵ Mueller, 22.

²⁶ Carpenter, 330.

time. Her suicide reflects the enduring challenges she confronted in her relationships and emotional well-being over the course of her life. The poignant and passionate poetry of Sara Teasdale mirrors her life, her loves, her battles with mental health, and the emotional weight of her experiences.

The writings of Sara Teasdale are unpretentious. They do not contain “figurative or ornamental imagery.”²⁷ Sara wrote from what she felt inside and was unconcerned with conforming to modern poetic trends.²⁸ “The objective world was never as real or important to her as the castle of her mind.”²⁹ Teasdale herself said, “I try to say what moves me,”³⁰ and the uncomplicated, individual spirit of her beautiful songs still moves audiences today.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 331

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Richard Pearson Thomas sets Sara Teasdale

Biography

Richard Pearson Thomas, a prolific and gifted composer from Montana, is well known for his theater music, concert works, and vocal compositions. Most of his works premiered on the East Coast of the United States, then extended across the country and overseas. Thomas was born in 1957 and grew up a voracious listener to all kinds of music. His parents were not particularly musical but always encouraged his love of listening and discovering. Thomas began taking piano lessons at age 7. His first composition was a short piano piece he wrote at 10. Much of his childhood was spent creating – making things, writing plays, drawing – so unsurprisingly, composing was a natural outgrowth of his creative nature and love of music. He attended the University of Montana in Missoula. After his sophomore year, his beloved piano teacher and mentor, Dr. George Hummel, retired from the university and encouraged Thomas to complete his education at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. He began as a composition major and then graduated *magna cum laude* from The Eastman School of Music in 1979 with the equivalent of a double major in composition and piano.³¹ Thomas recalls that his move to New York was, career-wise, the best choice for him due to the connections he made with the contemporary music world.

Thomas always harbored a fervent passion for musical theater. However, recognizing that Broadway-style songs were academically embraced only occasionally, and given that his degree work focused strictly on classical music, he devoted much of his personal time to writing within

³¹ William Clay Smith "Drum taps: a performance guide to the song cycle by Richard Pearson Thomas." (D.M.A. diss., Louisiana State University, 2009,) 10.

that genre. Thomas formed many beneficial relationships while in Rochester. A budding Canadian director adored his musical theater compositions and staged a triumphant cabaret show at Eastman. Following his graduation from Eastman, he spent the summer serving as an accompanist at the Aspen Music Festival. While in Colorado, he encountered numerous musicians from New York City who reinforced his aspiration to relocate to the city and pursue a career as a musician. He moved to New York City shortly after the festival, but not even a month had passed before his connection with that young Canadian director paid off. He got a call from the Banff Center in Canada and was offered a position as a coach and composer in their budding musical theater program.

Thomas worked at the Banff Center from 1980 - 1985. During that period, he cherished the opportunity to compose away from the constant critical scrutiny of the New York City music scene. "It was also good for me because I was young, and it was far from the public eye...it wasn't like putting something on in New York City that was going to be torn apart by the critics..."³² Thomas eventually returned to New York City to pursue his career as a composer, as he had originally intended. Initially, his ambition was to write for musical theater, but that path never fully materialized, as the music industry showed greater interest in his classical compositions.³³ He also worked as a pianist, accompanying many opera singers. He would say to them, "Okay, I'll play for your recital, but you have to sing one of my songs."³⁴ This musical exchange is a contributing factor to the recognition of his art songs in contemporary times. Thomas said, "We live in a time where melody is not celebrated in contemporary music...it is all rhythm and texture. My greatest gift, if I can call it that, is that I can write a tune. I have the

³² Laura Faith Bateman, "Song Cycles for Soprano by Richard Pearson Thomas." (D.M.A. diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2011), 10.

³³ Richard Pearson Thomas, interview with the author August 1, 2023.

³⁴ Ibid.

ability to write a melody.”³⁵ Regarding the harmonic language within his music, particularly evident in the cycle *Spring Rain*, it is notably rich and often marked by significant dissonance. But in his words, “It doesn’t sound off-putting. There’s tension and release and tension and release.”³⁶ Thomas’s melodies are unique and beautiful, with a splash of familiar charm and a healthy dose of contemporary flavor. When asked about his compositional goals for *Spring Rain*, Thomas said, “I strive in any piece, with or without voice, to take the listener on some sort of journey so that by the end of the piece, you’ve arrived somewhere that you were not at the very beginning.”³⁷ Inspired by Sara Teasdale's vivid and romantic poetry, Richard Pearson Thomas has crafted a beautiful and heartfelt composition for high voice and piano, *Spring Rain*.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

The Music

Spring Rain (2005)

This song cycle consists of four pieces: *Old Tunes*, *The Ghost*, *Child Child*, and *Spring Rain*. The piece was commissioned in 2005 by Hope Hudson, a NYC-based soprano who collaborated frequently with Thomas.³⁸ Ms. Hudson specifically requested Sara Teasdale's poetry, and the poet's words provided Thomas with profound inspiration.

The unifying thread running through Sara Teasdale's poetry chosen for *Spring Rain* is memory and reflection. A woman looks back on her youthful loves and passion with both joy and sorrow, confusion and clarity. In the first, *Old Tunes*, memory is wistful and hazy, like music heard from a distance. In the second, *Ghost*, the poet's present reality confronts perceptions from the past. The result is both terrifying and exhilarating. In the third, *Child, Child*, the mature woman counsels a younger compatriot to love unconditionally because time is brief and the chances to love are few. And in the final poem, *Spring Rain*, memory is sharp and sudden, sparked -- like the lightning around -- by a specific event. Unlike the evanescent images of *Old Tunes*, this experience is strong and vivid, as if it were actually happening again.³⁹

Thomas said, "I strive to set the text so that it is understandable on first hearing."⁴⁰

Considering that an audience member may only encounter his songs once, he aims for his pieces to be unforgettable. Thomas's contemporary songs captivate audiences with their unique fusion of dissonance and tonality, seamlessly blending elements of traditional lyricism with a modern flair. Each composition offers an artistically stimulating musical journey, inviting listeners to immerse themselves in a rich tapestry of sounds and emotions. From haunting melodies to dynamic rhythms, Thomas's music delivers a truly captivating listening experience for all.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Old Tunes

As the waves of perfume, heliotrope, rose,
Float in the garden when no wind blows,
Come to us, go from us, whence no one knows;

So the old tunes float in my mind,
And go from me leaving no trace behind,
Like fragrance bourn on the hush of the wind.

But in the instant the airs remain
I know the laughter and the pain
Of times that will not come again.

I try to catch at many a tune
Like petals of light fallen from the moon,
Broken and bright on a dark lagoon.

But they float away – for who can hold
Youth, or perfume or the moon's gold?

Range: D4 - G5

Tessitura: A4 - Eb5

Tempo: Moderato

The cycle begins with a sentimental piece brimming with emotion and intrigue, delving into themes of nostalgia, memory, and the passage of time. The lyrics reflect on the bittersweet experience of reminiscing about old melodies and tunes from the past. Through the lens of music, the piece explores the power of sound to evoke memories and emotions, transporting listeners back to moments long gone.

Since no key signature is provided, accidentals are prominent throughout the song. It is best suited for performers with a sharp ear, especially due to its semi-tonal nature. The melody boasts moderate complexity, featuring numerous chromatic steps and wide leaps. The detached harmonic structure, with its invigorating chords and intricate piano accompaniment, may prove challenging for less seasoned singers. The vocal range from D4 to G5 is manageable for most

sopranos, with the upper limit only moderately high. The tessitura, spanning from A4 to Eb5, primarily resides in the middle voice but frequently ascends to the upper passaggio. Occasional dips into the lower passaggio and a couple of dynamic phrases provide an enjoyable challenge for the singer. Each musical phrase spans from 2 to 5 measures in length, with the majority falling under 5 measures. These shorter phrases generally alleviate excessive demand on the breath; however, occasional phrases extending to 5 measures do present challenges in terms of breath control.

The “wistful and hazy”⁴¹ mood is set by the piano introduction, a lilting and melodic theme in the right hand and an ostinato rhythm in the left. The chromatic nature of the lyrical theme and the illusive harmonies create a misty and mysterious atmosphere.



Example 2.1: Motif and ostinato in piano.

A fragmented version of the melodic motif and the bass ostinato resurface several times in the song, mm. 8-12 and again in mm. 15-17, creating a sense of “structural unity” in the piece.⁴² The introduction spans 25 bars before gradually thinning out as the voice enters in measure 26. The lighter accompaniment serves to highlight the voice, evoking the image of a melody drifting through the air like the scent of perfume. The lyrics begin with "As the waves of perfume, heliotrope, rose float in the garden where no wind blows..." Each phrase typically starts with an upward movement followed by a gentle descent, reminiscent of the ebb and flow of

⁴¹ Thomas, interview with the author August 1, 2023

⁴² Bateman, 176.

waves, thus imbuing the melody with a fluid and undulating texture.

The main challenge regarding vowel usage arises with the lowest notes, D4 – D#4, sung on an [a], which is an open vowel. To ensure these lower passaggio notes are audible, singers must focus these vowels forward while adjusting them to a closed position. Conversely, the secondo passaggio mostly features [o] and [a], which assist sopranos in navigating this tricky part of their vocal range. While the range and tessitura of the composition typically correspond to those within a soprano's capabilities, younger vocalists might encounter difficulty in maintaining

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "lea - ving no trace be-hind, Like fra - grance borne". A red circle highlights a specific note in the vocal line, which is a D4 note. The piano accompaniment features a melodic motif and rhythmic ostinato. The score is marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic.

Example 2.2: Open vowel in lower passaggio.

clear vocal projection in the mid-range. Consequently, this piece is most suitable for advanced singers and should be approached judiciously by instructors to avoid impeding the vocal development of less experienced students. Although Laura Bateman suggested that this piece "could be good practice for less-experienced singers," I would exercise caution in recommending it for such individuals, as there are numerous alternative options that can effectively aid in refining vocal control without subjecting singers to the potential frustrations of grappling with its demanding technical challenges.

The song ends as it began, with a return of the melodic motif and rhythmic ostinato in the piano, fading away to a triple piano as the voice sustains “gold” on F5. The pianissimo dynamic and the high note delicately capture the essence of moonlight, evoking the soft, golden glow that bathes the world in a luminous embrace. This subtle expression at the top of the staff mirrors the

moon in the sky and its soft beams of light. The music creates a serene and tranquil atmosphere that envelops the listener in a sense of beauty and tranquility, infusing the performance with a touch of magic and enchantment. In a technical sense, the quiet and sustained F5 poses a challenge for the singer, demanding precision and control. However, it also serves as a fitting melodic farewell to the piece, leaving a lasting impression on the listener's ears as the song draws to a close. The melancholy tune, like a wisp of fragrance, dissipates into the recesses of memory, lingering softly in the minds of listeners long after the music fades.

107 *Poco rall.* *p* *A tempo* *pp*

or per - fume or the moon's gold.

Example 2.3: Sustained F5 and introductory motif

The Ghost

I went back to the clanging city,
 I went back where my old loves stayed,
 But my heart was full of my new love's glory,
 My eyes were laughing and unafraid.

I met one who had loved me madly
 And told his love for all to hear,
 But we talked of a thousand things together,
 The past was buried too deep to fear.

I met the other, whose love was given
 With never a kiss and scarcely a word,
 Oh, it was then the terror took me
 Of words unuttered that breathed and stirred.

Oh, love that lives its life with laughter
 Or love that lives its life with tears
 Can die, but love that is never spoken
 Goes like a ghost through the winding years....

I went back to the clanging city,
I went back where my old loves stayed,
My heart was full of my new love's glory,
But my eyes were suddenly afraid.

Range: Eb4 – Ab5

Tessitura: F4 – E5

Tempo: Restless, half note = 84 bpm

This piece tells a story of past and present love. The ghost in the title refers to “love that is never spoken goes like a ghost through the winding years.” It is as if the joyful ‘new love’ is haunted by this unspoken love from the past. The composer uses music to paint a picture of both happiness and fear, as new love is sometimes overshadowed by the memory of what could have been. The piano begins with a declarative, two-beat introduction, then doubles the voice for the first six measures. It’s as if the voice calls, “Listen to my story!”

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The voice part is in the upper staff, and the piano part is in the lower two staves. The music is in common time (C) and the key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The voice part begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics: "I went back to the clang - ing ci - ty, I went back where my old". The piano part begins with a two-beat introduction, marked with a forte (*f*) and marcato dynamic. The piano part then doubles the voice for the first six measures. The score is labeled "Example 2.4: Voice and piano doubling."

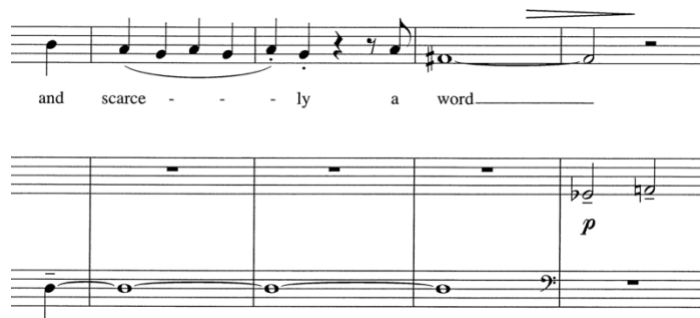
Example 2.4: Voice and piano doubling.

It is common for Thomas to employ word painting in this piece and throughout the cycle to express the poetry. After the intro, the music reflects the joyful narrative of a heart being “full of my new love’s glory.” The harmonies remain stable until measure 24, when large chords in the piano usher in a new key. The voice sings, “The past was buried too deep to fear.” Directly after this statement, the “piano plays a short interlude with a descending line (mm. 27-31), evoking an image of the descent into ‘the buried past’”⁴³, a beautiful example of word painting.

⁴³ Ibid.

The mood changes drastically as the protagonist recalls a former love, the ghost.

The haunting of the ghost occurs in measure 33 as the composer creates an eerie atmosphere in the melody and piano immediately following the piano's descent. A sustained pedal tone in the bass and minimal notes in the treble accompaniment conjures a misty memory. The voice speaks of remembering her past love as she relates, "I met the other..." The accompaniment remains thin as the voice recalls the past. Then, in measure 40, the piano's right hand disappears completely, mirroring the text "scarcely a word."



Example 2.5: Word painting on "scarcely."

The song is momentarily frozen in time until the ghostly reminiscence turns to "terror" in measure 46. Thomas creates a feeling of unrest with a chromatic step from D5 – Eb5 – D5 on "terror." The music escalates in the following system with a short melisma on "stirred." A feeling of agitation persists until the climax of the piece in measure 72, with a long, sustained F#5 on "years" that lingers for 14 counts (mm. 71-74), amplifying the emotional intensity to its zenith. What heightens the tension further is the closed vowel sound found on the word "years," a vocal challenge particularly daunting for sopranos at this pitch level. F#s can be problematic for a soprano, but sustaining the word "years" for 14 counts requires skillful technique. The singer must modify an [ɪ] vowel to [ɛ], creating more efficient breath flow through the vocal folds at that frequency. Despite its difficulty, Thomas skillfully blends this musical climax with

vocal demands, enhancing the performance's emotional depth and impact.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef and features a sustained note on the word "years..." with a dynamic marking of *f*. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and includes a section marked *f marcato*. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 2.6: Sustained F#5 on “years.”

Directly following this climax, the beginning theme returns. The woman recalls her “new love's glory” and returns to the present. However, the impact of the ghost is inescapable. Thomas ends the piece with the word “afraid” with a sustained Gb5 moving down ½ step to F5, creating a beautiful yet unnerving sense of irresolution. Thankfully, for a soprano mindful of vocal technique, the word "afraid" concludes with the [ε] vowel, a relatively comfortable vowel to sing at that pitch. However, the challenge arises as the singer must sustain this open position, particularly on a fortissimo, while the music descends a half step to F5. Once more, this demanding moment for the voice contributes to the enchantment of the piece, serving as a poignant reminder to both the audience and the singer that perhaps she will never truly escape the specter of her past.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef and features a sustained note on the word "fraid." with a dynamic marking of *ff* and a *long* marking. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and includes sections marked *f* and *ff*. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb) and the time signature is 4/4. There are also markings for *15^{ma}* and *Sub. Red.* in the piano part.

Example 2.7: Sustained note on “afraid.”

The consistent shifts between 4/4 and 3/2 time contribute to the overall atmosphere but

may be challenging for the singer. The range Eb4 – Ab5 and tessitura F4 – E5 are perfectly acceptable for a high voice. A soprano will enjoy the Ab5 on “love,” an [a] vowel. Typically, phrases in the music span between 2 and 5 measures, with the longer ones, around 5 measures, being manageable due to the quicker tempo. However, the two sustained phrases on difficult vowels will necessitate excellent breath management and vowel modification in the upper passaggio, which is more suitable for an advanced singer. Finally, the emotional nature of the song requires a singer with mature expression who can do justice to this intricate and nuanced piece. It is best sung by a veteran performer.

Child, Child

Child, child, love while you can
The voice and the eyes and the soul of a man,
Never fear though it break your heart –
Out of the wound new joy will start;
Only love proudly and gladly and well,
Though love be heaven or love be hell.

Child, child, love while you may,
For life is short as a happy day;
Never fear the thing you feel –
Only by love is life made real;
Love, for the deadly sins are seven,
Only through love will you enter heav'n

Range: Db4 – Ab5

Tessitura: Bb4 – F#5

Tempo: Gently in 1, dotted half note = 42 bpm

Child, Child is a delicate and sentimental piece. It's a “gentle yet passionate exhortation to the young to live their lives according to the eternal law of love.”⁴⁴ Because these tender words intend to share wisdom with a child, and the overall essence is mild, it could be

⁴⁴ Ibid., 165

interpreted as a lullaby; it is much more than that. Thomas elevates the “lullaby” feeling by adding grandeur and complexity. Even though there are several key changes and modulations, the tonality of this piece is firm. A key signature is given, but the music moves in and out of its key center. The timing switches between 5/4 and 3/4 time, but the words' clear syntax and the music's logical setting keep the song from feeling disjunct. The form is modified strophic, which fits the poem’s stanzas and offers clear musical structure while allowing freedom.

Melody reigns supreme in *Child, Child*, and several melodic themes surface throughout the song. The voice and piano begin together with no intro. The piano doubles the voice in the opening theme, “Child, child, love while you can.” These six notes in the first four measures of the piece expose the melodic theme used throughout the entire piece.

The musical score shows the opening theme in melody and piano. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody is written in the treble clef and the piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The lyrics are "Child, child, love while you can ————— The voice and the". The piano part features a descending line that mirrors the voice melody.

Example 2.8: Opening theme in melody and piano.

The initial theme frequently undergoes modification, evolving into an extended pattern featuring a comparable descending structure to the original theme, albeit transposed and embellished with extra notes. Example 2.9 on the next page shows “Never fear - though it break your...”, the modified opening theme which later returns eight times in the voice or piano. The exact opening theme is seen twice in a different key, in measure 34 and again at the end, measure 83, in the piano. Although the range of the piece is like the first two pieces, Db4 – Ab5, the tessitura is several notes higher on Bb4 – F#5. The voice spends more time in the upper passaggio, which could be taxing for some singers. Luckily, the highest percentage of these

passaggio notes are part of a descending theme, like above. These descending phrases typically begin in or above the passaggio on an open vowel and then step downward. These descending phrases help a soprano manage her breath, and the open vowels are much more comfortable singing at the top of the staff. The higher tessitura allows the singer to employ slightly more head voice, finding a gentler tone that fits this sensitive piece.

Example 2.9: Modified opening theme.

Thomas also uses soaring high notes in the melody and grand chords in the piano to demonstrate the passionate guidance of the text. Measures 44-46 are filled with large open octave chords in the piano, leading to the final page. Thomas demonstrates his understanding of the soprano voice at the end of the piece, as he sets a high Ab5 on the word “love.”

Example 2.10: Ab5 in the voice.

The piano exits as it enters, playing the opening theme, this time on a *pianissimo*. A delicate, high pedal tone in the right hand floats above the opening theme, then fades away on an

expressive fermata at the end. It's as if a child is surrendering to sleep, closing their eyes, and tucking the words of wisdom away in their memory for the future.

Spring Rain

I thought I had forgotten,
But it all came back again
Tonight with the first spring thunder
In a rush of rain.

I remembered a darkened doorway
Where we stood while the storm swept by,
Thunder gripping the earth
And lightning scrawled on the sky.

The passing motor busses swayed,
For the street was a river of rain,
Lashed into little golden waves
In the lamplight's stain.

With the wild spring rain and thunder
My heart was wild and gay;
Your eyes said more to me that night
Than your lips would ever say....

I thought I had forgotten,
But it all came back again
Tonight with the first spring thunder
In a rush of rain.

Range: D4 - Ab5

Tessitura: G4 – Eb5

Tempo: With motion, half note = 84 bpm

Those who have ever been thrilled by the first claps of thunder in an April storm, the first strike of lightning signaling an oncoming rain, and then the shower of water from the sky understand what Sara Teasdale recollects in this poem. Further, if the thrill of a rainstorm has been shared with one's true love, one understands the passion seen in the eyes of the other as they experience the storm together. Teasdale's words conjure a picture of a rainstorm in spring.

Thomas' music paints the words so vividly that one cannot help but be captured in a thrilling moment of love and nature.

One imagines a woman standing fixed on her front porch steps as she watches a finger of lightning stretch across the sky on the breast of a billowing black cloud. A storm is coming. Though not yet fully charged to an angry strike from a full storm, the gentle flash of light sparks a memory, and she is drawn back in time to a similar day on that same front porch. She was younger then, full of youth and vigor, and her love stood beside her as they watched the storm draw closer over the city lights.

This piece is full of word painting depicting thunder, rain, and lightning. The first of these musically painted elements can be heard in the rapid, detached octaves of the piano at the beginning, invoking the image of lightning scrawled on the sky, sparking the first lines to be



Example 2.11: Octaves, lightening.

sung. The rain begins two systems later with the words “In a rush of rain” as the piano introduces an alternating eighth-note pattern. This rhythmic depiction of raindrops returns with a slightly varied melody in mm. 28-39, then again in mm. 45-48.



Example 2.12: Raindrop rhythms.

The thunder is heard in the piano's left hand in mm. 23-24. A low octave on F#, followed

by an even lower sustained D, rumbles underneath the melody as the voice sings, “Thunder gripping the earth.” This is one of only three instances when the piano strays that low, and each moment depicts thunder either marked by the text being sung (mm. 53-54) or the dramatic development of an interlude. (mm. 65)

The music demonstrates the unpredictable rush of nature. No key signature is given for this piece, and it is marked “con moto,” the quickest song of the entire set. However, Thomas beautifully contrasts the wild rainstorm with moments of gentle stillness when nothing stirs but a memory. The voice reiterates, “I thought I had forgotten,” as the piano accompaniment thins to a single sustained chord. (mm. 81-92)

81 *p*

I thought I had for - got-ten, But it all came back a - gain ————— To -

Example 2.13: A moment of gentle recollection.

A 47-measure piano interlude begins in measure 93. It is marked at a faster tempo and with a given key signature (A \flat major). The music starts gently but escalates only slightly, which is unexpected in a piece that has thus painted a clear aural picture of a rainstorm. Instead of mimicking nature, this interlude marks the passage of time since that original spring rain and beautifully demonstrates the remorse, guilt, and longing for the love sacrificed.⁴⁵ In these moments, the performer reaches out to the audience in anguished recollections, and they feel her despair. Ironically, one of the moments in the piece with the most emotional potential was initially added to make the piece longer.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The emotional maturity required to manage this piece necessitates an advanced singer to perform it. The vocal line ranges from D4 to Ab5, and although relatively easy for an experienced voice, the melody sports several long phrases that dip below then immediately above the passaggio, allowing a soprano to demonstrate her vocal flexibility. With open vowels in the passaggio, or easily modified vowels, and an exciting but accessible vocal line, this piece is a perfect playground for a singer to exercise her emotional and technical muscles.

Chapter 3: Lori Laitman sets Sara Teasdale

Biography

Lori Laitman is the youngest of three sisters born to Josephine Propp Laitman and Milton Abraham Laitman. Her mother was a musician, as were both her sisters, but her father was not. Her father had been a career army officer and one of 3 Jewish cadets in West Point's Class of 1939. Regardless, "there was always music in the house, and music at all family get-togethers."⁴⁷ She credits the gift of growing up in a musical family to her maternal grandmother, Dina Propp, who came to the US from Russia in the early 1900s. She was not a musician, but she loved music and made sure her children and grandchildren had good musical educations.

Laitman was born in Long Beach, NY, on January 12, 1955. At seven, she moved with her family to New Rochelle, NY. She was 16 when she graduated high school, after which she enrolled at Yale College that fall. 1971 was only the third year of coeducation at Yale. The composer shared, "There were about 250 women to 1000 men, although the ratio in music was slightly better."

Laitman began studying composition during her sophomore year at Yale, as all her friends were composers. The summer following her sophomore year was a significant one for Laitman, as she attended the Interlochen Music Camp as a flutist and met soprano Lauren Wagner. It was there she wrote her first song for voice, a piece in the avant-garde style that "required the singer to make all sorts of weird sounds, singing the words 'yo-yo-yo-yo' to some leaping intervals. A tape of this composition exists somewhere, but I will be very content if it is

⁴⁷ Lori Laitman, "Lori Laitman Composer: Biography," Accessed Nov 21, 2023 <http://artsongs.com/informal-biography/>

never unearthed.”⁴⁸ She learned how to write music for film and theater in Frank Lewin’s class, which she took in her senior year. It was in Frank’s class that she learned how to respond to images and texts, and she said, “These are the same techniques that I use when composing for voice.”

Laitman stayed at Yale until 1976 as she had been accepted into the combined BA and MM program, enabling her to get a master's degree in one year. She received an MM in flute performance from The Yale School of Music in 1976 at the age of 21. Her main musical goal at that point was to become an orchestral flutist. In 1977, she played with the Vermont Symphony while doing freelance work and teaching. At the same time, she was also writing music for film and theater. The composer shares, “At that point, I was a bit conflicted as to whether I was a flutist or a composer.”⁴⁹ She married her college sweetheart, Bruce Rosenblum, in 1976 and had her first child, James, in 1980.⁵⁰ Being a mother took priority over composing film music, so her professional endeavors leaned more toward composing chamber music and teaching flute.⁵¹ With the addition of two more children, her duties as a parent took further precedence over her career as a composer.⁵²

Laitman received an invitation in 1991 from her friend and former roommate, Lauren Wagner, to compose several songs for her debut album.⁵³ At the time, Wagner was in the prime of her career, and Laitman credits much of her success to having such an illustrious singer perform her early songs.⁵⁴ She also relates “finding her compositional voice”⁵⁵ when she wrote

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Lori Laitman, email to author, July 31, 2023.

⁵⁰ Mueller, 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Ibid., 10.

⁵³ Lori Laitman, email to author, July 31, 2023.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

her first real art song – *The Metropolitan Tower*. That first song was a collection of four pieces written for Lauren Wagner, setting the poetry of Sara Teasdale. She says, “That song flew out of me — and I realized that I seemed to have a natural affinity for writing for the voice. From then on, I focused on writing only for the voice.”⁵⁶

During her search for poetic inspiration, she came across Sara Teasdale's works and was drawn to their expressive style and relatable subject matter. Laitman felt it was important for an audience to understand a song the first time they heard it.⁵⁷ She felt Teasdale’s poems were easily understood yet full of enough emotion to inspire a song. Laitman said, “I found her works to be very lyrical but also a bit quirky in form — which I felt was similar to my music.”⁵⁸

The song cycle *The Metropolitan Town and Other Songs* – and especially her favored first piece, *The Metropolitan Tower*, set Laitman’s career as an art song composer in motion. She would later add two more songs to the original collection of four pieces written for Wagner⁵⁹ and would even use Sara Teasdale's poetry in two other cycles for mezzo-soprano titled *The Years* and *Mystery*.⁶⁰ The examination of the latter cycle makes up the rest of this chapter.

⁵⁶ Lori Laitman, email to author, July 31, 2023.

⁵⁷ Mueller, 10.

⁵⁸ Laitman, email to author, July 31, 2023.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The Music

The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs (1992)

The Metropolitan Tower

We walked together in the dusk
To watch the tower grow dimly white,
And saw it lift against the sky
Its flower of amber light.

You talked of half a hundred things,
I kept each hurried word you said;
And when at last the hour was full,
I saw the light turn red.

You did not know the time had come,
You did not see the sudden flower,
Nor know that in my heart Love's birth
Was reckoned from that hour.

Range: D₄ – F₅^b

Tessitura: A₄ – D₅

Tempo: Lyrical, quarter note = 84 bpm

The first piece in the cycle is characterized by a beautiful, flowing melody and a charming yet relatively thin accompaniment. Originally, Laitman felt embarrassed by *The Metropolitan Tower* because it was melodic and written in a simple form, which she claimed were “aspects that were not in favor when I studied composition.” It has since become one of her favorite songs.⁶¹ She recalls a conversation with Frederick Weldy, Lauren Wagner’s pianist. Weldy thought the accompaniment to *The Metropolitan Tower* was “too easy.” From then on, Laitman tried to write “more interesting accompaniments that did not just double the voice.”⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Despite any initial reservations on the composer’s part, the song has proven very successful. It’s one of my personal favorites from the cycle, and it is performed often. Laitman additionally states that although she might make a few changes if she were composing the song now, she has no wish to rewrite it.⁶³

Teasdale's poem sets the scene of a couple sharing a leisurely stroll through the city at dusk. The setting is calm and serene. But love simmers under the surface. Laitman’s music mirrors the words effortlessly in this ABA’ song. The tender accompaniment allows the voice to shine through as the melody line arches gently through the piece.⁶⁴ While covering a range of only slightly more than one octave (D \flat 4 – F5 \flat), the vocal line is devoid of any major interval leaps, sharp twists, or melodic jolts. In fact, the gentle arch is audible in the piano from the start of the A section and is clearly visible on the page. Most phrases in the voice and piano ascend by

The musical score for 'The Gentle Arch' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano introduction with a tempo of 84, marked 'Lyrical, Legato'. The piano part is marked 'Magical, legato' and 'mf'. The second system shows the vocal entry with the lyrics 'We walked to - geth - er — in the dusk To watch the'. The piano accompaniment includes performance directions: 'poco rit.' and 'a tempo'.

Example 3.1: The gentle arch.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Carol Lines, “The Songs of Lori Laitman,” *Journal of Singing*, Vol. 64, No.1 (Sept/Oct 2007):

steps or small leaps, then descend lightly once again. The piano often doubles the voice, adding dimension to the lyrical melody. While the vocal line gracefully weaves through the B section, Laitman masterfully injects harmonic nuances that mirror the depth and emotion of the accompanying poetry. Every chord change and small shift in harmony deeply connects with the words of the song, making the listener's experience richer.

The poem's second stanza tells how the couple talks of a hundred things, and new and exciting feelings are uncovered during this interchange. The music changes keys four times to represent the frenzied feelings of falling in love before finally landing in A major at the reiteration of section A.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system (measures 21-24) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "word you said: And when at last the hour was full,". The piano part has a bass line with a wavy pattern. The second system (measures 24-27) continues the vocal line with lyrics: "I saw the light turn red. You did not". The piano part includes a middle line with a wavy pattern and a bass line. Red circles highlight key changes in the vocal line at measures 21, 22, 25, and 27. Performance markings include *poco rit.*, *f*, *a tempo*, and *mf*.

Example 3.2: The frenzied discovery.

The return of the A section brings a satisfying conclusion to this lovely piece, as Laitman emphasizes the importance of the last two lines of poetry. The newly discovered feelings of love are captured, and the tender moment is suspended in the music as the voice sings “love’s birth” on two half notes. These longer rhythms contrast with the rest of the melody line, which is mostly quarter and eighth notes. The final word, “hour,” is held for five counts as if to hold on to

the sweet moment.

The motion of the melody, along with its smaller range, shorter phrases, and tessitura between A4 – D5, makes it appropriate for younger singers. I would not hesitate to assign this piece to a sophomore or junior undergraduate voice student, but the same cannot be said for the entire cycle.

A Winter Night

My window-pane is starred with frost,
The world is bitter cold to-night,
The moon is cruel, and the wind
Is like a two-edged sword to smite.

God pity all the homeless ones,
The beggars pacing to and fro,
God pity all the poor to-night
Who walk the lamp-lit streets of snow.

My room is like a bit of June,
Warm and close-curtained fold on fold,
But somewhere, like a homeless child,
My heart is crying in the cold.

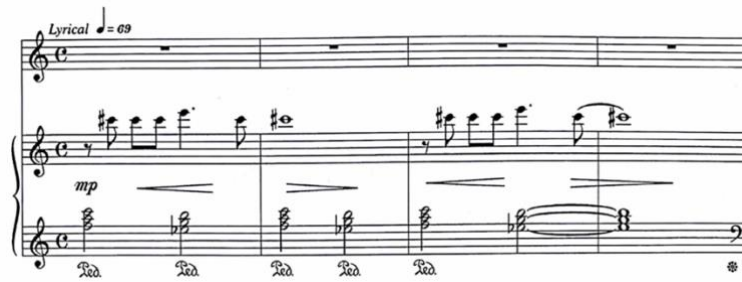
Range: D \flat 4 – G5

Tessitura: B4 – D5

Tempo: Lyrical, quarter note = 69 bpm

In sharp contrast to the warm and exciting aurora of the last song, *A Winter Night* creates an atmosphere of dreary cold. It's a thought-provoking juxtaposition of a warm, safe home against the background and cruel reality of those who linger outside on a freezing night because they have no home. It's easy to imagine a bitter wind howling through the trees as the evening temperature plummets below freezing. Anyone would feel grateful for a cozy hearth on such a night, and any compassionate soul would ache for the welfare of those less fortunate. The bleak mood and winter imagery are set by "the opening textural sparseness and dissonance of the

accompaniment...,”⁶⁵ and these characteristics remain throughout the piece.



Example 3.3: Sparse, dissonant piano introduction.

The composer structures the piece in alignment with the text – three sections, ABC, one for each verse. The A section begins with a haunting melody in syllabic unity with the poetry. Laitman uses shifting meters to match the text, fluctuating between 3/4 and 5/4 to honor the format of Teasdale words.⁶⁶ These defining characteristics (syllabic text setting, shifting meters, dissonance, and sparse accompaniment) are employed throughout or purposefully deviated from to emphasize important moments. The first musical deviation is at the end of the first stanza on the word “smite.” This word sits on two notes, F5-G5, and this non-syllabic setting is the apex of the vocal range, creating a semi-climax that leads to the B section.



Example 3.4: Non-syllabic setting, shifting meters.

The second stanza of the poem coincides with the B section, where the singer compassionately pleads with God to have pity on “the homeless ones.” This section remains

⁶⁵ Lori Laitman, *The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs* (Riverdale, NY: Classical Vocal Reprints), 1991.

⁶⁶ Mueller, 47.

consonant to represent softer emotions like empathy and kindness. Although no key signature is given, the tonality remains solidly in F minor from mm.13-32. This obvious deviation from the rest of the song’s distinct dissonance emphasizes the human need for compassion and the necessity of caring for one another. The repetitive, rhythmic pattern in the accompaniment from measures 13-19 depicts “beggars pacing to and fro” with a relentlessly frantic feel.



Example 3.5: Pacing rhythms.

A short interlude connects sections B and C, and more lush harmonies appear in the final section.⁶⁷ With the words “my room is like a bit of June,” dissonance returns to the melody. The lush harmonies and the glacial melody portray a frigid guilt one might feel for being safe and warm while others are not. The “dirge-like ending”⁶⁸ leaves the audience frozen and pensive.

Despite its vocal challenges stemming from intricate harmonies and melodic dissonance, this piece offers an excellent opportunity for singers to navigate its emotional and musical depth. The range spanning Db4 to G5, and the tessitura falling between B4 and D5, are reasonable for a soprano, and along with its average phrases spanning between 2 to 4 measures, this piece serves as an excellent opportunity for vocalists to hone their skills. Its complex yet approachable nature makes *A Winter Night* a perfect addition to a higher-level undergraduate recital, allowing performers to showcase their musical prowess on a challenging yet rewarding song.

⁶⁷ Laitman, *The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Old Tunes

As the waves of perfume, heliotrope, rose,
Float in the garden when no wind blows,
Come to us, go from us, whence no one knows;

So the old tunes float in my mind,
And go from me leaving no trace behind,
Like fragrance bourne on the hush of the wind.

But in the instant the airs remain
I know the laughter and the pain
Of times that will not come again.

I try to catch at many a tune
Like petals of light fallen from the moon,
Broken and bright on a dark lagoon.

But they float away – for who can hold
Youth, or perfume or the moon’s gold.

Range: C#₄ – G#₅

Tessitura: A₄ – C#₅

Tempo: Quarter note = 112 bpm

The third song of the cycle reflects the nostalgic and emotional power of music. Teasdale explores the idea that music can evoke memories and emotions, transporting individuals back to specific moments in their past. Since Teasdale likens these past tunes and the memories associated with them to wafts of perfume floating on air, Laitman creates an atmospheric piece that evokes wistfulness, reflection, and appreciation for the past.

Pedal markings in the piano have been deliberately placed throughout the song to create sounds “that merge and linger in the air, just as ‘waves of perfume...float in the garden where no wind blows.’”⁶⁹ The music begins with a melodious arch, like *The Metropolitan Tower*, but Laitman has added frequent tempo changes and shifting dynamic marks to give it a more erratic

⁶⁹ Laitman, *The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs*.

feel. The song is meant to ebb and flow naturally, and although Laitman adds many markings, she stresses in the score that a “passionate musical performance is of utmost importance.”⁷⁰ The first section of music establishes a sense of floating, with a melody that flows effortlessly and a relatively thin accompaniment whose pedal markings create a mesmerizing atmosphere.

Each stanza of poetry has a separate rhyming scheme at the end of each sentence, like “rose,” “blows,” and “knows” in the first stanza. There are three musical sections, ABA’, and the five stanzas are divided by two-one-two to fit the ternary form.⁷¹ A vivid key change ushers in the B section, and a clean musical depiction of the text “But in the instant the airs remain” rhyming with “I know the laughter and pain.” Three ascending eighth notes set syllabically on “but in the” in measure 38 are identical to those in measure 42 on “I know the.” Each of these ascending figures is the start of two rhyming phrases that musically emulate each other. Laitman uses largely the same rhythms to set each phrase and adjusts the melody down ½ step to indicate a rhyme, not an exact replica. This, and similar musical rhyming moments, occur throughout the piece, making it advantageous for even a less experienced singer, as it allows for a clear connection of music and text and ease in learning phrases that are only slightly different.

The image displays two musical examples. Example 3.6, titled 'Initial phrase,' shows a vocal line starting at measure 39 with a tempo of 144 and a dynamic of *mf*. The lyrics are 'in - stant the airs re - main,'. The piano accompaniment features a tempo of 144 and a dynamic of *f* (forceful), with a *mp* section starting at measure 42. Example 3.7, titled 'Rhyming phrase, ½ step lower,' shows a vocal line with a tempo of 126 and a dynamic of *mf*. The lyrics are 'laugh - ter and the pain,'. The piano accompaniment features a tempo of 126 and a dynamic of *mp*. Both examples include 'Ped.' markings under the piano part.

Example 3.6: Initial phrase.

Example 3.7: Rhyming phrase, ½ step lower.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mueller, 49.

A piano interlude in 7/8 time that is marked *slightly off-kilter* precedes the third section and beautifully illustrates the words “I try to catch at many a tune.” It’s easy to imagine the off-kilter dance of someone trying to grasp a fluttering butterfly with their bare hands. This text painting signifies that trying to catch memories from the past can be as difficult as capturing a butterfly in flight or an invisible wave of perfume.

One of the most ethereal passages of the text is “like petals of light fallen from the moon, broken and bright on a dark lagoon.” In measures 68-70, Laitman illustrates the words “broken and bright” with quarter rests, an accelerated tempo, and an ascending phrase. By using multiple rests to break up a longer phrase into deliberately shorter snippets, the word “broken” can be heard in the music. These smaller phrases are not technically necessary, as a soprano could reasonably sing the entire five-measure phrase without the rests. But since these rests are interpretationally motivated, they can be used strategically to 1) ensure the singer has enough breath before singing a forte “lagoon” on a G#5, and 2) teach a singer how to breathe in the middle of a phrase without sacrificing dramatic intensity or phrasal integrity. Many times, a singer must carve out their own time to breathe prior to a climactic high note, but in this instance, Laitman created a musical breath motivated by the text. However, a soprano must learn to breathe mid-phrase appropriately so as not to halt breath energy or let the phrase die. Moreover,

The image shows a musical score for measures 67-70. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 7/8. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest in measure 67, followed by the lyrics "Bro - ken and bright on a dark la - goon." in measures 68-70. The piano accompaniment features a similar rhythmic pattern with quarter rests and eighth notes. Tempo markings include "poco rit.", "♩ = 126 poco accel.", and "allargando". Dynamics include "f" (forte). Pedal markings ("Ped.") are present in the bass line.

Example 3.8: Musical illustration of “broken and bright.”

Laitman introduces a slight acceleration (*poco accelerando*) over the phrase "broken and bright." To emphasize the word "bright" and complement the increased tempo, she incorporates an ascending melody leading up to the high G#5, symbolizing the radiant ascent of the moon and the "bright" glitter of the moon's light on the surface of a "dark lagoon."

The final G5 on the word "gold" is an ideal open vowel for such a note. However, the *piano* dynamic and the emotional need to end this ethereal piece on a floaty high note will likely prove challenging. Laitman proceeds "gold" with the word "moon" on G4. This interval allows a soprano to utilize the [u] vowel on the low note to find a solid head voice while taking advantage of nasal continuant [m] to feel high forward resonance before jumping through the passaggio. This practice could prevent the final note from becoming too heavy or pushed. It's appropriate to Laitman's interpretation of the poem that the final note is gentle instead of harsh. It feels like the final glimpse of a memory as it disappears into the past.

Example 3.9: Octave leap from “moons” to “gold”.

There are many advantages to an undergraduate student learning this song in their junior or senior year. With its reasonable range (C#4 – G#5), comfortable tessitura (A4 – C#5), shorter phrases, approachable harmonies, flowing melody, relatable subject matter, and accommodating vowel usage, this atmospheric piece would make an excellent choice for a developing soprano and an enriching addition to any recital.

The Strong House

Our love is like a strong house
Well roofed against the wind and rain
Who passes darkly in the sun again and again?

The doors are fast, the lamps are lit,
We sit together talking low
Who is it in the ghostly dusk goes to and fro?

Surely ours is a strong house,
I will not trouble any more
But who comes stealing at midnight
To try the locked door?

Range: D₄ – G₅

Tessitura: G₄ – D₄

Tempo: Very flexible throughout, quarter note = 80 bpm

In *The Strong House*, Teasdale uses the metaphor of a "strong house" to represent a stable and secure relationship. The poem suggests that love can provide a sense of refuge and protection, much like a strong and well-built house. The speaker describes the strength of the love she's created with her partner and the solace it brings, emphasizing the enduring nature of their connection. However, their peaceful reality is disrupted by a mysterious force trying to sabotage their love. *The Strong House* is the next to shortest piece in the cycle, and it combines the feelings of contented strength and foreboding mystery to illustrate the wonders and fears of a committed relationship. The vivid contrast between such intense emotions makes this piece one of the most expressive of the whole cycle.

The Strong House is a powerful song, although when I wrote it, I was unsure about whether it was a good song or not. But with this composition, I was starting to tap into using structure as another way of commenting on the text. Here, the ever-shifting metrical landscape captures the emotional essence of the poem.⁷²

⁷² Laitman, email to author July 31, 2023.

Despite any previous misgivings on the part of the composer regarding its value, *The Strong House* has many structural nuances to explore that illustrate the text. This is a through-composed piece, with no key signature given. The meter changes frequently, and the tempo is also marked as “very flexible throughout.” The “ever-shifting” meter and the flexible tempo are employed partly to accommodate the syllabic setting of the text but also to help the melody line remain effortless.

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The tempo is marked as '♩ = 80 but very flexible tempo throughout' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is in 7/8 time, the second in 4/8 time, and the third in 3/8 time. The text 'Our' is written below the vocal line. Three red circles highlight the meter changes in the vocal line.

Example 3.10: Unsettled meter.

Before the voice begins, the piano creates an underlying sense of fear through the shifting time signatures in the first three measures. The setting of the text remains syllabic throughout the piece, but Laitman uses melodic structure to illustrate the words. Moments characterized by love and tranquility are portrayed through a fluid melody line, predominantly composed of stepwise intervals, gently guiding the listener through a serene musical landscape. Conversely, instances of apprehension or fear are evoked by the introduction of larger intervals in the melody, such as 4ths, 6ths, 7ths, and octaves, instilling a sense of unease and tension within the music. Notably, in the passage highlighted in blue, the smooth, stepwise motion beautifully illustrates the sentiment "I will not trouble anymore," conveying a sense of resolution and inner peace. In contrast, the subsequent phrase, "But who comes stealing at midnight," is mirrored by a melody characterized by bold leaps and jumps, adding an air of mystery and suspense to the

composition. These sudden intervals create a dramatic shift in mood, heightening the sense of anticipation and intrigue.

Example 3.11: Melodic structure.

Contrasting accompaniment styles and clear musical notation are also used to illustrate the emotional shifts between peace and fear. Measure 13 sees a change from the characteristic sweeping ascending line in the accompaniment (see the previous two examples) to a repetitive eighth-note figure, suggesting impending trouble. The accompaniment in this section instills a sense of foreboding and sets a mood of anticipation and unease. As the music progresses, tension mounts, heightened by explicit instructions within the score to "build slightly," hinting at an

Example 3.12: Eighth note figure in accompaniment, and musical instructions.

impending crescendo. However, the real twist lies in the directive for the forte in the following measure to be a surprise, adding an unexpected element to the dynamics and intensifying the emotional impact of the passage. This strategic handling of dynamics keeps the listener on edge, enhancing the dramatic narrative and ensuring that each moment unfolds with gripping suspense.

The *subito forte* in measure 16 is a climactic moment of fear depicted in the melody by an elongated G5 followed directly by a descending octave leap. Two other wide melodic leaps complete the phrase, wrapping up the chaotic moment and ushering in the next moment of tranquility.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is the vocal line in 3/4 time, starting at measure 16. It begins with a *sub. f* dynamic and a crescendo hairpin. The melody features a long note on G5, followed by a descending octave leap to G4, and then two more wide leaps. The dynamics change to *mf* and then *poco rit.* The lyrics are: "Who is it in the ghost - ly dusk goes to and fro". The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, also in 3/4 time, with a key signature of two flats. It features a *sub. f* dynamic and a *poco rit.* marking. The piano part consists of chords and a bass line with some grace notes.

Example 3.13: *Subito forte*, wide leaps.

The characteristic wide leaps in the melody are the most technically challenging elements for a soprano, as many intervals span two different vocal registers. Fortunately, the leaps are most often descending, which is more advantageous to the management of breath. However, it will be important for a singer and a teacher to focus on the lower notes of the leaps so they do not descend out of resonance to an inappropriately open vowel. The interval from an Eb5 – Ab4 (see example 3.12) on “ghost-ly dusk” extends from the passaggio on a closed [i] to a more open [ʌ] in the mid voice and must be attended to. The [i] must be modified slightly to a more open [ɪ], and the [ʌ] must remain slightly closed to be audible and comfortable. Apart from some challenging melodic moments, the vocal range, D4 – G5, and tessitura, G4 – D4, is realistic for most sopranos, and the interesting structural elements give this piece a true appeal. With

delightful emotional contrast and powerful musical moments, this song is exciting to sing and fun for an audience to hear and would make a delightful addition to a soprano recital.

The Hour

Was it foreknown, was it foredoomed
Before I drew my first small breath?
Will it be with me to the end,
Will it go down with me to death?

Or was it chance, would it have been
Another if it was not you?
Could any other voice or hands
Have done for me what yours can do?

Now without sorrow and without elation
I say the day I found you was foreknown,
Let the years blow like sand around that hour,
Changeless and fixed as Memnon carved in stone.

Range: C₄ – G₅

Tessitura: G₄ – D₅

Tempo: Somewhat freely, quarter note = 72 bpm

The Hour is a contemplative and introspective piece that reflects on one pivotal moment, forever altering one's life. The text explores themes of love, destiny, and the profound impact one person can have on another. Teasdale must have reflected on a certain moment in her own life with a special person who inspired these transcendent words. Laitman shared that Teasdale's poem related so deeply to her own life experience that this song became the first she dedicated to her husband, Bruce Rosenblum.⁷³ Such passionate experiences in a person's life are not only transformational but also universally relatable. This song is an inspiring narrative of such a momentous occurrence.

⁷³ Ibid.

The first stanza of poetry ponders the existence of fate and destiny. The significance of such elements is mirrored beautifully in both voice and piano. “Lush harmonies are the hallmark of ‘The Hour,’ which, like ‘The Metropolitan Tower,’ reflects on a woman’s first discovery of love.”⁷⁴ Such harmonies can be heard in the opening chords of the piano introduction before the voice begins. Once again, Laitman uses larger intervals, specifically ascending major 5ths in the first lines of the melody, to illustrate the ponderings of fate. A descending major 6th in measure 9 on the words “go down” paints the text beautifully. Laitman adds musical interest with shifting meters and altering tonality while continually using syllabic text setting, a defining characteristic of the set.⁷⁵ As in *Old Tunes*, regular tempo adjustments in the music add dynamic motion and can be seen in specific markings on the page.

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano piece. The voice part is written on a single staff in 3/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72 and the instruction 'somewhat freely'. The lyrics are 'Was it fore-known, was it fore-doomed'. The piano part is written on two staves (treble and bass clef) in 3/4 time, also marked 'somewhat freely' and 'mp'. The piano part features lush harmonies and ascending 5th intervals in the melody. The score includes dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p' (piano), and articulation marks like 'acc.' (accents) and 'p' (piano) under the piano part.

Example 3.14: Lush harmonies, ascending 5ths in the melody.

The second stanza celebrates the unique love the speaker has found, highlighting the deep impact and significance this person has had on their life. Pure elation and passion can be heard in the music through a slightly faster tempo and frequent usage of *push* and *relax*. (see Example 3.15 on the next page) The meter changes suit the syntax of the text and demonstrate Laitman’s “remarkable gift for setting words to music.”⁷⁶ The clean text setting and energetic musical

⁷⁴ Laitman, *The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs*.

⁷⁵ Mueller, 57

⁷⁶ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005), “Lori Laitman,” 340.

motion effectively lead to the climax of the piece in measure 25.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 12. It begins with a tempo marking of *mf* and a tempo of *♩ = 96 slightly faster*. The lyrics are: "Or was it chance, would it have been an - o - ther if it was not you?". The score includes performance markings: "push" (indicated by a horizontal line above the notes) and "relax" (indicated by a horizontal line above the notes). The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, also starting at measure 12. It begins with a tempo marking of *mf* and a tempo of *♩ = 96 slightly faster*. The piano part features a bass line with several "ped." markings. The time signature changes from 7/8 to 3/4 in the final measure.

Example 3.15: Push and relax, shifting meters.

One significant cultural reference in the final stanza, demonstrating Teasdale’s love of ancient history, is the reference to “Memnon carved in stone.” As a hero of ancient mythology, Memnon was an Ethiopian king, celebrated for his strength and beauty, who fought in the Trojan War.⁷⁷ According to ancient Greek mythology, Memnon met his demise at the hands of the legendary warrior Achilles during the Trojan War. However, his story does not end with his death on the battlefield. It is said that Zeus, the king of the gods, took pity on Memnon and bestowed upon him the gift of immortality. Thus, while Memnon's mortal body may have perished, his spirit lives on eternally, forever immortalized in the archives of myth and legend.⁷⁸

Many statues have been erected in his honor, and Teasdale likens the timeless nature of transformative love to Memnon’s permanent fixture in sculpture. During the climax of this piece, Laitman avoids stepwise motion, instead using skips to emphasize the text. Several octave leaps characterize the melody line from measures 25 – 33: G4-G5 on “*the day* I found you” in measure 27, G4 – G5 on “*the years* blow like sand” in measure 31, D4 – D5 on “a-*round that* hour” in measure 32. The final leap in the melody, a major 9th on “Memnon” in measure 35, serves as a catalyst for the closing line that descends in skips to a sustained D4 on “stone.”

⁷⁷ Griffiths, R. Drew. “The Origin of Memnon.” *Classical Antiquity* 17, No. 2. (1998), 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

35 *push* *f* *poco rit.*
 fixed as Memnon carved in stone.
push *f* *poco rit.* *mp*
 ped. ped. ped. ped. ped. ped. ped. ped. ped. ped.

Example 3.16: Major 9th on Memnon, sustained last note.

A short postlude reiterates the opening vocal line in transposed form, “underscoring the text and definitively stating that it *was* foreknown, it *was* foredoomed.”⁷⁹ This final musical gesture serves as a meaningful punctuation mark, underlining the profound themes of fate and destiny that weave through the text. With each note, the melody reverberates with a sense of certainty, definitively affirming that what transpired was not merely by chance but was predestined. As the music fades, it leaves a lasting impression on the listener, inspiring contemplation and introspection on the mysteries of life and the forces that shape our existence.

To A Loose Woman

My dear, your face is lovely,
 And you have lovely eyes,
 I do not cavil at your life,
 But only at your lies.
 You are not brave,
 You are not wild,
 You merely ride the crest of fashion;
 Ambition is your special ware
 And you have dared to call it passion.

Range: D₄ – A₅

Tessitura: C₅ – G₅

Tempo: Quarter note = 88 bpm

⁷⁹ Meuller, 60

To A Loose Woman introduces a sarcastic and somewhat judgmental character as the speaker critically addresses a woman embracing life on her own terms. The lyrics imply an appreciation for the woman's physical attractiveness but also express disapproval for what is perceived as a deficiency in her moral character. The light-hearted yet sardonic tone of the poem sets it apart from the rest of the pieces, and it's a dramatic way to end a cycle. "I love the energy of *To A Loose Woman*, which I wrote in a 24-hour spurt of energy. It is much jazzier than many of my compositions."⁸⁰ Syncopated rhythms and jazzy harmonies can be heard from the first measure, and they "set a sly background for the dramatic vocal line."⁸¹

The image shows a musical score for a piece. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in treble clef and includes the lyrics "My dear, My". Above the vocal line, there are tempo markings: "♩ = 88", "poco rit.", "f", and "a tempo". The piano accompaniment is written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and features syncopated rhythms and octave leaps. Dynamics markings include "f", "meno f", and "mf". There are also some performance instructions like "poco rit." and "a tempo" above the piano part. The score is set in 4/4 time.

Example 3.17: Jazzy accompaniment, octave leaps

The tessitura of this piece, C5 – G5, is several notes higher than most other songs in the cycle. For much of the time, the melody rests within the soprano's secondo passaggio and, for some sopranos, even extends beyond it, presenting an added challenge. The opening lines of the voice effectively captivate the audience with several successive octave jumps on "My dear, your face is lovely." The wide leaps seem to mock condescendingly, and the jazzy piano makes it all seem fun. The quick tempo, the jagged vocal line, and the snarky words are great for letting the voice loose and provide the perfect opportunity for a soprano to play the part. The wide melodic intervals prove to be characteristic of this piece, upping its difficulty, but not only do they

⁸⁰ Laitman, email to author July 31, 2023.

⁸¹ Lori Laitman, *The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs*.

enhance the words of this poem, but they also function as a typifying element of the cycle.

Scornful appreciation of beauty is quickly followed by "I do not cavil at your life but only at your lies." A disjunct vocal line and a dramatic octave leap from A4 – A5 in measure 13 emphasize "lies" and drive home the point that there are some questions about the woman's honesty and virtue. Then, a chromatic melody beginning on G5 in measure 18, "You are not brave, you are not wild," brings the mocking to a new level, suggesting that the woman's actions are motivated solely by trends and fashion. A vampy, raucous 6-bar piano interlude precedes the climax of the piece.

In measure 31, the pinnacle of the piece is reached on an A5, coinciding with the word "ambition."

I don't expect that anything above a high G would necessarily be understood (diction wise). I'm careful to approach high notes in a manner that is easy for the voice, something I learned from Lauren Wagner.⁸²

This sequence of three chromatic notes—A5, G#5, and G5—on "ambition" ventures into the upper register of a soprano's range. To sustain these notes effectively, a slight adjustment from the [æ] vowel to a more open [a] may be necessary. This modification ensures proper airflow through the vocal folds, facilitating smooth execution of the passage at such elevated pitches. While the A5 is sustained, the subsequent G# and G are articulated with shorter rhythms that precisely complement the structure of the word. The accented syllable "am-BI-tion" aligns with the downbeat of measure 32, and the irregular rhythm (16th note followed by a dotted eighth) accentuates the importance of this syllable within the phrase. Laitman demonstrates her knowledgeable treatment of the soprano instrument by using an easily modified word on high

⁸² Lori Laitman, email to author July 31, 2023

chromatic notes and by using advantageous rhythms. The other high A5 in the piece is on the word “lies,” which is an ideal vowel for that note. Laitman's skillful treatment of the text adds aesthetic diversity to this syncopated and bluesy tune.⁸³

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "ambition". It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 28 and includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a high note marked with a fermata and the instruction "Am - - -". The piano accompaniment features triplets and is marked with "stretch timing if needed use fingers 3 and 4" and "less raucous". The second system starts at measure 32 and includes a vocal line with lyrics: "bi - tion is your spe - cial ware - - - And you have". The piano accompaniment continues with triplets and is marked with "mf". The score ends with a double bar line and a star symbol.

Example 3.18: Climax on “ambition”.

This short yet vivid piece is full of life and fun. Although it is exciting, it presents some vocal challenges, much like the other songs of the cycle. Given its elevated tessitura, demanding octave leaps, and theatrical spirit, *To A Loose Woman* is best suited for a singer with advanced skills, and I recommended assigning this piece to a singer at the graduate level. Such performers typically possess the technical proficiency and emotional depth required to fully convey the nuances of this composition, ensuring a compelling and authentic rendition that does justice to the piece's expressive complexity and melodic demands.

⁸³ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Simon A. Sargon sets Sara Teasdale

Biography

Simon Alexander Sargon is a notable American pianist, music educator, and composer. He was born in Mumbai, India, of Sephardic-Indian and Ashkenazi-Russian descent, and was just an infant when his parents brought him to the United States. Sargon's parents wanted him and his brother to be raised in America, so they moved from India to Washington, DC, in the 1940s, ultimately moving to Boston after World War II. As a young boy, Sargon discovered his love for the piano, and he began taking private lessons at six years old.⁸⁴ He remembers writing down "little pieces" for the piano back then.⁸⁵ Sargon continued with piano lessons during his Junior High and High School education at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sargon's Jewish faith began as a child, being raised by Jewish parents who were dedicated to the religious training of their children.⁸⁶

Beyond his personal faith, he demonstrated a devotion to religious studies while attending Hebrew College five days a week as a teenager. However, his love of music was always a priority, and his religious studies took a backseat as he plunged into an undergraduate degree in music at Brandeis University. Polish pianist Mieczyslaw Horszowski mentored him through his bachelor's degree, and he graduated at the top of his class. He earned a master's degree in composition with a minor in accompanying from the Julliard School. During his

⁸⁴ Chandler, A. Dione. "An overview of the oboe works of Simon A. Sargon." (D.M.A. diss., The Florida State University, 2012), 14.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Jared Foretek. "For composer Simon Sargon, what's a birthday without music?" *Washington Jewish Week* 54, no.14 (April 2018): 4. <https://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/for-composer-simon-sargon-whats-a-birthday-without-music/>

master's education, he studied under several master teachers: Vincent Persichetti, Irving Fine, and Darius Milhaud.

Under advisement from his mentors, Sargon spent his summer months attending the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals to accompany and study composition.⁸⁷ There, he became acquainted with noteworthy mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel, whom he would accompany in many performances stateside and overseas. After graduation, he continued to work as a freelance musician for nearly 12 years based out of New York City. During this time, he also served on the musical staff of the New York City Center Opera, the Lincoln Center State Theatre, Sarah Lawrence College, and the Juilliard School.⁸⁸

In 1971, the American-Israel Cultural Foundation awarded Sargon a grant to join the faculty of the Rubin Music Academy in Jerusalem. They were hoping to strengthen their voice department, and Sargon was hired as the Chair of the Voice and Opera Department.⁸⁹ He also worked as a Visiting Lecturer at Hebrew University and was a founder of the Jerusalem Opera Theatre.⁹⁰

Sargon never considered working in a synagogue before he returned to the United States in 1973.⁹¹ He was looking for a position in academics when he was unexpectedly appointed as Music Director of Temple Emanu-El, located in Dallas, Texas.⁹² During his tenure at the Temple, he wrote a myriad of Jewish pieces, both secular and liturgical, and became well known for his compositions honoring the Jewish faith, culture, and history.⁹³ The choir at Emanu-El was led

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Simon Sargon, "Biography," accessed Nov 22, 2023, <http://simonsargon.com/bio.php>

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Chandler, 15.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

into prominence under Sargon's masterful guidance. Then, in 1984, he joined the faculty at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, where he remained until 2013. Throughout his sojourn at SMU, he continued his career in compositions, focusing on Jewish music and works for the singing voice.

In an interview with Bruce Duffie, Sargon stated, "I think very much vocally because coming out of a Jewish background, the music of the synagogue in which I was very involved is vocal, not instrumental. Because of that, I was always drawn very much to opera and to lieder."⁹⁴ Sargon spent much of his education studying vocal music and his freelance work accompanying singers. He dedicated much of his career to educating young musicians on various university faculties. Sargon remained loyal to this Jewish faith throughout his life, and much of his Jewish-themed music has received national acclaim.⁹⁵ Although the song set discussed in this paper is not of the Jewish tradition, it shows Sargon's dedication to vocal writing and his preference for setting the poetry of Sara Teasdale.

The composer emphasized the importance of text in writing art songs when he said, "The text has got to speak to me in a way that suggests a mood that can be amplified by music or is waiting for music to amplify it... so many of the great lyrics have been taken, and so much of contemporary poetry is simply too intellectual, or cerebral to really be effective as song texts."⁹⁶ By selecting Sara Teasdale's poetry as his inspiration, Sargon effectively enhanced her words through music, demonstrating that her poetic language harmonized seamlessly with his vision of a beautiful melody.

⁹⁴ Bruce Duffie, Composer Simon Sargon: A Conversation with Bruce Duffie, Accessed Nov 22, 2023, <http://www.bruceduffie.com/sargon.html>

⁹⁵ "Simon Sargon", Southern Methodist University Website, Accessed Nov 25, 2023, <https://s3.smu.edu/des/registrar/RetiredFaculty/?a=bio&pid=44&name=Simon%20Sargon>

⁹⁶ Duffie, "A Conversation."

As Sargon's music often revolves around his faith, inquiries have been made regarding his spiritual bond with music. Is there a spiritual essence inherent in all his compositions, even those without lyrics?

We all have God Divine inside of us, and what I try to do is bring out the divineness inside of me so that it will draw out that divine inside the listener. That's my goal, even in the lighter music. If I can get to that pure essence of who I am as a unique human being, with a soul that God has implanted in me, if I can express that truly and honestly and sincerely, then that will speak to your honest and sincere soul.⁹⁷

Sargon spent so many years playing for singers' voice lessons, recitals, and performances that he felt confident in his knowledge of “what is comfortable for the various categories of voices.”⁹⁸ He hoped that vocalists felt a refuge in making his music and remarked on the fact that quite a few vocalists have called his songs “voice-friendly.” Sargon was careful about what he put on paper,⁹⁹ and he was reportedly a tremendous collaborator. His daughter Olivia Sargon-Glasgow recalls, “Musicians enjoyed working with him because he was always striving for the highest level of artistic performance.”¹⁰⁰ This beloved pianist, music educator, and classical composer was 84 years old when he passed away on December 25, 2022. His supreme musical legacy is survived by his loved ones and his countless fellow musicians.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen Braunstein. “Life of area composer Simon Sargon was one of music, Jewish inspiration.” *Washington Jewish Week* 59, no. 1 (January 2023): 5.

The Music

Let It Be You (1988)

Let It Be You is a beautifully cohesive collection of 5 songs. The musical settings are characterized by their lyrical simplicity and are often quiet and reflective in nature. The vocal melodies serve as graceful conveyors of the text that thoughtfully complement the meaning of the words. The piano accompaniments, while supportive, employ intricate harmonic and rhythmic patterns that enhance the poetry. This collection is ideal for sopranos who appreciate Sara Teasdale's poetry and seek repertoire that is approachable yet meaningful.

All pieces in the cycle adhere to traditional keys, each piece being assigned a specific key signature. The vocal ranges are limited to no higher than A5 or lower than C4, well within the capabilities of a trained soprano. While the tessituras vary slightly, they generally fall between F4 and D5, which is the middle voice that sits between the primo and secondo passaggi. The tempos are predominantly moderate, with one being lively and another slower (andante). Sargon is meticulous in his approach to word setting, paying careful attention to vowel usage across different parts of the soprano voice. He selects vowels that are comfortable for a soprano within specific ranges. Any instances in the songs that deviate from the mentioned elements, affecting the piece's complexity, will be highlighted in the dedicated section for that song. With all the above features being considered, the songs may appear suitable for any soprano. However:

What a lot of people have said about my music is that it looks very, very easy on the page. It's so spare, and then they go to do it and they're on a tightrope because everything is so exposed, and every note counts.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Duffie, "A Conversation."

Sargon's music is more complex than it appears at first glance, and his genius accompaniments reflect his background as a pianist. They seldom double the melody line and intentionally let the melody stand on its own. Because of the exposed melodies, the emotional nature of the poetry, and somewhat hidden complexity, these five pieces are best suited for an advanced intermediate student and above, a senior undergraduate or early graduate student.

Let It Be You

Let it be you who leans above me
On my last day,
Let it be you who shut my eyelids
Forever and aye.

Say a "Goodnight" as you have said it
All of these years,
With the old look, with the old whisper
And without tears.

You will know then all that in silence
You always knew,
Though I have loved, I loved no other
As I loved you.

Range: F4 – G5

Tessitura: G4 – Eb5

Tempo: Moderato

This poem expresses themes of love, acceptance, and the continuity of affection in the face of mortality. The poem opens with a request from the speaker to have a loved one, likely a romantic partner, present during their final moments. This desire for companionship in death suggests a deep emotional connection and intimacy, and this melancholy tune becomes as much a love song as it is a deathbed wish.

Sargon sets the somber tone by employing the key of G minor, complemented by a minimalistic piano accompaniment that maintains a consistent rhythm from start to finish. The

recurring motif in the accompaniment accentuates the melody while maintaining a subdued energy, contributing to the melancholic atmosphere. The initial vocal line features a triplet figure on "let it be," which reappears multiple times throughout the composition to unify the piece. Sargon uses a syllabic setting for the text and skillfully aligns the rhythm with the stress of the words, including a clear appoggiatura on "above me," a vivid way to end that initial phrase.

Moderato (♩ = 69) Simon Sargon

2 *mp, simply* 3 4

Solo
Let it be you who lean a - bove me

Piano
p, quietly

Example 4.1: Repeating accompaniment rhythm, triplet.

Each of the three stanzas consists of four lines, with two longer phrases followed by a shorter completion of that phrase on the next line. The triplet figure, as demonstrated in example 4.1, is present in each longer phrase, typically at the beginning. Each shorter line consists of four syllables, and Sargon uses the same rhythm of quarter-quarter-quarter-dotted half note to mirror each of those moments in the text, as shown in Example 4.2. One notable deviation from this formulaic rhythm setting appears in measure 21. Sargon omits the triplet figure from the vocal line, and for two measures, the accompaniment changes to sustained whole-note chords, creating a dramatic contrast in the music.

6 7 8

Solo
On my last day,

Piano
p

Example 4.2: Short phrase rhythm

A *sostenuto* beginning in measure 21, coupled with the modified accompaniment and vocal line on "with the old look, with the old whisper," symbolizes a moment of reminiscence as

the speaker finds a brief respite from her deathbed plea, allowing her to recall past moments of tender bliss shared with her lover. Amid the remembrance, and despite the solemnity of the occasion, the speaker encourages her loved one to say farewell “without tears,” implying a desire for acceptance rather than sorrow. However, this peaceful moment is fleeting as her dying struggles return in measure 25 when the accompaniment resumes its original pace, and the melody returns to its prescribed configuration.

Example 4.3: *Sostenuto*, a moment of remembrance.

In the final stanza, the speaker expresses profound gratitude and affection for their beloved, affirming that they have never loved anyone else as deeply. Sargon chooses this moment to introduce the song’s highest note in a final climactic moment. The concluding triplet figure on G5 in measure 31 serves as an introduction to the closing phrase, "Though I have loved, I loved no other," adding a strong yet subdued flourish to the song’s conclusion.

Example 4.4: Climactic, triplet figure on G5.

In a poignant finale, the music echoes a resolute declaration of love as Sargon chooses to repeat the concluding phrase of the text, "as I loved you," not once but twice, emphasizing its significance. This repetition serves to underscore the depth of emotion conveyed in the lyrics.

Furthermore, the song concludes with a sustained note held for nine counts, gradually diminishing in intensity as it fades into the gentle accompaniment of the piano. This lingering musical moment allows the sentiment of love to linger in the air, creating a lasting impression on the listener's heart.

Wind Elegy

Only the wind knows he is gone,
Only the wind grieves,
The sun shines, the fields are sown,
Sparrows mate in the eaves;

But I heard the wind in the pines he planted
And the hemlocks overhead,
“His acres wake, for the year turns,
But he is asleep,” it said.

Range: C4 – F5

Tessitura: G4 – Db4

Tempo: Moderately

A theme of death continues in *Wind Elegy* as the poem reflects on the passing of someone dear. The lines convey a sense of solitude and sorrow as nature becomes the only witness to the absence of a departed love. Teasdale demonstrates her love of the living world with mentions of wind and sun, sparrows and pines, hemlocks, and acres. Sargon utilizes numerous instances of text painting to evoke the natural world described in the text.

Sargon utilizes the key of F minor to express a feeling of loss. He frequently incorporates chromaticism to illustrate the text. While the accompaniment took on a secondary role to the melody in *Let It Be You*, it assumes a crucial role in *Wind Elegy*, as the natural elements of the poem are depicted in the piano. A brisk wind blows through the accompaniment like an unbroken wave. It begins in the first two measures with sharp, chromatic bursts of descending

16th notes, supporting the entrance of the voice. It evolves into a steady stream of ascending and

Example 4.5: The windy accompaniment, triplets.

descending 16th notes spanning both hands. The opening lines convey a feeling of isolation, with only the wind aware of the silent grief. The vocal line begins with a chromatic triplet figure, a rhythmic motif that recurs throughout the piece, acting as a unifying element between the first two songs of the cycle. In this through-composed piece, the melody continues in a syllabic text setting with one exception. In measure 5, the melody features an octave leap, followed by a brief, descending melisma on the word "grieves," resembling a cry of despair and an echoing sob.

Example 4.6: Melismatic text setting in the melody.

Amid the gusting gales of wind and the grieving sobs of a broken heart, the sun emerges in measure 7 with a vividly discernable tonal shift from minor to major. Sweet rays of warmth descend briefly upon the fields, and even though the harrowing wind continues to blow, the sun

Example 4.7: Major tonality evoking the sun.

is powerful, and the speaker's gaze turns upward to soak in the life-giving beams of light.

Sparrows can be heard twittering in the eaves. The piano in measure 10 illustrates the chirruping birds with chromatic trills and grace notes written 8va. The speaker's gaze is drawn further upward. Her attention is directed towards the treetops. In the next 7 measures, she contemplates the enduring presence of her lost love in the world around her.



Example 4.8: Sparrows.

Teasdale makes it clear in the poem that a connection exists between the deceased and nature. The mention of the wind in the pines that were planted by the departed lover emphasizes the enduring presence of their memory in the natural world. Sargon marks measure 12 with *poco meno mosso*, while the piano is given a *pianissimo* with the direction to play “delicately.” This poignant moment evokes not just the soft murmur of a breeze among the pines but also the tender truth that to experience love anew, one needs only to remember. Despite the renewal of life in the world around them and the ever-pressing passage of time, solace can be found in the idea that the departed is at peace.



Example 4.9: Sensitive moment.

As the song concludes, the phrase "He is asleep" is repeated three times in succession.

The wind gradually fades into a soft diminuendo while the piano reaches its final cadence.

Despite death's finality, Sargon employs this repeated melody to depict the tranquil acceptance of the departed individual's peaceful rest. Though the body may perish, love remains everlasting.

Barter

Life has loveliness to sell,
All beautiful and splendid things,
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,
Soaring fire that sways and sings,
And children's faces looking up
Holding wonder like a cup.

Life has loveliness to sell,
Music like a curve of gold,
Scent of pine trees in the rain,
Eyes that love you, arms that hold,
And for your spirit's still delight,
Holy thoughts that star the night.

Spend all you have for loveliness
Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
Count many a year of strife well lost,
And for a breath of ecstasy
Give all you have been, or could be.

Range: Eb4 – Ab5

Tessitura: A4 – Eb5

Tempo: With spirit

Barter provides a delightful mood shift with both text and music. While the first two poems of this cycle deal with grief, death, and hardships of life, *Barter* describes the many lovely and splendid things, sounds, and experiences life has to offer. Teasdale encourages readers to actively pursue life's beauty, even in the face of difficulties, and to invest deeply in happiness. The poem consists of three stanzas, each containing six lines. In every stanza, a rhyme scheme follows the pattern abcbdd, with the exact rhyme varying with each stanza as the author saw fit.

Many, if not every reader, should be able to find something in this poem to relate to.

Sargon skillfully reflects the joyous essence of the poem through a modified strophic form characterized by a brisk tempo, lively harmonic progression, and an energetic melody line. The accompaniment maintains a consistent rhythmic pattern throughout the piece, another trademark of the cycle. The first two lines of text from each stanza seamlessly follow the prescribed key signature. However, as the poem progresses, Sargon sets the last four lines of each stanza to dynamic harmonic changes, infusing the music with added depth and complexity. Notably, the concluding line of every stanza unveils a lyrical highpoint, meticulously placed within the vocal range to delight singers with its impeccable text setting. The initial vocal line, "Life has loveliness to sell," cheerfully sets the tone for the song and reappears at the conclusion.

The image shows a musical score for a voice and piano piece. The title is "With Spirit". The score is in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The voice part is written in a soprano clef, and the piano part is in a grand staff. The lyrics are "Life has love-li-ness to sell, All". The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *con ped*. There are also performance instructions like "2" and "3" above the voice line, indicating phrasing or breath marks.

Example 4.10: Opening melody, recurring accompaniment theme.

Meter changes from 4/4 to 3/4 time are consistently employed to match the rhythmic flow of the lyrics. In lines 2 - 6 of stanza 1, Teasdale makes a heartfelt list of life's joys. Sargon constructs that list musically between measures 5 and 9 by initially presenting the melody and then recycling that melodic and rhythmic material with varied harmony in the subsequent phrase. This method is echoed in the same lines of the next two stanzas of text, aligning the song's structure with the unity of the poem. (See Example 4.11 on the next page)

Example 4.11: Recycled melodic material.

Many times, the small and simple moments of joy can profoundly impact our lives. In measure 12, Sargon illustrates that life's wonders are often found in simplicity by presenting a simple musical interlude with the phrase "Holding wonder like a cup." The use of a descending perfect fifth on "wonder" allows for expressive *strong-weak* phrasing within a straightforward musical context. The open vowel on the E5 complements a soprano's voice, and the subsequent leap to [ə] in the mid-voice offers an ideal setup to avoid over-opening on the descent to the middle voice. This musical moment presents singers with a chance to showcase its melodic beauty through precise phrasing and flawless vocal technique.

Example 4.12: Simple moment of “wonder.”

Both Sara Teasdale and Simon Sargon maintained a strong belief in God throughout their lives. Teasdale's poetry suggests that some of life's most magnificent experiences are rooted in thoughts of the divine, reminding us that amidst the ordinary and earthly aspects of existence,

there is potential for encountering sacredness through connection with God. Sargon highlights the importance of "Holy thoughts" in measure 24 by positioning these notes above the staff, symbolizing the upward direction one must reach toward holy ideals. While singing the Ab5 note

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 24 with the instruction 'Hold back' and ending at measure 26. The lyrics are 'Ho - ly thoughts that star the night.' The notes for 'Ho - ly' are placed above the staff. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with 'sub ppp' and ending with 'mf, espr legato'. The bottom staff is the bass line. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 4.13: "Holy Thoughts."

on an [o] vowel, a soprano may naturally adjust to the more open [ɔ] sound as they reach for higher pitches, but guidance from a teacher might be necessary to ensure this adjustment, even transitioning closer to [a] if needed. Additionally, the Gb5 note on the [i] of "holy" creates a too-closed vowel sound for maintaining a balanced airflow above the staff, requiring modification to a [ɪ] or even an open [ɛ]. After ensuring these modifications are in place, allowing for optimal vocal expression, this phrase reaching toward the stars transforms into a deeply gratifying moment.

The postlude spans six measures, delicately reiterating the opening melody line. Sargon's melody reminds us that life is full of beauty, ready to be enjoyed. It suggests that to appreciate this beauty, all you need is an open heart and a willingness to grasp it. As the final notes linger, the music imparts an enduring message of hope and possibility, encouraging the audience to seek out and savor life's inherent splendor.

Let It Be Forgotten

Let it be forgotten, as a flower is forgotten,
 Forgotten as a fire that once was singing gold,
 Let it be forgotten for ever and ever,
 Time is a kind friend, he will make us old.

If anyone asks, say it was forgotten
 Long and long ago,

As a flower, as a fire, as a hushed footfall
In a long forgotten snow.

Range: D4 – G5

Tessitura: G4 – D4

Tempo: Andante

Let It Be Forgotten is a short yet impactful song. The poem conveys a deep longing to let go of past pain and move forward with hope and freedom. Sargon's musical interpretation leans towards quietness and introspection, indicative of a private prayer between the speaker and a higher power. The music paints a picture of a weary soul, alone and seeking solace from God, hoping to find strength within themselves to leave the past behind.

The piano introduction begins *quietly*. Chords in the right hand resonate like a celestial beacon, radiating with the promise of something divine. Played an octave higher than written, they evoke the image of the piano stretching upward as if reaching toward heaven. The voice begins simply, merely sharing a desire, but a poignant repetition of the word "forgotten" throughout the poem conveys a strength of feeling, a fervent desire to erase the past from memory. Sargon employs an appoggiatura on three of these repetitions, like the one in Example 4.14, reminiscent of a similar technique used in "Let It Be You," thus creating a subtle link between the two songs. This musical connection adds depth to the composition, weaving a thematic thread that ties both pieces together.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Let It Be Forgotten". It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Andante". The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/2. The vocal line begins with a rest for two measures, then enters with the lyrics "Let it be for - got - ten, As a". The word "forgotten" is marked with a triplet of notes and the instruction "mp, simply". The piano accompaniment is marked "p, quietly" and features a series of chords in the right hand, with the instruction "8va" indicating they are played an octave higher than written. The left hand plays a simple harmonic accompaniment. The instruction "Con Ped" is at the bottom.

Example 4.14: Quiet piano intro, appoggiatura on “forgotten.”

A moment of intensity surfaces in measure 11 with a reiteration of the words “Let It Be Forgotten” marked *piu forte* and *intensely*. It is as if the speaker has moved beyond simple desire to fanatic pleading as the vocal line moves toward the words “Forever and ever” in measure 12. Sargon abruptly concludes this earnest moment with a sostenuto over the words, “Time is a kind friend; he will make us old.” This instance could signify a moment of insight, as the speaker remembers that time can heal wounds. Time's passage allows us to experience growth, wisdom, and a deeper understanding of life while shedding certain elements of our past.

13 Moving forward slightly 14 15 Tempo l^o , Sostenuto 16

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "e - ver and e - ver, Time is a kind friend,". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. Above the score, there are tempo and performance markings: "13 Moving forward slightly 14", "15 Tempo l^o , Sostenuto", and "16". The piano part features rolled chords and a sostenuto effect starting in measure 15.

Example 4.15: Remembrance of “time.”

The latter half of this composition deviates from the structure of the first part. Instead of the standard accompaniment and a flowing melody, Sargon introduces a quasi-recitative style from measure 19 onwards, which persists until the conclusion. Here, it seems the speaker is resolving, however desperately, to forget and decides to tell anyone who asks that “it was forgotten long long ago.” Rolled chords in the piano serve to emphasize the rhythmic melody, punctuated by frequent rests that depict the speaker's internal, restless resolutions.

19 Quasi Recitative

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "If a - ny - one asks,". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. Above the score, there is a tempo and performance marking: "19 Quasi Recitative". The piano part features rolled chords and a forte (*sf*) dynamic.

Example 4.16: *Quasi recitative.*

The conclusion of the song begins after a long, thoughtful pause following the recitative section. Sargon introduces a new tempo, *adagio*, spanning the final 5 measures, while the piano gradually diminishes to a *pianissimo*. The voice is left vulnerable, supported only by sparse accompaniment. A final sustained note on the phrase "forgotten *snow*" evokes a sense of closure, and the theme from the introduction reemerges on the piano. Its chords, written 8va, echo like a quiet, secluded prayer returning once more.

The image shows a musical score for the 'Adagio ending' of a song. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is the vocal line, starting with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Adagio' and the duration is 'Lunga'. The lyrics are: 'In a long ————— for - got - ten snow. —————'. The vocal line has a long note on 'snow.' that spans measures 27, 28, and 29. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, starting with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp. It features a piano (*pp*) dynamic and includes chords written 8va (octave above the staff) in measures 27, 28, and 29. The score is numbered 26, 27, 28, and 29.

Example 4.17: Adagio ending.

There Will Be Rest

There will be rest, and sure stars shining
 Over the roof-tops crowned with snow,
 A reign of rest, serene forgetting,
 The music of stillness holy and low.

I will make this world of my devising
 Out of a dream in my lonely mind.
 I shall find the crystal of peace, – above me
 Stars I shall find.

Range: D4 – A5

Tessitura: G4 – E5

Tempo: Slow

Teasdale penned *There Will Be Rest* just months before her tragic death by suicide in her New York apartment in 1933. The poem must have served as a personal solace for her, a reminder that despite life's hardships, she would find peace in the next life. The various imagery in the poem all points upward: stars, rooftops, a “crystal of peace *above me*.” It seems Teasdale

was looking *up* for solace in an especially lonely time of life, likely contemplating the reality of her God and life after death.

The piano introduction contains a series of slow, nearly jazzy chords in the piano, creating a sense of gentle dignity in this final piece. Just before the voice enters with "There will be," the introduction features open octaves on low E1-2, followed by an even more pronounced low octave (written 8vb creating C1-2) on the word "rest." These notes serve as an initial point of

The image shows a musical score for the piece "There Will Be Rest". It is in 2/4 time and G major. The tempo is "Slow and Sustained". The score is divided into four measures. Measure 1 is a whole rest for the voice. Measure 2 is a whole rest for the voice. Measure 3 is a whole rest for the voice. Measure 4 is a whole rest for the voice. The piano introduction consists of chords in the right hand and open octaves in the left hand. The dynamics are *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *pp*. The vocal entry begins in measure 5 with the lyrics "There will be rest,". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and octaves.

Example 4.18: Introductory and resolute chords.

resolution in the song, encapsulating the essence of the piece within its first phrase. Unlike the other songs in the cycle, this one includes more instances where the voice strays from syllabic singing. These moments enhance the melody, adding depth and emotion. *There Will Be Rest* also features more ascending phrases. While these phrases can musically symbolize a spiritual ascent towards a heavenly rest, from a technical standpoint for the voice, they pose challenges in carrying vocal weight from the lower register up to the secondo passaggio and beyond the staff.

The image shows a musical score for the phrase "and sure stars shining". It is in 2/4 time and G major. The score is divided into two measures. Measure 6 is a whole note for the voice. Measure 7 is a whole note for the voice. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and octaves. The dynamics are *p*, *mp*, and *pp*. The vocal entry begins in measure 6 with the lyrics "and sure stars shining". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and octaves.

Example 4.19: Ascending melodic phrase.

The first instance of both elements occurs in measures 5-7.

One of the most demanding passages in the piece presents three vocal challenges: an ascending phrase, closed vowels in the *passaggio*, and a sudden *pianissimo* on a closed vowel above the staff. Sargon revisits the ascending melody from measure 6, employing it on the word "serene" in measures 13-14. Here, it continues to ascend into the *passaggio*, creating an opportunity for a soprano to navigate extra vocal tension up to the F#5. Even more challenging is the setting of the word "forgetting" on D5 – E5 – F#5. A closed vowel [ɪ] ("forget-ting") on an F#5 presents difficulties for a soprano and requires modification. Furthermore, this is followed directly by a wide leap to a G5 above the staff. The word "music" on G5 is intended to be sung *subito pianissimo* and on a closed vowel [u], which is slightly easier to modify than [i] but still not as comfortable as an open vowel in that range. Voice teachers and students must recognize these challenges and address them appropriately. For instance, a *subito pianissimo* dynamic may lead them to withhold breath. It's crucial for the singer to maintain breath flow throughout the phrase and reduce vocal fold closure to achieve the overall expression Sargon aims to convey here.

The image shows a musical score for four measures (13-16). The top staff is the vocal line in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 13: Vocal line starts with a rest, then 'se - rene -'. Piano accompaniment has chords. Measure 14: Vocal line continues 'se - rene -'. Piano accompaniment continues. Measure 15: Vocal line has 'for - get - ting,'. Piano accompaniment continues. Measure 16: Vocal line has 'the mu - sic of'. The piano accompaniment has a 'sub pp' dynamic marking. The vocal line has a wide leap from the end of measure 15 to the start of measure 16.

Example 4.20: Ascending phrase, vowels, and *sub. pianissimo*.

"A reign of rest" suggests a time of undisturbed tranquility or relaxation. "Serene forgetting" indicates a peaceful liberation from past difficulties or worries. "The music of stillness holy and low" evokes a sacred and quiet ambiance, where silence holds a sense of reverence and spirituality. Collectively, these phrases depict a serene and harmonious existence

devoid of worldly disturbances. This is what Teasdale was longing for. Sargon employs text painting to depict Teasdale's "holy and low" by incorporating a melodic descent to a D4 and an open 8vb octave on D1-2 in the piano.

18 19

ho - ly and low

p *pp*

8^{va}

Example 4.21: Word painting on “low.”

In the concluding stanza of the text, a resolve is formed to "make this world of my devising" and "find the crystal of peace above me." Sargon mirrors this sentiment with a tempo slightly quicker than the original, accompanied by a resolute, syllabic text setting. The ultimate declaration of purpose, to seek rest, is encapsulated in measures 27 – 32, where Sargon employs a tender, descending phrase for "Stars I shall find." The A5 note on "stars" is thoughtfully placed on a comfortable vowel for a soprano. Finally, a sustained C5 on "find" stretches determinedly toward a hopeful peace, heralding the return of the introductory accompaniment material.

Hold back 28 A Tempo 30 Poco cresc 31 32

stars I shall find.

ppp *p* *mf* *p* *pp*

8^{va}

Example 4.22: Final hope of rest.

We can envision the speaker looking upward and finding guidance and inspiration in the beauty and constancy of the stars. Stars, which often represent guidance, dreams, and eternity,

provide comfort by showing us there are still bright lights to lead us ahead. "Stars I shall find" thus becomes a symbol of resilience and perseverance, serving as a beacon of hope amid uncertainty – a hope of rest.

Conclusion

The poetry of Sara Teasdale holds a unique and enchanting quality that resonates deeply with audiences, offering a glimpse into the depths of human emotion and experience. Her words, brimming with romance and relatability, possess a timeless allure that transcends generations. More sopranos should embrace the opportunity to immerse themselves in the beauty of Teasdale's verses, permitting her poetry to inspire and enrich their musical journey. To safeguard the continued appreciation and relevance of Teasdale's work, composers of art songs who have set her poetry to music should be sought out. Teasdale's words are brought to life in a captivating and evocative manner with the compositions of the three composers in this paper. Their songs allow her legacy to endure through the medium of song.

These song cycles are ideally suited for singers at the graduate level and above, although some individual songs may be suitable for advanced undergraduate singers as well. All three composers meticulously craft their melodies to reflect the rhythmic patterns of the text by employing a predominantly syllabic setting of the text. While most of the songs maintain a moderate tempo, reflecting the serene, romantic, and introspective moods found in Teasdale's poetry, it's fascinating to note how each composer infuses their distinct musical style into the compositions.

Richard Pearson Thomas distinguishes himself through his use of chromaticism and quasi-atonality, crafting melodies that are often disjunct yet impeccably matched to the text. His compositions frequently forego traditional key signatures, opting instead for liberal usage of accidentals, which may appear daunting at first glance. Overall, Thomas tends to set Teasdale's poetry to slightly faster tempos compared to his counterparts, giving a livelier mood to

Teasdale's words. Lori Laitman employs a predominantly syllabic text setting with occasional deviations. While her melodies may be slightly less complex than Thomas's, she shares his penchant for incorporating wide melodic leaps. In contrast, Simon Sargon adopts a more conventional approach by utilizing traditional keys and consistently assigning key signatures. Unlike Thomas and Laitman, Sargon maintains a steady meter throughout his compositions, with only occasional shifts. Sargon rigidly structures his compositions to align with the poems' structure, while Laitman and Thomas demonstrate greater flexibility in their settings.

In their own distinctive manner, each composer skillfully captures the romantic and relatable essence of Sara Teasdale's poems, infusing them with their personal artistic touch. Each song cycle stands as a testament to the enduring beauty of Teasdale's verses, offering a captivating exploration of love, longing, and the human experience. They serve as invaluable additions to the soprano repertoire, enriching the vocal journey with an array of expressive and emotive pieces. These cycles offer a wealth of teaching material for vocal instructors, providing valuable opportunities for students to immerse themselves in the intricacies of interpretation, expression, and vocal technique. Captivating melodies, evocative harmonies, and profound emotional depth invite singers and audiences alike to embark on a fascinating musical journey through the poignant landscapes of Teasdale's poetry. Truly, these compositions deserve a cherished place in the soprano repertoire and in the studios of vocal instructors today.

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