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A Performance Guide to Anthony Brandt's Creeley Songs

Penny Reid Shumate
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO ANTHONY BRANDT’S CREELEY SONGS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

Penny Reid Shumate
B.S., Radford University, 1993
M.M., Temple University, 1997
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to provide a performance guide to composer Anthony Brandt’s *Creeley Songs*, a song cycle consisting of six poems by Robert Creeley set for soprano and piano. In addition to biographical information about the composer and poet, this document contains details regarding the creation of the cycle as well as analysis and performance suggestions with supporting musical examples for each song. Appendices include the composer’s works list, the composer’s program notes for *Creeley Songs*, transcripts of interviews with Anthony Brandt, and letters of permission.
INTRODUCTION

Anthony Brandt (b. 1961) is an award winning composer, who continues to gain national attention for his works. His compositions span a variety of genres including chamber music, string quartets, orchestral, and vocal music. He has received numerous commissions for his music and has been invited to participate as a guest artist in festivals across the country including Tanglewood, the Bowdoin International Festival, and Baltimore’s New Chamber Arts Festival. Some of his recent compositions have been recorded on the Albany Record label. Brandt is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Musiqa, a Houston based contemporary music ensemble which has been the recipient of multiple awards from the National Endowment for the Arts. Brandt currently serves as Associate Professor of Composition at Rice Shepherd School of Music.

For Creeley Songs, Brandt set the poetry of Robert Creeley (1926-2005), an award-winning American poet, author of prose, and significant force in the American literary scene in the second half of the twentieth century. Utilizing simplicity of text, Creeley featured his thoughts and experiences. He stated, “That undertaking most useful to writing as an art is, for me, the attempt to sound in the nature of the language those particulars of time and place of which one is in a given instance, equally present.”\(^1\) One of his goals as a poet he said, “. . . was to bring feeling into the common reference of a commonly experienced world.”\(^2\) Characteristics of his verse include a non-metrical, minimalistic, and stark expression of human emotion. Creeley traveled extensively throughout his life, and in addition to his prolific writing, he was also


\(^{2}\) Tom Clark, Robert Creeley and the Genius of the American Common Place (New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1993), 84.
employed as a teacher and as an editor of magazines, journals, and books. His published writings span nearly forty years and his work has been the subject of many books, journals articles, and interviews.

In this document I have provided a performance guide to Anthony Brandt’s *Creeley Songs*, a song cycle containing six songs for soprano and piano.

Chapter One contains biographical information about Robert Creeley and outlines the inspirations that contributed to a lifetime of creativity and the characteristics of his writing. Chapter Two traces the influences of Anthony Brandt’s family and music training which has resulted in prolific career of music composition and advocacy of the arts. Detailed information about the creation of *Creeley Songs* is provided in Chapter Three. Chapter Four offers a performance guide to the cycle which includes analysis of each song, performance suggestions, and musical examples.
Creeley was born in Arlington, Massachusetts on May 21, 1926. He spent most of his childhood in a large home on a forty-two acre farm in West Acton, where he lived with his parents, older sister, and maternal grandparents. His rural childhood was filled with ordinary activities including tending chickens, pigs and pigeons, playing in the woods, hunting, and fishing, while enjoying the changing seasons in the picturesque landscape. He always felt deeply connected to his New England upbringing and his early memories served as inspiration for the content in many of his poems and prose.

One of the most significant life shaping events occurred when he was two-years old. While riding in a car with his father, Dr. Oscar Slade Creeley, his left eye was struck by a piece of flying glass from a construction accident. His cornea was cut, which caused chronic infections. The construction company accepted responsibility and awarded Creeley nearly ten thousand dollars. His father, a successful doctor and alumnus of Harvard Medical School, died two years later. Thus, he had few memories of his father, and he sensed from family members that his father bore a heavy burden of guilt regarding the accident. Because he was not told of his father’s death when it occurred, and was not taken to the funeral, Creeley struggled later in life with this lack of closure. The death of his father suddenly put all the financial burden on his mother, Genevieve Jules Creeley, who went back to work as a nurse to provide for her family.

When Creeley was five, due to the chronic nature of the infections in his injured eye, his mother was advised by his doctor to have the eye removed. Creeley’s mother did not tell him about the procedure until after they arrived at the hospital. Later in life, he stated he understood why his Mother had not told him ahead of time, but he “. . . remembered feeling betrayed for
being tricked . . . so I certainly didn’t like it. I must have held it against her emotionally for some time . . .”\(^3\) After the procedure, Creeley was fitted for a glass eye, which soon became a normal part of his life. After this event, he returned to enjoy the activities of a normal childhood.

**The Fledgling Writer**

As a teenager, Creeley’s interest in writing was sparked by two family members. His sister, Helen, introduced him to the writings of Joseph Conrad and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and, according to Creeley, she “wrote poems which gained the approval of Robert P. Tristram Coffin among others.”\(^4\) In addition, his Aunt Bernice was a published poet living in Boston. Inspired by her, Creeley later confessed, “. . . I was much more intrigued by the fact that you could get your name in the papers.”\(^5\) For his sophomore year of high school, he received a scholarship to attend Holderness School for boys in Plymouth, New Hampshire. It was during this time that Creeley published his first writings in *Dial*, the school’s literary magazine, for which he served as the editor-in-chief. Creeley recalled, “I think I already had the small town love of getting published, as a form of public report.”\(^6\) After his graduation in spring of 1943, he was accepted into Harvard University, his father’s alma mater. Of his choice to attend the prestigious school he said, “. . . I’d been propelled by my Mother’s sense of duty to the memory of my father.”\(^7\) He used the construction company’s settlement to pay his tuition.

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\(^3\) Clark, *Robert Creeley and the Genius*, 8.


\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid., 125.
At Harvard, he struggled to identify his life goals and recalled, “I didn’t, as one says, know what I wanted to do, despite the hope to be a writer, because I didn’t have the faintest sense of who or what a writer was.”\(^8\) After this freshman year, he felt he needed a break from school and joined the American Field Service in 1944, where he was stationed in India-Burma as an ambulance driver. On the first night he arrived, his glass eye was broken. Because of delays in replacing the eye, Creeley made a permanent choice to go without it, which created his trade-mark persona. When he returned to Harvard in the fall of 1945, for his second academic year, he was still unsure of his literary career path. Years later, he remembered a professor’s favorable response to his interest in writing and said, “It was the only literal encouragement of that kind I ever got at Harvard, but it was enough.”\(^9\)

While Creeley’s writing was inspired by such writers as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and D. H. Lawrence, he was influenced, as well, by other creative genres such as jazz. He heard the music of Charlie Parker for the first time at Harvard, and became interested “... in his uses of silence, in his rhythmic structure.”\(^10\) Likewise, he also enjoyed abstract expressionism in art, particularly the works of Jackson Pollock. Creeley used these influences as he created his own unique and artistic use of words, and published his first poem, “Return,” in *Wake*, Harvard’s literary magazine.

\(^8\) Clark, *Robert Creeley and the Genius*, 132.

\(^9\) Ibid., 131.

Creeley married Ann McKinnon, and the couple moved to Provincetown, which was described at that time as “an artists’ colony.” The daily four-hour ferry commute to Harvard contributed to his sliding academic record and his loss of interest in the completion of a degree. The Dean encouraged him to take a break from academia, inviting him to return when he was ready to resume his studies. The Creeleys then moved to Truro, Massachusetts, after the birth of their daughter. In 1947, Creeley dropped out of Harvard just credits shy of earning his degree. Later in his life he remarked, “. . . I just never came back, I never really had occasion to.”

Early Publications

The Creeleys then moved to a farm house outside of Littleton, New Hampshire, where their two sons were born. Creeley utilized his early farming knowledge and bred pigeons and chickens to try to support his family. During this time, he became associated with a Boston poetry radio program and began reading his poetry on the air. He also began a correspondence with popular American poet Charles Olson, which lasted for more than forty years and was later published in six volumes. In 1951, the Creeleys’ financial situation was so bleak they could not continue their farm life. Further, they had suffered the tragic loss of their daughter in a construction accident. Due to the emotions of that event, they needed to get away, and moved to France, outside of Aix-en-Provence. One year later, Creeley published four poems, three short stories, and an essay. The Creeleys’ relocated to the Island of Mallorca, off the coast of Spain, where they had their second daughter. There, Creeley briefly served as editor of Martin Seymour-Smith’s Roebuck Press. He also published his first book of poems titled *Le Fou* (1952), which presented his unique use of syntax and contemporary style. Subsequently, he and his wife

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12 Creeley, *Robert Creeley*, 114.
founded Divers Press, where he published two more books of his poems; *The Kind of Act Of* (1953) and *The Immoral Proposition* (1953).

**Black Mountain College**

In 1954, at the request of Charles Olson, a professor at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, Creeley was hired to teach classes and to serve as editor of the school’s literary journal called the *Black Mountain Review*. Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, a disgruntled university professor. Rice believed that the public world sometimes oppressed artists. He wished to “. . . provide opportunities for those who wanted to escape that public world and reassert their artistic nature.”\(^{13}\) He also wanted to create an environment of learning that did not conform to the usual structure of a university. At Black Mountain there was a “. . . freedom from bureaucratic and administrative control.”\(^{14}\) It was a very small school. By the time it closed its doors in 1957 less than twelve hundred students had attended. The school encouraged work that challenged traditional standards and “. . . poetry that met with little acknowledgment elsewhere found recognition and sustenance.”\(^{15}\) While teaching there, Creeley published two more poem collections called *A Snarling Garland of Xmas Verses* (1954) and *All That Is Lovely in Men* (1955). Further, he published what may be described as a collection of short fictional stories, *The Gold Diggers* (1954). However, Creeley used the term prose rather than fiction and stated:

> I distrusted fiction, feeling the term ‘something made-up’ argued an intentional distortion of the “truth,” whatever that proved. I wanted to call such work “prose”

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 8.
simply. Those crucial lies of my childhood, the one covering my father’s death and the other the necessary removal of my eye, left truth a peculiar authority.\textsuperscript{16}

Through his association with the college, Creeley would be forever identified as one of the three founders of the avant-garde group called the Black Mountain Poets, which included his fellow professors Charles Olson and Robert Duncan. After the college closed, the Black Mountain Poets remained popular through the 60’s and 70’s, with a growing community of disciples and well as critics. The commonality of their poetry was the “absolute priority of the poet’s self at least as the source of the poem’s cadence, music, and structural integrity.”\textsuperscript{17} It was characterized by natural speech rhythms and breathing pauses, which would allow the listener to feel intimately the emotion and energy of the poet. The Black Mountain Poets were important sources of inspiration for future innovative American poets such as Susan Howe and Clark Coolidge, who were associated with Language Poetry.

\textbf{Teaching Career and Writing Success}

While Creeley began to enjoy success in his professional life, his personal life suffered, and his marriage to Ann ended in divorce. After he left Black Mountain College in 1956, he moved to New Mexico where he taught at Albuquerque Academy. A year later, Creeley met Bobbie Louise Hoeck, and within two weeks, the couple was married. With help from Olsen, in the form of an honorary Bachelor of Arts degree from Black Mountain, he began his Master of Arts degree at the University of New Mexico. In 1959, Creeley completed his course work and turned in his thesis at UNM. After the birth of their daughter, the couple moved to Guatemala, where Creeley worked as a tutor on a plantation. By this time Creeley had published three more books of poems; \textit{If You} (1956), \textit{The Whip} (1957), and \textit{A Form of Women} (1959).

\textsuperscript{16} Clark, \textit{Robert Creeley and the Genius}, 142.

\textsuperscript{17} Foster, \textit{Understanding}, 19.
Now an established and well-respected poet, Creeley was awarded the Levinson Prize in 1960, and was featured in *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* by Donald Allen. During the next seven years he served as a visiting Lecturer at University of British Columbia, University of New Mexico, and The State University of New York at Buffalo. Simultaneously, Creeley published *For Love: Poems 1950-1960* (1962). This prolific writing continued with his first novel, *The Island* (1963), and an expanded edition of *The Gold Diggers* (1965). Creeley’s poetry was growing in popularity, and he became the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Rockefeller Grant, as well as a Levinton-Blumenthal Prize for thirteen of his poems. He also read his poetry and lectured at several poetry festivals in the United States and Canada, including the Vancouver Poetry Festival, World Poetry Conference in Montreal, Buffalo Arts Festival, and the Berkeley Poetry Conference. He continued to interact with Charles Olson from Black Mountain College, and he edited *Selected Writings of Charles Olson* (1966). That same year Creeley was featured in a television documentary called *Poetry USA: Robert Creeley, Poems 1950-1965*.

**Teaching at University of New York**

In 1967 Creeley was offered a permanent teaching position at the State University of New York in Buffalo where he worked for thirty-seven years. In 1976, he divorced his second wife Bobbie Louise Hoeck, and a year later he married Penelope Highton. The marriage produced two children and lasted until his death. During his tenure at Buffalo he published many new books of poems including *Words* (1967), *Away* (1976), and *Life & Death* (1998). Additionally, prose, essays, letters, and interviews were printed including *A Quick Graph: Collected Notes and Essays* (1970), *Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971* (1973), *Mabel: A Story and Other Prose* (1976), *Charles Olson and Robert Creeley: The Complete*
Correspondence (1980), and Tales Out of School: Selected Interviews (1993). His various collections of his works included The Charm: Early and Uncollected Poems (1969), The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975 (1982), The Collected Prose of Robert Creeley (1984), and Just in Time: Poems 1984-1994 (2001). He continued to amass critical acclaim for his work and was honored with the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, a Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award, the Frost Medal, and was a grantee from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the Berlin Artists Program. From 1989-1991, he was honored as the New York State Poet. In recognition of his appointment, Governor Mario Cuomo said, “With courage and cunning, he has made the discreet loneliness of the solitary individual into a universal experience.”

In 1999, Creeley was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He maintained his international presence by touring and reading his poetry throughout Europe and Asia. In 2003, Creeley resigned from University of Buffalo to accept a position at Brown University in Providence, R.I. He recalled his many years at University of Buffalo saying:

UB gave me my first defining appointment as a teacher, and made me a full professor no less (the first year "visiting," the next tenured) . . . I am forever grateful and be very sure I will never forget what a great life we have had here and all those who were so much its company and occasion, and its wonderful heart.

Creeley was warmly welcomed at Brown University as the David Gray Professor of Poetry and Letters. In 2005, he was invited by the Lannan Foundation, which champions writers, to participate in a two-month residency in Marfa, Texas. While there, Creeley contracted

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18 Clark, Robert Creeley and the Genius, 139.

pneumonia and died in March of that same year. In his memorial notice issued by Brown University, his faculty colleagues Forrest Gander and C.D. Wright wrote,

Robert joined the faculty two years ago and participated fully in teaching, advising and faculty affairs. We relished his company, his intelligence was unwavering and utterly singular, and his spirit was consistently generous. He was already happily integrated into the community at Brown and was glad to be spending the last years of his teaching career here. We are grateful for the short years that we were beneficiaries of his company on our campus.  

**Conclusion**

Throughout his life, Creeley was engaged in exploring the art of writing. He wrote nearly seventy books of poetry, essays, and prose during the span of forty years. The content of his writing was contemporaneous to each specific time and place of his life. He stated, “. . . I do like the sense of art being the event of the effects of having been alive.” 21 In this way, Creeley’s readers experience the emotions and thoughts of his life. This significant poet, who blazed a path for a new style of American poetry in the mid-twentieth century wrote that with his art he, “. . . was trying to extend . . . the consciousness of being alive or [of being] aware . . . as a means to exploring the world.” 22

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22 Ibid., 363.
Anthony Brandt was born in 1961 and raised in New York City. His father, Nathan, served as a magazine editor for *American Heritage* and *Publisher’s Weekly*, and was a history writer. His mother, Yanna, was an independent television producer and often worked for PBS. From the start, Brandt enjoyed a nurturing home life that was the result of courage and resilience a generation before him. His maternal Grandfather, Boris Kroyt (1898-1969), was a remarkable German violinist who, as a teenager, was appointed as concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic. Brandt remembered a story about his grandfather: “. . . when the violist of the Budapest Quartet became ill, my grandpa learned the viola in one day and played so well the quartet asked him to take over permanently.”

Conditions in Germany became harsh, and to hide his Jewish heritage, Kroyt changed his name to Tito Volare so that he would perform professionally. As time went on, Kroyt knew he had to escape and fled to America with his wife, Sonya, Brandt’s grandmother, and the members of the quartet in 1938.

As a young child, Brandt saw his grandfather perform at the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont, where he was also able to enjoy the company of the other classical artists. Following in his grandfather’s footsteps, Brandt began studying the violin by the time he was seven. He remembers enjoying playing but not practicing, and as a result he became frustrated and admitted he “. . . always had limitations in my technique.” In recalling this experience, he stated,

23 Anthony Brandt, email interview with author, June 1, 2013.

24 Ibid.
“Looking back, I wonder if my grandfather’s prodigious skill made it very difficult for me to be patient with myself.”25

Brandt’s parents raised their children with a strong appreciation for creativity. They played with construction toys, made their own special occasion cards, and were permitted to watch very little television. Brandt says this outlook “. . . instilled the desire in me to be creative”26 and fostered his interest in music composition and writing. He enjoyed writing mysteries and when he was in the 6th grade, his school performed a play he had written, “The Open Window.” At eleven years of age, his musical compositions were performed at the Bowdoin International Summer Festival in Maine, where Brandt studied violin with the festival’s founder and artistic director, Lewis Kaplan.

As a teenager, Brandt won two National Scholastic Awards for Writing. When he was sixteen, Brandt studied composition with the well-known French composer and conductor, Nadia Boulanger, at the Fontainebleau Summer Academy in France. He recalled, “. . . Boulanger was the first pivotal figure in my compositional development; she showed me the incredibly high standards to which a musician should hold him or herself; that made an indelible impression.”27

Higher Academic Education Years

In 1979, Brandt began his Bachelor of Arts degree at Harvard, unsure as to whether he would pursue composition or writing. During this time, he was the assistant concert master of the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra. He gained knowledge from the orchestra’s conductor, Maestro

25 Brandt, interview, June 1, 2013.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Yannatos and considered him “. . . a great role model.”\textsuperscript{28} He felt unengaged with the program at Harvard until his junior year, when he developed a new interest in modern music after taking an electronic music course. “I loved the open terrain of new sounds and threw myself completely into the class.”\textsuperscript{29} He credits his professor, Ivan Tcherepnin, for “. . . opening my mind to new music through the world of electronics.”\textsuperscript{30}

Upon completing his degree at Harvard in 1983, Brandt was offered a fellowship the following year to study in Paris at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM). While several notable composers were associated with the prestigious school, including Pierre Boulez and John Cage, it was through this experience that he began to see that electronic music was not his path, after all. Brandt enrolled in the California Institute of the Arts that same year. It was a challenging time in his life, as he doubted his compositional skills and was unsure of his future. His path became clearer through his studies there. Brandt remembered, “The biggest turning point of my compositional life was studying with Mel Powell at CalArts . . . he was the greatest teacher I ever had in any subject.”\textsuperscript{31} While working as his assistant, Brandt recalled the impact of the experience:

\begin{quote}
. . . I remembered the comments Mel wrote on my first year report card: he praised my progress and lauded my potential; it was the first time someone had said that I had talent as a composer. Those encouraging words—at such a critical time and from someone I respected so deeply—were life-changing for me.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.

\textsuperscript{29} Brandt, interview, June 1, 2013.

\textsuperscript{30} Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.

\textsuperscript{31} Brandt, interview, June 1, 2013.

\textsuperscript{32} Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
Brandt flourished artistically during his time at CalArts, and was awarded the ASCAP Young Composers Award for his thesis composition. Brandt remained active as a writer, and founded *Aperiodical*, a CalArts music journal which he edited.

After he earned his Masters of Arts from the California Institute of the Arts, he returned to Harvard to begin his Ph.D. in 1987. Armed with a new confidence in his talents, Brandt enjoyed an enriching experience this second time around at the prestigious school. In particular, two members of the faculty helped him to improve his skills: Professor Stephen “Lucky” Mosko who encouraged adventurous composition, as Brandt recalled, “Lucky challenged me to take risks,” and Professor Earl Kim taught him the value of trusting simplicity. Brandt stated, “I learned from him that ‘less is often more’: that musical ideas didn’t have to be over-crowded to be complex and engaging and that overwhelming the ear is often less effective than stating something clearly.” During Brandt’s Ph.D., he met and married his wife Karol Bennett, a critically acclaimed soprano and an accomplished music teacher. This union has produced three children.

**Teaching and Composition**

After completing his doctorate, Brandt became a visiting lecturer at Harvard, Tufts University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During this time Brandt received commissions from many music organizations. His works spanned chamber music, string quartets, orchestral, and vocal music. These new compositions were premiered in California, Mexico, Massachusetts, Belgium, and Italy. He also mourned the loss of his teacher, Earl Kim,

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33 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.

34 Ibid.
and was pleased to accept a commission from the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra to complete Kim’s unfinished composition, *Illuminations*, which premiered in Boston.

In 1998, Brandt accepted a position as Associate Professor of Composition and Theory at The Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Brandt has been prolific in composing works which span a wide variety of genres, now, including opera. Further he has engaged in collaborative art music, which has combined theatric techniques and live art with instrumental music, which serves him “. . . as a way of getting outside oneself and forcing oneself into new situations.”

His recent works have included collaborations with contemporary poets, playwrights, a lighting designer, and a neuroscientist. He has continued to receive commissions from organizations across the country, and his works have premiered in Washington D.C., and in the states of New York, Washington, Maine, Massachusetts, and his native Texas. In addition to educational and occasion works, Brandt composed the score for the award-winning documentary, *Crucible of the Millennium*, which aired in 2001 and 2002 on the Public Broadcasting System. During his tenure at Rice, Brandt has been the recipient of numerous awards including a Koussevitzky Commission from the Library of Congress, grants from the National Endowment of the Arts, Meet-the-Composer, the Houston Arts Alliance, the New England Foundation of the Arts and the Margaret Fairbank Jory Copying Assistance Program. He has also been honored with The George R. Brown Award for Superior Teaching and Phi Beta Kappa Teaching Prize from the Shepherd School of Music. In addition to his teaching at Rice, Brandt has developed and taught a music appreciation course on OpenStax

35 Brandt, email interview with the author, August 18, 2013.

36 _____, Works List, Houston, TX, 2013.

CNX, a web based educational resource. The course, “Sound Reasoning,” “. . . offers a new approach to music appreciation for adults, focusing on style-independent concepts,” \(^{38}\) that enable the student to increase their comprehensive understanding of music, regardless of style or era.

**Advocating the Arts**

Brandt champions contemporary composers and believes in “. . . building a receptive community for modern works.” \(^{39}\) In 2002, he co-founded and serves as Artistic Director of Musiqa. Based in Houston, this organization’s mission statement is:

. . . to enrich and inspire the community through programs that integrate contemporary music with other modern art-forms. With its innovative collaborations and educational programming, Musiqa strives to make modern repertoire accessible and vital to audiences of all ages and musical backgrounds. \(^{40}\)

The program continues to flourish and artists with Musiqa have been involved in free-of-charge outreach programs to over thirty thousand public elementary school. In a recent interview Brandt said, “We see ourselves as sustaining classical music as a living tradition. We feel that contemporary art has to be accessible, and something people have a chance to experience all the time.” \(^{41}\) Musiqa has received many awards, including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Aaron Copland Fund, and Argosy Foundation, and in 2013 was awarded the CMA/ASCAP Adventurous Programming Award. Colin Eatock of *The Houston Chronicle* recently wrote:


\(^{39}\) Brandt, interview, August 18, 2013.


Each Musiqa concert presents music you've probably never heard before — some by composers living and working right here in the Bayou City — in a framework that allows for the safe exploration and expansion of artistic boundaries. That's why Musiqa is cherished by art lovers in Houston.\textsuperscript{42}

Brandt has maintained his interest in writing. In 2012, he co-authored “Music and Early Language Acquisition” which was published through a web based journal called \textit{Frontiers in Psychology}. Brandt and his two collaborating authors present evidence, “. . . that music learning matches the speed and effort of language acquisition . . . that music merits a central place in our understanding of human development.”\textsuperscript{43} Brandt expressed his views of the importance of music in human development with his presentation at the 2012 TEDx Houston Conference, titled “Why Minds Need Art.” In his speech, Brandt makes a case to “. . . integrate the arts more strongly into the curriculum and to advocate for its importance to society,”\textsuperscript{44} and that the creative process involved in art stimulates mediated behavior which helps elevate human consciousness.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Brandt is extremely optimistic about the possibilities of contemporary composition without the strictures of “the common practice” which existed prior to the twentieth century. He believes that “. . . the arts are extremely dynamic and in a constant state of reinvention.”\textsuperscript{45}

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\textsuperscript{44} Anthony Brandt, “Why Minds Need Art,” TEDx Houston Conference, Houston, TX, November 3, 2012.
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\textsuperscript{45} Brandt, interview, August 18, 2012.
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Brandt’s current projects include co-authoring a book on the science and art of creativity with neuroscientist David Eagleman, and composing *Ulysses, Home*, a chamber opera inspired by the epic poem *Odyssey* by Homer.
CHAPTER THREE
THE CREATION OF CREELEY SONGS

Choosing the Text

All that would matter to me, finally, as a writer, is that the scale and the place of our common living be recognized, that the mundane in that simple emphasis be acknowledged.\textsuperscript{46}

Robert Creeley’s interest in common living was one of the qualities that drew Anthony Brandt to his verse. Brandt believes that creativity and art are parts of everyone’s lives. He asserts, “It’s not something divorced from the rest of our experience. It’s a reflection of the way human beings live in everyday life.”\textsuperscript{47} Choosing to set Creeley’s poems seemed natural to Brandt as he says, “I feel drawn to his poetry . . . he leaves space for the music.”\textsuperscript{48} Brandt also has a unique criterion for choosing texts: “I have to hear music in my head when I’m reading it.”\textsuperscript{49}

In November 1990, Brandt set “After Mallarmé” from \textit{For Love} (1962), a collection of Creeley’s poems from 1959-1960. This song for soprano and piano was an engagement gift for his wife, whom he married the next year. In 1999, Brandt received a commission from Rice University to compose a new work. He chose to set five additional Creeley poems for soprano and piano to add to “After Mallarmé,” forming a six-song collection. These additional poems included “I Know A Man” also from \textit{For Love}, “The Rhythm” from \textit{Words} (1967), “The Drums” from \textit{The Charm} (1969), “As You Come” from \textit{Thirty Things} (1975), and “Time” from \textit{Backwards} (1975), and spanned more than fifteen years of Creeley’s writing. The first poem he added to the group was “The Drums.” With regard to choosing the poems, Brandt says:

\textsuperscript{46} Tom Clark, \textit{Robert Creeley and the Genius}, 133.

\textsuperscript{47} Brandt, phone interview with the author, October 27, 2012.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
I remember that the very opening was one of the first passages I heard in my head. It then seemed to me that the poem, “The Rhythm” would make a good complement to “The Drums,” as the final song. “The titles are related; and the text of “The Rhythm” speaks of “time returning,” which suggested to me that I bring back material from the earlier song. The opening of “I Know A Man” also came to me right away when I read the poem. The cycle assembled itself song by song based on my aural responses to the poems.  

**Compositional Process**

Brandt enjoys freedom as he composes and feels comfortable starting a work from whatever point in the music in which he hears and feels a creative idea. He expresses, “One of the nice things about the word compose is that it means to assemble. It doesn’t mean to do it in chronological order starting from the left and going to the right.”

Brandt follows a model of Species counterpoint as part of his initial compositional process, wherein he establishes a work’s background structure, starting point, and conclusion, as an outline. Creating the transition between points is an exciting process of discovery for Brandt and he adds, “I can remember thinking right when I collected the poems together . . . I’ve got the first poem called ‘The Drums’ and I’ve got the last poem called ‘The Rhythm,’ and I want a connection between the drums and the rhythm.” From that point, he began creating the transitions. He discloses, “I think of composition more like a developing photograph, with the entire image gradually coming into focus. I’ll work on multiple sections/songs at once, write backwards from the ending . . . follow

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50 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.

51 Brandt, interview, October 27, 2012.

52 Species counterpoint is a pedagogical tool whereby a composer can study the construction of melodic lines against a *cantus firmus*, according to a prescribed set of rules. The exercises used in Species counterpoint increase in complexity to help a composer develop the ability to write Free counterpoint.

53 Brandt, interview, October 27, 2012.
wherever my ear leads me.” Brandt trusts his instincts, and lets his creative energy pour through “without censorship or judgment.”

Harmony and Text Setting

Brandt feels a responsibility to the poet, and he states, “My job is to have a conversation with him and say . . . this is what I get out of your poem but I’m going to tell you about what I get out of it in musical terms.” He creates harmonic progressions which translate his interpretation of the text. He explains: “I then craft the vocal line within that progression. The challenge of doing this is that the vocal line has to have enough integrity as a melody that the listener can't tell that it resulted from the harmony—I put a lot of effort into that!” Brandt represents the changing moods of the texts by using tonality in contrast with intense chromaticism and harmonic clusters. He elaborates, “Tonality is evoked, mostly ironically, to represent conformity, the well-worn path; whenever the text becomes more personal, the dissonance increases.” The cycle is connected motivically with the exception of “After Mallarmé.” He felt that it would be an “. . . interesting counter-weight to the rest of the cycle . . . I thought this thematic "isolation" supported the meditative, private sense of the text.”

54 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
55 Ibid.
56 Brandt, interview, October 27, 2012.
57 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
58 Anthony Brandt, Program Notes for Premier Performance of Creeley Songs by Karol Bennett, Soprano and Brian Connelly, pianist, College Music Society Southwest Division Conference, San Antonio, TX, March 2000.
59 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
Premiere and Recording

*Creeley Songs* was premiered at the College Music Society’s Southwest Division Conference in San Antonio, Texas in March of 2000. Brandt’s wife, Karol Bennett, and pianist Brian Connelly performed the work. Subsequently, the work was released on Albany Records in 2009, along with three additional compositions by Brandt. *Creeley Songs* have been acclaimed as “. . . tonal and intense . . .”, and the composer was praised for “. . . streamlining his own harmonies, to good effect.” In addition, Brandt’s interpretation was lauded for being “. . . successfully communicative in the settings of six aphoristic texts by Robert Creeley.” Also included on the album is Brandt’s chamber opera, *The Birth of Something*; as well as two songs for voice and string quartet: *The Dragon and the Undying* and *Slumber Song*.

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CHAPTER FOUR
PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO CREELEY SONGS

I. The Drums

how are you harry the
last time we met it was
in heaven
surely
or so I remember 62

Creeley’s poem, published in the collection entitled The Charm (1969), features an economy of words, to which Brandt responds by using only eight pitches for the vocal line. The piano accompaniment is a generous crafting of harmonic clusters evoking a $e^\flat$ minor tonality to translate the questioning nature of the text of the poem. The setting is a ternary design, which is defined mostly by rhythmic diversity.

Section A begins with a bass-clef piano introduction in m. 1-5. A sustained harmonic cluster introduces the theme. Brandt marks this theme “trenchant” (very strong, clear, and effective), to inform the pianist how to shape this reoccurring thematic element which both colors the performance and serves as a unifying device. This theme represents the drums referred to in the title, as well as defines the A of the ABA form of this song (see Example 1).

Example 1, Brandt, “The Drums,” mm.1-2.
Unifying thematic element represents the title and defines the form of the song.

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The piano in m. 6 introduces the treble clef with a second sustained harmonic cluster which closes the introduction. The text is preceded by a re-statement of the recurring thematic element which seamlessly leads into the vocal line. In this way, Brandt depicts the thought in the piano part that precedes the text. The rhythm and melody of the vocal phrase mimic natural speech patterns (see Example 2).

Example 2, Brandt, “The Drums,” m. 8.
The vocal phrase mimics national speech patterns and is a seamless continuation of the unifying thematic element.

In m. 8 of section A the singer should anticipate the breath for the entrance in the melodic “hand-off” with the piano. The vocal production should lean towards a *parlando* style with minimal vibrato. This will give the sense of natural conversation.

Brandt creates a seamless transition into section B by initiating it within the vocal line and sustaining it with rhythmic augmentation in the piano. He also incorporates text painting\(^{63}\) with regard to meaning as well as inflection. The vocal line and piano rise to represent the word “heaven,” as well as the inflection of the questioning word, “surely” (see Example 3).

Example 3, Brandt, “The Drums,” mm. 10-11.
Text painting with regards to meaning as well as inflection with ascending voice and piano on the words “heaven surely.”

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\(^{63}\) The music reflects the literal meaning of the text.
By interrupting the thematic element, Brandt creates a pensive mood preceding the piano’s rolled cluster in m. 13 that leads to “in heaven” (see Example 4).

![Example 4, Brandt, “The Drums,” mm. 12-14. Expanded rhythmic values create pensive mood for repeated text.]

The singer must anticipate the seamless transition into section B, which is characterized by a mood of contemplation. A fuller vocal production and a new vocal color to suggest the ethereal nature of heaven will effectively communicate the composer’s intentions. The singer must also sustain the emotional energy and characterization through the piano interludes to preserve the mood of contemplation.

The returning A section, starting in m. 16, is defined by the restatement of opening thematic element and serves to develop the word “heaven.” Once again the piano seamlessly leads in the voice, which utilizes the same repeated six pitches that form descending arpeggiated groupings. These combine to create ascending melodic sequences on the repeated word “heaven,” which are used to create an intensity of focus and driving momentum in the vocal line. Here again, Brandt is able to use text painting to include meaning as well as context. The rising sequences infer the ethereal focus while the individual descending arpeggios suggest a subtext of doubt (see Example 5).

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64 The music reflects an underlying meaning in the text.
Example 5, Brandt, “The Drums,” mm. 17-20.
The vocal line depicts ethereal focus and subtext of doubt.

A sustained harmonic cluster in m. 22 suspends the forward momentum and the final text “or so I remember” returns to an earlier device which mimics speech pattern and is sung on a D₄, the only time this pitch appears in the vocal line. This establishes a clear contrast with the previous material and the dissonant piano cluster suggests an uncomfortable uncertainty. The coda, marked “emphatically, ferociously,” concludes the song with the unifying thematic element (see Example 6).

Example 6, Brandt, “The Drums,” mm. 21-25.
Harmonic cluster serves to precede a change of emotion as well as to color the closing text with an air of uncertainty. The coda finishes with the unifying thematic element.
In the return of section A the piano and voice are interwoven melodically and rhythmically; thus care must be taken to ensure that the ensemble is completely coordinated. Due to the fast paced vocal skips, some of which span over an octave, this section is challenging because it requires vocal agility, pitch and rhythm precision, with an even range. The repetition of the pitches on the word "heaven" requires the singer to employ a variety of vocal colors and pace the gradual building of emotional intensity to delineate further the build to the climax in m. 21. Without this, the section may fail to achieve the depth of meaning, and seem only like vocal pyrotechnics. The singer must anticipate the contrasting mood of doubt in m. 21 and let the sustained cluster represent a thought that precedes the final text "or so I remember."

II. After Mallarmé

Stone,
like stillness,
around you my
mind sits, it is

a proper form
for
it, like
stone, like

compression itself,
fixed fast,
grey,
without a sound.65

The title of Creeley’s poem, included in the collection For Love (1962), makes reference to Stephane Mallarmé, a well-known 19th century French symbolist poet. This poem by Creeley shares Mallarmé’s characteristics of structural freedom and imagery. The deliberate spacing in

65 Creeley, The Collected Poems, 250, “After Mallarmé” is used by permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of the Estate of Robert Creeley.
“After Mallarmé,” represents a non-contextual style, common in Creeley’s writing, which he uses to organize stanzas. Brandt observes the punctuation markings exactly, while he elects to join some stanzas to create a more lyrical structure. The harmonic clusters in the piano, together with the vocal line, text paint the meaning of the words in the poem, and flow continuously toward the coda.

At the outset, the voice enters alone and is joined by a slow-moving chordal cluster progression, reflecting the word “stillness.” In this progression, the clusters are comprised of Major and minor 2nds which contains all of the pitches heard in the first stanza, which suggest the density of the word “stone.” Brandt elaborates these elements with syncopation in both the voice and piano (see Example 7).

![Example 7](image)

Example 7, Brandt, “After Mallarmé,” mm. 1-4.
Vocal line and harmonic clusters reflect the meaning of density and stillness in the text.

Brandt takes the liberty of repeating the text, “my mind” (mm. 7-8) after introducing a trill which propels forward the extemporaneous quality of the thought, and contrasts with the solemn music of the beginning (see Example 8).

![Example 8](image)

Example 8, Brandt, “After Mallarmé,” mm. 7-8.
The piano trill creates a contrasting mood after the repeated text “my mind.”
The vocal line in the second stanza (mm. 10-12) mimics natural, but interrupted speech patterns. The piano intervals are broader with a bass trill that creates an undercurrent of momentum which leads to the heightened energy of the final stanza. In mm. 12, Brandt uses text painting on the word “compression” by introducing with a trill the syllabic stress of the word and encompassing the melody in a series of half-steps which continuously ascend to the climax of the song in m. 15 (see Example 9).

Text painting on “compression” and an ascending half-step melody builds to a climax.

The sustained harmonic cluster in m.16, and the delicate vocal setting of “without a sound” return to the opening mood. The silence in both the voice and piano in the following measure serves as a literal representation of the preceding text. Brandt created a coda by repeating the syncopated vocal melody in mm. 1-2; however, in this reiteration the clusters are rhythmically more active (see Example 10).

Example 10, Brandt, “After Mallarmé” mm. 16-20.
Rest in m. 17 is a literal representation of the preceding text and following piano and vocal line reiterate the opening mood with subtle variations.
The challenge in this piece lies with the singer’s ability to sustain what Brandt calls the “. . . sense of private meditation.”\textsuperscript{66} By using beauty of tone, contrasting vocal colors, and emotional intensity, the singer must create the mood that depicts Brandt’s intentions of introspection. In mm. 1-5, the singer must begin the song using an effortless legato with a delicate vocal color suggesting an emotion of contentment. The trill in m. 8 should reflect a heightened energy that will inform the vocal color used to sing the repeated text “my mind.” For the climactic phrase (mm. 12-15) the singer should respond to the tempo and rhythmic indications with full vocal resonance and a strong sense of emotion. From m. 16 to the end, the effortless legato used in the beginning phrase needs to be employed in addition to a vocal color reflecting a mood of sincere meditative pleasure.

\textbf{III. I Know A Man}

As I sd to my friend, because I am always talking, —John, I sd, which was not his name, the darkness surrounds us, what can we do against it, or else, shall we & why not, buy a goddamn big car, drive, he sd, for Christ’s sake, look out where yr going.\textsuperscript{67}

This poem by Creeley, drawn from the collection \textit{For Love} (1962), contains three contrasting sections, to which Brandt responds by setting the text in a three part form (ABC).

\textsuperscript{66} Anthony Brandt, Program Notes, March 2000.

\textsuperscript{67} Creeley, \textit{The Collected Poems}, 132, “I Know A Man” is used by permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of the Estate of Robert Creeley.
Similar to “The Drums,” the harmony leans toward c♯ minor and depicts the moods of uncertainty and fear in the text. While Brandt observes the grammatical punctuation, he takes liberty by using word repetition and stanza combinations in setting the poem.

The piano introduction is comprised of structured thematic material in c♯ minor that is used throughout section A (mm. 1-25). The regularity of the arpeggiation and periodic injection of rapid figures, sets a mood of heightened contemplation (see Example 11).

Example 11, Brandt, “I Know A Man,” mm. 4-6.
The piano introduction sets a mood of heightened contemplation.

In setting the text, Brandt combines stanza one with the first phrase of stanza two creating a more lyrical word flow (mm. 10-16). He uses a limited vocal range and utilizes triplet rhythms to mimic natural speech patterns. The introductory theme of the piano continues through this section sustaining the contemplative mood. The irony of the text, “which was not his name,” causes the piano to cease in m. 16. As the piano resumes, the rapid moving fragments found in the introduction create a “call and response” with the text “the darkness surrounds us.” The emotional intensity increases as the repeated text ascends to higher pitches. Brandt highlights this text by having the piano stop abruptly during the vocal line. The words are set with a triplet pattern followed by an ascending skip to a sustained pitch both times, clarifying word stress and inflection (see Example 12).
Example 12, Brandt, “I Know A Man,” mm. 21-23.
This text is highlighted by an abrupt stop in the piano, while inflection and word stress are created by a rhythmic and pitch pattern in the vocal line.

The initial vocal phrases of section A (mm. 10-15) should be sung with a beautiful legato in a mood of contemplation. The piano theme stops abruptly in m. 16, highlighting the text “which was not his name.” By choosing a vocal color for this phrase which contrasts the preceding phrases, the singer can realize the composer’s intentions to stress this phrase. Brandt utilizes the same approach for the repeated text “the darkness surrounds us” in mm. 19-23. Not only does the singer need to color this text with the emotion of fear, but following Brandt’s restatement of the text one step higher, the singer must incorporate a greater emotional intensity.

Section B (m. 26-40) begins with connected lines from stanzas two and three with the text “what can we do against it.” As the piano takes a slower pace in this section the mood changes from fear to hopelessness. The piano is written in the bass clef in mm. 28-29, which gives an ominous quality. The next group of vocal phrases (mm. 31-40) develops this mood as the text from stanzas two and three are repeated with variation. The contrasting vocal melodies and the wealth of rhythmically variable triplet patterns in both the vocal line and piano reinforce the uncertainty of the protagonist. The piano clusters provide a dissonant texture, which heightens the mood of the text. In mm. 30-31, the text “what can we do” is repeated with an ascending vocal melody over a stark three-pitch piano cluster in the bass clef, which adds a
feeling of hopeless isolation. The repeat of the text is set with an added chromatic ornament and represents an increased intensity of emotion (see Example 13).

Brandt’s pattern of repeated text, in this case “the darkness,” continues in mm. 33-34 with sparse piano clusters. As the piano clusters become more dense in m. 36, the text “what can we” is repeated twice with Brandt’s instruction “resigned, disconsolate.” The broad and descending vocal melody (mm. 36-38) occurs in the lowest pitch range of this developmental section. These elements, combined with the dissonant piano, realize Brandt’s intentions. As before, the repetition of this text in m. 38 is varied with an ascending octave transfer of the last pitch. This leads into the final repeat of the text “the darkness” (mm. 39-40) which Brandt has instructed to be performed “expressively, with pathos.” This text is set in the highest vocal range of this section and serves to intensify the climax of emotion with a sense of crying out (see Example 14).
In this section, the vocal lines includes wide leaps, which contrast with the stepwise motion of the preceding section. Care must be taken that vocal resonance remains consistent through the different pitch ranges. Throughout section B, Brandt uses an ornamented melody for repeated texts to increase the emotional energy of the phrases. The singer must use a variety of vocal colors and dramatic intensities to reflect Brandt’s intentions. In addition, the singer must pace the growing dramatic energy to reflect the overall arc of the entire section which climaxes in m. 40 on the highest pitches of the section.

A sustained piano cluster in m. 41 serves as a transition between section B, which is characterized by hopelessness, into the contrasting section C, colored with a decisively determined text from the third stanza of the poem. With the instructions, “gradually more assertively, with spirits rising” in m. 41, Brandt sets the continuing text (mm. 41-44) with an ascending step-wise motion which is doubled by the piano, reflecting his performance instruction. Further, by omitting the words “shall we” from the poem, Brandt creates a more direct expression with the phrase, “or else, and why not, buy a goddam big car.” The strong and structured rhythmic pattern in both the voice and piano add the power for the expletive (see Example 15).
Example 15, Brandt, “I Know A Man,” mm. 41-44.
The ascending melody and strong rhythmic pattern translate a mood of optimistic assertiveness.

Broader note values in piano and voice inform the inflection of “drive, he said” found in m. 46 with Brandt’s instruction “harshly, abrupt.” A frantic piano interlude (mm. 47-48) represents the motion of the car and leads to the fearful outcry “for Christ’s sake” (see Example 16).

Example 16, Brandt, “I Know A Man,” mm. 47-49.
A frantic piano melody leads into the fearful outcry.

In mm. 50-52, Brandt uses a group of short and trilled piano clusters to represent the car with his instruction, “revving up, gunning the motor.” In mm. 53-54 the rapid piano arpeggiations depict the car in motion again and leads into the final text, “watch out where you’re going.” In m. 55, Brandt substituted the word “watch” for the original text “look” in the poem. “Watch” has a more resonant quality in that range of the soprano voice and also serves to create a subtle rhyming scheme with the initial consonants of the segment “watch out where.”
Brandt’s text alteration and the descending vocal line create an aggressive ending to the text. The concluding piano clusters add a sense of finality to the song (see Example 17).

Example 17, Brandt, “I Know A Man,” mm. 55-56.
Descending vocal line and piano clusters create an aggressive finality.

Section C includes dramatic and vocal challenges. The singer must anticipate the abrupt emotional change from the end of section B to the beginning of section C in m. 41, as well as an increased intensity during the frantic piano interlude (mm. 47-48). Brandt’s text setting in the section is declamatory and requires a combination of powerfully projected tone balanced with healthy vocal technique. This is critical for the fearful outcry “for Christ’s sake” in m. 49. This phrase is set in the highest vocal range of the song. The challenge for the singer is to color with fearful intensity “for Christ’s sake,” sung on A5, but not at the expense of a well-produced tone. The range of the final phrase (mm. 55-56) leads to a register requiring a strong chest or mixed voice.

Robert Creeley commented on this poem in an interview: “John is almost a hierarchical name for me. I’ve had very good friends named John.” He also makes a point that the “Drive” command in m. 46 is spoken by the protagonist while the text “look out where you’re going” is spoken by the other character.

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68 Creeley, Tales Out of School, 116
IV. As You Come

As you come down
the road, it swings
slowly left and the sea
opens below you,
west. It sounds out.  

With only five lines in one stanza, this poem contained in Creeley’s publication *Thirty Things* (1975), is similar in structure to the first poem of this cycle, “The Drums.” Comparable to that setting, Brandt restricts the vocal melody in “As You Come” to nine pitches. He also employs text repetitions and piano interludes. Brandt creates a graceful elegance and spaciousness with the use of arpeggiation and melismatic fragments, which alternate with sustained chords and clusters in the piano. The continuity of the music in this song preserves a mood of anticipation with one continuous form.

To suggest the distance pictured in the opening phrase, Brandt creates an expansive and delicate texture (mm. 1-9) in several ways: the initial words are spaced between piano interludes which alternate sustained and open chords with wide-ranged arpeggios. The off-beat, almost syncopated setting of the text suggests a feeling of relaxation (see Example 18).

Example 18, Brandt, “As You Come,” mm. 1-4.
Off-beat text setting and piano interludes create an expansive feeling with a relaxed mood.

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The rests in measure 9 act as a transition between the opening text and the following piano interlude. In mm. 10-15, the piano plays a series of sustained chords in overlapping patterns. This preserves the feeling of distance and expansion suggested in the first eight measures. This invites an opportunity for introspection by the protagonist. During this interlude, two brief and ascending octave chords in m. 11 and m. 14 add a sense of excitement. Rhythmic diminution and descending patterns of the piano chords is observed in mm. 16-17, which ushers in a contrasting mood for the repeated text, “as you come down the road.” The increased tempo marking in m. 16, and the descending vocal line, as contrasted with the series of fragmented melismas in the piano, create a feeling of heightened anticipation through m. 20 (see Example 19).

Example 19, Brandt, “As You Come,” mm. 18-19.
Continuous descending vocal phrase and piano melisma fragments suggest a heightened anticipation for the repeated text.

Brandt highlights the text in m. 21 with a brief suspension in the forward momentum by doubling the vocal line with broadened chords in the piano. Here again Brandt expands the song structure by interrupting the text and suspending the mood with a piano interlude (mm. 22-25) which echoes the previous structure of alternating rapid melismatic fragments with sustained chords. This structural lengthening strengthens the feeling of expansiveness in the following text “and the sea opens below you west” (mm. 25-28). Brandt uses text painting on the word “opens”
by including a large downward skip in the vocal line and widely separated piano lines (see Example 20).

Example 20, Brandt, “As You Come,” mm. 26-27. Text painting the word “opens” with a downward skip in the vocal phrase and widely spaced piano lines.

The final text “it sounds out,” is set to nearly identical repeating melodies in mm. 29-32. The piano echoes these melodies in the postlude (mm. 33-38), as if to represent the continuation of the “sound” referred to in the text. The piano in this final section also returns to the alternation of wide-ranged arpeggiations with sustained chords as in the beginning, serving to unify the song (see Example 21).

Example 21, Brandt, “As You Come,” mm. 31-32, and mm. 35-36. Postlude echoes final text melody and wide-ranged arpeggiations return from beginning.

The greatest performance challenge for the singer is textual ambiguity. The singer must be able to find meanings in Creeley’s text that will create a picture of the scene and project clear
and varied emotions to the audience. It is critical for the singer to keep the dramatic energy flowing during the frequent piano interludes and postludes. Vocally, this song requires delicate phrasing with subtle dynamic nuances that reflect the mood of introspection as well as anticipation. In particular, the climactic phrase in mm. 25-28 is the most vocally expansive in length and range. The singer should highlight this section with a flowing legato, but with an energy that propels through the phrase.

V. Time

What happened to her and what happened to her and what happened to her?

This poem, within Creeley’s publication Backwards (1975), is ambiguous for neither is the identity of “her” known nor is the emotional context of the question. Brandt’s text setting and his use of strong thematic and unifying rhythmic and melodic piano material represent a subtext of anguish and urgency. In one continuous form only seven measures long, “Time” is the most compact song of the cycle. Only four pitches are heard within the repeated vocal line, which balances the economical use of words. The piano constantly builds in intensity to project an increasing level of emotion.

In the first measure Brandt presents his intentions with the instruction, “Off-handed, mildly concerned.” The vocal melody leads the musical phrase and the syllabic stress of “happen’d” is placed on the highest pitch. The piano gives a clear indication of mood in two ways: first, the rapid thirty-second notes reflect anxiety. Second, the arpeggiated, and sometimes contrapuntal piano part moves ever inward in contrary motion. This piano pattern serves as a

\[\text{\footnotesize 70 Creeley, The Collected Poems, 574.}\]
unifying device for the song. It also suggests a state of frustration, as the protagonist continues to return to the same unanswered question (see Example 22).

Example 22, Brandt, “Time,” m. 1.
Text setting reflects syllabic stress and piano unification device suggests a mood of frustration.

For the repeated text in m. 2 Brandt’s performance instruction states “with stronger but controlled anguish,” and in m. 3, “severe, dispassionate.” The repeated text is laced with the composer’s instructions of increasing emotional intensity. Likewise, the piano expands to reinforce the growing intensity (see Example 23).

Example 23, Brandt, “Time,” mm. 1-3 (excerpts).
The piano reflects an increased emotional intensity for each repeat of text.

A piano interlude in mm. 3-5, based on a wide-ranged chordal progression with the composer’s instruction “ad. lib as fast and fluidly as possible,” sets the stage for the final restatement of the text. The frantic nature of this interlude leads into the repeated text with Brandt’s instructions, “more urgently, perhaps exasperated” in m. 6. In the final phrase the piano
is relegated to the lowest extremes of the bass, which colors the repeated text with a darker mood (see Example 24).

Example 24, Brandt, “Time,” m. 6.
Repeated piano unification device in the bass reflects a dark mood.

The final rapid arpeggiated chord in m. 7 presents a marked contrast. Here, the contrary motion that has moved inward takes an abrupt reverse and moves outward to the extremes of the treble and bass. This is because the protagonist has reached a point of “falling apart” with this unanswerable question.

The repeated four pitches heard in the text create a challenge for the singer. Because of the restrictive melody, the singer must rely on a varied use of inflection, vocal color, and dynamics. The first phrase in m. 1 should be sung in a parlando style with minimal vibrato. Using a fuller tone with vibrato on in m. 2 will suggest an increased emotional intensity. In m. 3 the phrase should be sung with a round and dark vocal color to reflect severity. The final phrase needs to grow constantly through the measure. The singer should employ a dynamic crescendo accompanied with an increase in brighter vowel colors and vibrato.

VI. The Rhythm

It is all a rhythm,
from the shutting
door, to the window
opening,
the seasons, the sun’s light, the moon, the oceans, the growing of things,

the mind in men personal, recurring in them again, thinking the end

is not the end, the time returning, themselves dead but someone else coming.

If in death I am dead, then in life also dying, dying . . . And the women cry and die.

The little children grow only to old men. The grass dries, the force goes.

But is met by another returning, oh not mine, not mine, and in turn dies.

The rhythm which projects from itself continuity bending all to its force from window to door, from ceiling to floor, light at the opening, dark at the closing.\textsuperscript{71}

This poem, contained in Creeley’s collection \textit{Words} (1967), is the longest movement of this cycle and nearly half the length of the work. Brandt’s setting of this song is the most complex, and features many distinct and contrasting melodies that reflect the varied text of the

\textsuperscript{71} Creeley, \textit{The Collected Poems}, 265.
poem. The first four sections (ABCD) are followed by repeats of C and D in altered versions. The song concludes with an epilogue. Brandt organizes these sections by setting double or single stanzas and sometimes repeats text. Each section contains unique vocal melodies in combination with a repeated piano theme or fragment that return periodically. The epilogue contains repeated text from both the first and last stanzas.

Brandt set the opening text of the A section (mm. 1-11) with an emphasis on the words “all” and “rhythm” which highlight the theme of the poem. The stark piano texture of treble clusters serve to further shift the focus to the broad vocal phrase (mm.1-3). In m. 3 the piano begins with a repeated rhythmic and disjunct melodic pattern consisting of continuous sixteenth-note octaves that contrast with syncopated clusters which alternate between the treble and bass clef. This serves as a unifying factor for section A. The text for this section includes the first two stanzas of the poem which list the many elements that create a rhythm of life. While observing Creeley’s grammatical punctuation, Brandt sets the text using a lyrical triplet melody that contrasts the text against the piano unification theme (see Example 25).

Example 25, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” m. 6.
Triplet vocal melody highlights the text by contrasting the piano unification theme.

While strictly observing the triplet rhythm, the singer should use a flowing legato for this graceful melody. The vocal color should reflect a sense of wonder as the rhythm of life is described in its many elements.
In m. 11, section B is introduced with one of the four repeated motivic figures in the piano. These rapid figures are repeated and create a disjunct melodic counterpoint for this setting of stanzas three and four. The vocal melody is a mixture of step-wise motion and skips with a militaristic rhythmic quality. Brandt creates clear word stress within each phrase by using rhythm and pitch. The text concerns the cyclical nature of life and the repeated piano figures reflect this by text painting the words “recurring” and “returning” (see Example 26).

\[\text{Example 26, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 18-24. Repeated piano figures reflect “recurring” and “returning.”}\]

The militaristic rhythmic quality in section B suggests a sense of detachment and strength on the part the protagonist. The singer should respond to this by using a full tone while executing the rhythms with precision.

In m. 30 an ascending piano melody ushers in section C (mm. 30-50). This serves as a developmental segment using the first three lines of text in stanza five of the poem. Brandt set the text in mm. 31-34 with a melody that is fragmented by using repeated pitch groupings
separated by rests. The piano unifies this pattern by creating an echo effect with the vocal line through m. 33, further highlighting the text. These melodic and rhythmic elements help to reveal the emotional intensity of the protagonist who is contemplating mortality (see Example 27).

Example 27, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” m. 31.
Text is highlighted with rests as piano echoes helping to reveal an emotional intensity.

Starting in m. 35 the vocal line of repeated text contrasts the previous fragmented melody by employing broad and lyrical phrases. The grace notes within the phrases create a sighing effect, which suggest an emotion of sadness. The piano unification theme is continually repeated to reflect the unending cycle of life and death, as expressed in the text. The longer rests in the vocal melody (mm. 39-41) add a greater emphasis to the text while repeated and descending arpeggiation create a heightened energy (see Example 28).

Piano arpeggiation and longer rests in vocal line create heightened energy and greater text emphasis.
Brandt states “The Rhythm” is an expanded version of the first song of the cycle, “I bring back material from the earlier song.” An example of this can be seen in section C. The arpeggiation in the piano where originally in the voice of “The Drums” (see Example 29).

![Example 29, “The Drums,” m. 19, and “The Rhythm,” m. 41. Vocal arpeggiation in the first song transferred to the piano in the final song.](image)

The repeated piano theme from the beginning of section C returns in m. 43. The repeated text “then in life also dying” (mm. 43-45) is set to a broad melody from mm. 35-36 with alterations including new pitches with wider skips. The final word “dying” in m. 45 is set with a notated trill on the highest pitches as a climax of this section. Brandt closes section C by setting the last line of the fifth stanza, “and the women cry and die,” (mm. 49-50) using rhythm and pitch to stress the words “cry” and “die.”

The singer faces vocal and dramatic challenges in section C. The dramatic energy should be carried through the rests of the initial and repeated sections of fragmented vocal melody to maintain continuity. The broader vocal melodies, including grace notes and wide skips, require vocal agility and musical accuracy. This section continually grows in fervor as the protagonist contemplates mortality. The singer must employ vocal and dramatic pacing appropriate to this arc of intensity.

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72 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
The text of stanzas six and seven of the poem is used for section D (mm. 51-90) of this song. Following the pattern used in the previous sections, Brandt introduces new contrasting and repeated piano figures as the unification material. In m. 51-53, a wide-ranged triplet pattern moves to contrary arpeggiation that usher in the start of the first piano triplet unification figure. The vocal line contrasts the rhythmic characteristics of the piano and highlights the text. The repetitive triplets reflect the inevitable cycle of life (see Example 30).

Example 30, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 56-57.
The repeated triplets reflect the inevitable cycle of life.

In m. 60, the piano theme stops abruptly and a sustained chord returns the focus to the text “the force goes” (mm. 60-62). With a rising and sustained melody, Brandt suggests the action of a departing and ascending life-force. An arpeggiation introduces a brief step-wise fragment in m. 62, which is repeated periodically during the setting of the stanza seven. This fragment was first introduced in the first song of the cycle (see Example 31).

Example 31, Brandt, “The Drums,” m. 8, and “The Rhythm,” m. 62.
The step-wise fragment introduced in the first song is used again in the final song.

In section D of this final song, both the vocal line and piano are disjunct at times with wide skips, however there is a sostenuto element within the vocal line that contrasts with the
Similarly to section C, Brandt adds a grace note to the repeated word, “returning,” in m. 66 for increased textual emphasis. The duplicated piano step-wise fragment also serves as a text painting device for the word “returning.”

In mm. 70-90 the text “not mine” is repeated along with the triplet rhythm from the beginning of section D and the step-wise fragment. In mm. 70-77, the text is set to a disjunct and sustained melody that builds in intensity with ascending pitches and accelerated rhythms. The step-wise piano fragment is also repeated and transposed higher, contributing to the growing intensity. The triplet rhythm resumes with descending arpeggiations in mm. 78-81, as a reminder of the unending cycle of life. The ascending vocal melody climaxes on a sustained A♯5 marked *forte* and is the highest pitch in section D. Brandt maintains this climactic energy through m. 90 in two ways: The step-wise piano fragment returns with ascending repeats simultaneously to the wide-ranged and sustained vocal line (see Example 32).

![Example 32, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 86-89. Ascending piano and sustained vocal line maintain climatic energy.](image)

In measures 91-101, the piano texture changes and features repeated groupings of dissonant chord clusters which are interspersed with rapid arpeggiations. The dynamic marking
is mezzo-piano with Brandt’s instruction, “subdued, peaceful.” The final line of the stanza seven, “and in turn dies,” is set to a sustained and repeated melody which is pitched low in the soprano range and reflects the somber nature of the text. The dissonant and simple rhythmic nature of the repeated piano clusters, serve as a subtext and add a color of resignation and finality (see Example 33).

Example 33, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 92-94.
Piano and vocal line reflect the somber nature of the text.

Section D presents new challenges for the singer. The low tessitura of the vocal phrases in mm. 56-59 and in mm. 92-95, lie below the treble piano and require a strong chest voice or mix to communicate the text effectively. Many other vocal phrases incorporate large skips, which demand an even resonance throughout a wide vocal range. Some of the vocal skips move rapidly between chest or mix to head voice and require vocal agility in register transitions. The wealth of repeated text requires the singer to be able to incorporate a variety of vocal colors. Throughout this section the intensity grows and the singer must have a strong command of vocal dynamics in order to reflect and sustain the composer’s dramatic intentions.

Measures 91-105 serve as a transition leading to a repeat of section C. Beginning in m. 98, the clusters become interrupted with rests and foreshadow the return of the fragmented vocal
melody and text from the section C. Marked piano, the text, “if in death I” is repeated (mm. 102-105) on two pitches with rests between each word. The frequency of the rests increase in the piano as well, and clusters alternate with the vocal line. The rapid piano figures on the repeated word “I” create a sense of anticipation for the text phrase that will be completed in the following section.

Section C is repeated in mm. 106-125, with only slight modifications which serve subtlety to increase the dramatic intensity. In mm. 126-141, Brandt repeats the triplet piano theme from section D, and uses periodic rapid figures to increase the energy and momentum. The final stanza is set with a rhythmic triplet vocal melody. The disjunct nature of the vocal line creates a declamatory energy for the text as it ascends to a climax in m. 138.

Both repeated and varied versions of sections C and D contain similar vocal challenges and dramatic opportunities. The vocal lines include a wealth of wide skips which require the singer to possess agility and an evenness of range. The vocal color for the repeated text in the return of section C, should suggest a mood of acceptance of mortality. This facilitates the transition into the repeated section D, which celebrates the rhythm of life. In both these sections the growing dramatic intensities call for emotional and dynamic pacing that is appropriate to the arc of the compositional structure.

The epilogue (mm.142-177) begins with ascending chords that lead to the last line of the final stanza. This is repeated (mm. 144-159) using a lyric melody which is marked mezzo-piano. The high tessitura and dynamic marking create a sense of a calm and ethereal repose. Repeated octave patterns registered high in the piano (similar to section A, see Example 25) complement
the vocal line with a sparkling energy. This sense of well-being characterizes the natural cycle of life coming full circle (see Example 34).

Example 34, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 152-155.
Piano and vocal line suggest ethereal repose.

In m. 160 Brandt repeats the first line of the poem, “It is all a rhythm.” The straightforward nature of the *forte* rhythmic vocal line is more declamatory. The repeated open octaves move to the bass clef, further supporting a forceful and grounded energy. A contrasting piano interlude (mm. 165-169) conveys Brandt’s instruction “agitated,” with a disjunct chordal progression. The first line of the poem returns for a final repetition in mm. 170-174. Brandt creates a sense of certainty and finality through the text by separating each chordally accompanied word with a rest. Brandt makes his summary statement “all a rhythm” by placing the final repetition of the word “all” on a sustained G♯5 marked *forte* supported by a sustained piano cluster reiterating the universality of the poetic meaning. The last words “a rhythm” are set on C♯4 quarter notes, which provide a strong closure to the text. A rapid and descending choral arpeggiation in mm. 175-177 returns the cycle to the opening C♯ minor tonality and brings a dramatic conclusion to the work (see Example 35).
Example 35, Brandt, “The Rhythm,” mm. 170-177.

Final song closes with finality and certainty and returns to c♯ minor tonality unifying cycle.

The text setting of the epilogue requires the singer to encompass beauty of tone, legato, and declamatory power. The initial lyric melody (mm. 144-159) should be sung with beautiful legato phrasing. The final two vocal phrases are set in a declamatory style and the vocal color should reflect strength and finality. The last words in m. 174, set on C♯4, are low in the soprano voice, thus a strong chest register or mix should be used by the singer. Dramatically, the singer needs to be able to contrast effectively the ethereal repose of the lyrical melody with the intensity of the two declamatory phrases.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to create a performance guide for *Creeley Songs* by Anthony Brandt. The bibliographical information in chapters one and two provide a singer with meaningful knowledge of the lives of Anthony Brandt and Robert Creeley. This will aid the singer in presenting an effective performance of this work. These chapters also reveal similarities between Brandt and Creeley. Early in their lives, each had family members that helped to ignite the spark of creativity within them. For both men, their initial studies at Harvard were disappointing, and they both went through a period in their lives when they doubted their artistic talent. They also shared the experience of having helpful role models; people in their field that encouraged and assisted them in developing confidence in their work. Further, both Brandt and Creeley served as educators and assisted future artists.

Chapters three and four provide detailed information about the cycle. Chapter three, “The Creation of *Creeley Songs*,” gives the singer insight into Brandt’s choice of poetry and compositional process. Brandt says he was drawn to the poetry of Creeley because, “he leaves space for the music.” As a performer, I have found Brandt’s unique compositional elements throughout the cycle to reveal the literal meaning of the poetry as well as subtext. Within his compositional process, Brandt crafts vocal lines from harmonic progressions that he has created that he says are “. . . musically convincing” and have “. . . a sense of inevitability or inescapability.” He states, “The challenge of doing this is that the vocal line has to have enough integrity as a melody that the listener can’t tell that it resulted from the harmony—I put a lot of

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73 Brandt, interview, October 27, 2012.

74 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
effort into that!” As a singer, I find Brandt was successful in this process, as the vocal melodies are extremely beautiful and lyrical. The analyses of the songs, musical examples, and performance suggestions in Chapter four, “Performance guide to Creeley Songs,” serves to provide the singer with an intimate knowledge of the work. A deep understanding of Brandt’s settings of these poems is necessary to present a successful and moving performance. One of the many reasons I enjoy singing Creeley Songs is because Brandt provides the opportunity to communicate the poems through such a varied palate of rhythms and melodies.

During my study of Creeley Songs, I developed a growing passion for the poetry and the music. After my initial interview with Anthony Brandt, I became fascinated with the influences that led him to be a composer. I was very pleased that this talented composer agreed to allow me to write about this cycle. Researching the poet Robert Creeley was also very rewarding for me. I read a quote by Gertrude Stein that Creeley enjoyed and had mentioned in an interview; “the business of Art . . . is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present.” This quote had a profound effect on my study of the cycle and on my artistry as a whole. The combination of their artistry creates in this cycle a perfect synthesis of text, music, and inspiration.

Due to the complexities of this work, it is most appropriate for advanced singers and pianists that both possess an attention to detail and an appreciation for musical and emotional variety. Collaboration with a worthy pianist can be very rewarding because of the intricacies of creating ensemble. I hope the information in this dissertation will assist a performer in presenting Creeley Songs with a combination of vocal beauty and dramatic intensity.

75 Brandt, interview, June 6, 2013.
76 Foster, Understanding, 92.
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APPENDIX A
WORKS LIST FOR ANTHONY BRANDT

*Four Score* for clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2013)
Commissioned by the SOLI ensemble.


*My Best Eleven* for percussion ensemble (2012)
Commissioned and premiered by the Moores School Percussion Ensemble of the University of Houston, November 2012.

*Maternity* for soprano and chamber orchestra, with a libretto by David Eagleman (2011-12)
Commissioned and premiered by the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra with soprano Karol Bennett. Premiered in Houston, TX, April 2011.

*Nano Symphony* for large ensemble (2010)
Commissioned by Richard E. Smalley Institute for Nanoscale Science and Technology
Premiered by the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, Alastair Willis, conductor, in Houston, TX, September 2010.

*Focus* for flute, clarinet, harp, piano, percussion, violin and cello (2009)
Premiered by Musiqa, Tomasz Golka, conductor, January 2010.

*America* (text by Tony Hoagland) for narrator and chorus (2007)
Commissioned by the Houston Chamber Choir, with support from the Houston Arts Alliance. Premiered by narrator Dayton Smith and the Houston Chamber Choir, Robert Simpson, conductor.

*The Birth of Something* for chamber opera for soprano, baritone, string quartet and percussion, with a libretto by Will Eno (2006)
Commissioned by Da Camera of Houston. Premiered by Karol Bennett, Michael ChioLDI, The Enso String Quartet, Andrea Moore and conductor Daniel Myssyk in Houston, TX, February 2006.

*The Dragon and the Undying* (text by Siegfried Sassoon) (2004) for soprano and string quartet
Premiered by Karol Bennett and the Cassatt String Quartet at the Bowdoin International Festival, July 2004.
Round Top Trio (2003) for flute, clarinet and piano
Commissioned by the Round Top International Festival. Premiered by the Webster Trio at Festival Hill, Round Top Texas, August 2003.

The House Surrounded (text by Jule Superville) (2002-3) for soprano, piano, harp and percussion, Premiered by Karol Bennett, soprano, Christopher Taylor, piano, Paula Page, harp and Andrea Moore, percussion on a concert of Musiqa at the Rothko Chapel, Houston, April 2003.

Handful for solo piano (2002)
Premiered by Jon Kimura Parker in Houston, TX, October 2002.

Express for orchestra (2002)
Commissioned and premiered by OrchestraX, John Axelrod, conductor, in Houston, TX in May 2002.

Crucible of the Millennium (2001), score for three-hour television documentary which aired nationally on PBS in December 2001 and January 2002. The documentary has also been commercially released on video.

Four Shadowings (String Quartet No. 2) (01-02)
Commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation of the Library of Congress. Premiered by the Flux String Quartet in Houston in April 2002 and at the New Chamber Festival, Baltimore, in June 2002.

Roman à Clef (00) for cello and piano

Fanfare in X (00) for orchestra
Commissioned and premiered by OrchestraX, John Axelrod, conductor, in May 2000 in Houston, TX.

X-Caliber (99-00) for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, two percussion, and piano
Premiered by members of OrchestraX, John Axelrod, conductor, at the Conductors’ Guild Conference in Houston, TX, January 2001.

High and Mighty (1999) for flute and trombone
Commissioned by flutist Libby Raichart and trombonist Pat Raichart.

Creeley Songs for soprano and piano (1999)
Premiered by soprano Karol Bennett and pianist Brian Connelly in Houston, TX, March 2000.
Turbulent Tones (1998) for orchestra

Breathing Room (text by Emily Dickinson) (1998) for soprano and string orchestra


Songs for Soprano and String Quartet (text by Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams) (1997) Premiered by Karol Bennett and members of the Metamorphosen Ensemble at Paine Hall, Harvard University.

Hidden Motives for two pianos (1996)
Premiered by pianists John McDonald and David Horne in Cambridge, MA, March 1998.

Octopiece for flute, bass clarinet, percussion, piano and string quartet (1996)
Commissioned and premiered by the Ensemble de las Rosas, Emil Awad, conductor, at the International Festival of Music, Morelia, Mexico, July 2006.

Disturbing the Piece for piano and improvisatory ensemble (1996)
Commissioned and premiered by the Tufts New Music Ensemble in Medford, MA, April 1996.

New (text by Amanda Powell) for soprano and piano (1995)
Premiered by Karol Bennett and John McDonald at San Francisco State University, September 1995.

Bar None for string quartet/string orchestra (1995)
Commissioned and premiered by the Chamber Music Center of the Wellesley Composers Conference in August 1995. Version for string orchestra premiered by the Orchestre de Chambre Orphée of Belgium, Bart Van de Velde, conductor, July 1996.

String Quartet (1994)
Premiered by the Amernet String Quartet at Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood Music Center, July 1994.

Septet-à-tête for flute, clarinet, piano, 2 percussion, violin and cello (1993)
Inside/Out, a music-and-art piece for young people, in collaboration with architect Steven Brittan (1992) Commissioned by the Young-at-Arts Program of the Wang Center, Boston. Premiered on a concert of the Griffin Music Ensemble at the Wang Center, Boston. Exhibited at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, and at the S.A.C.I. Biennale in Florence, Italy.

Special Projects

Earl Kim, Illuminations, reconstructed from the composer’s manuscript and orchestrated (1998) Commissioned and premiered by the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, Scott Yoo, conductor, in Boston, MA, February 2003.

Educational and Occasion Pieces

“TEDx Lullaby” for string quartet, composed for TEDx Houston talk (2012)

The Last Words of Gesshu Soko for baritone, oboe, viola and cello (2012)

History for soprano and piano (text by Charles Angoff) (2012)

“Those who wish to sing” (Plato) for soprano and piano (2011)

Ofrenda for soprano, oboe, viola and cello (text by Chief Dan George) (2011)

Musiqa Miniature (Variation on “Happy Birthday,” in celebration of Musiqa’s 10th anniversary) (2011)
APPENDIX B
COMPOSER’S PROGRAM NOTES FOR CREELEY SONGS

Robert Creeley finds for his words at bargain outlets and gritty neighborhood stores. Somehow, he decorates his poetry with these tattered and common-place phrases, and makes something shining out of them. I have tried to parallel his troubled directness in my settings, juxtaposing more recognizable elements with others that are more unsettled. Tonality is evoked, mostly ironically, to represent conformity, the well-worn path; whenever the text becomes more personal, the dissonance increases. In “I Know A Man,” for instance, straight sailing down the highway is represented with a slightly restless $c^\flat$-minor figure; but as the driver begins to ponder the surrounding “darkness,” the harmony veers into more irregular territory. The songs are conceived as a cycle, and are linked by shared material: the final song, for instance, an expanded version of the first, its references a way of highlighting the cyclic nature of life the poem describes (“the time returning”—but “not mine”). The second song, with its sense of private meditation, is the only one removed from the work’s main motives. The Creeley Songs were composed for soprano Karol Bennett and pianist Brian Connelly.
APPENDIX C
TRANSCRIPT OF PHONE INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY BRANDT

October 27, 2012

I’m reading about Robert Creeley and I just wanted to share with you a quote he said while he was at Harvard, which you also attended, and which I thought was interesting. He said, “All that would matter to me finally as a writer is that the scale and the place of our common living be recognized, that the mundane in that the simple emphasis be acknowledged.” And I wanted to know what brings you to enjoy his poetry?

Wow, that’s a beautiful quote. I didn’t know he went to Harvard, that’s interesting because what I know more is that he taught at Mountain with such a collection of incredible avant-guard figures, so I hadn’t realized that he went to Harvard, wow. I think that’s a really wonderful quote and I’ll tell you how I would connect to that. I think the arts are often misunderstood and underestimated in the extent to which they connect with our everyday life. I don’t know how much we talked about this last time we spoke but if you can allow me to digress, I will just do a little train of thought here.

Please do.

A week from today, next Saturday, I’m doing a Ted X talk. Have you ever heard of the Ted talks?

No.

Oh, they’re really fun. I highly recommend them. There’s an organization called Ted, T E D, that has a conference every year and they invite world class and famous speakers. People pay thousands of dollars and they go to the talks but what’s really great is then they post these talks online. And the talks have this very specific rule; they can’t be longer than eighteen minutes. So you have these very exciting people, on all sorts of innovative topics, talking about something they are passionate about for exactly eighteen minutes. And so I’ve actually learned a lot about neuroscience from these eighteen minute talks. There’s a wonderful neuroscientist that gives a great eighteen minute talk on neuroscience and I learn these things that I didn’t know before. It’s wonderful.

And the Ted series has turned out to be so phenomenally successful, that they’ve licensed the TED name to individual cities who get to do their own; what they call the low cost alternatives to the big TED. And so there are literally 250 of these all around the world in Stockholm, Edinburgh, and so forth. Houston hosts one now. I think it’s the second year and so I was invited to speak. I have never prepared for a talk more carefully than this one because of the time limit. You have to. They will cut you off in mid-sentence if you go over eighteen minutes.
My talk is based on something that I am not sure, that I can’t remember if we talked about. It’s my view of creativity basically; coming out of some research in brain science that I think confirms something that I’ve always believed, and I think most artists always believe. You know, creativity, it’s not some luxury, it’s not something divorced from the rest of our experience. It’s a reflection of the way human beings live in everyday life. On a fundamental level, we are the most creative species in the history of the world. And that’s why we are who we are. Let me do a train of thought and stop me at any point and say, Tony, explain that more cause I’m not following you. I’ve got this talk so much in my brain and I don’t know how much it’s going to be elliptical and I don’t want to just give you my talk, you know.

Ok.

The neuroscientist David Eagleman says mental life can be divided into two basic types of behavior: automated and mediated. And an automated behavior is anything you learn by rote; rote drilling, memorization, practicing something over and over again. And what happens in your brain when you do that, is your brain streamlines neural networks and basically gets more and more efficient at doing the task. That’s way habits are so hard to break, because your brain has literally turned away the options. My child’s piano teacher once described the goal of practicing. When you first play something, it is like a hose with a bunch of holes in it. The goal of practicing is eventually to close the holes so that the water only comes out of the hose one way, and she is completely neurologically correct. The goal of practicing is basically to train your brain to eliminate all the neural pathways that don’t lead to the right result. Then you are left only with the possibility of doing it correctly, and that’s, of course, why when performing you can have that experience…I’m nervous but my body seems to be playing the piece for me. You know what I mean?

Yes, absolutely.

You know, you can’t even make a wrong note if you tried cause you’ve learned it so well and your brain literally doesn’t know anymore how to even think about doing it another way. So that’s automated behavior, and it functions the best when we’re unconscious.

Part of the whole point of David Eagleman’s book, Incognito, is that fact that we don’t want automated behavior to be conscious; consciousness slows it down and gets in the way. It creates errors. So our brain, at large, relies heavily on automated behavior in order to be able to do any kind of complex task. That’s the one type. Now, we share that ability with every living being with a brain, and if you think about animal instincts . . . that’s exactly what an instinct is. It’s that I respond with a set behavior to something that happens. You see what I mean?
That’s true.

And that’s why wild animals are so dangerous because they literally don’t have the option for any other kind of behavior. The lion sees you standing there and it doesn’t have the capacity to learn not to eat you, you know.

That’s true, that’s true.

This is why we’re different from animals. Now, mediated behavior is the opposite. Instead of pruning, the brain tolerates redundancy, and for most networking it allows multiple brain circuits to work together and collaborate on a solution. And Eaglemen calls this, the team-of-rivals model of the brain, and says it’s like a parliamentary debate. And the goal is flexibility and innovation. It allows your brain to come up with a new possible answer each time. And literally, I feel very strongly that what David is describing, mediated behavior, is the neurological basis of creativity. That it is the multiple brain circuits collaborating on solutions that make behavior creative. Now what’s interesting about that also, is that that’s where consciousness comes in. You don’t need consciousness if you’re a totally automated being. But consciousness allows you to overhear and even participate in this internal parliamentary debate.

And no one has proved this yet, but, I see that the likely next step is that that’s how consciousness arose; because human beings have an unsurpassed capacity for mediated behavior. That’s the great innovation in the way that we think, over every other living being in the animal kingdom. And consciousness enhances that capacity. I think that came by the way, probably, because we’re so social. And that in interacting over the long term with the same people and learning to be more and more sensitive to all the nuances of interaction, we became very creative and attentive in our understanding. Trying to sustain a long term relationship by doing the same thing over and over again isn’t going to work, you know. And as I sometimes joke, if you compare our mating/courtship rituals where it could take three years to get your loved one interested in you, verses animals, it just shows you creativity right there. I wouldn’t want to oversimplify it because of course the great thing about human beings is that automated and mediated behavior are all tangled up together. And you could take any task that we’re doing, I mean cooking, playing sports, anything, and you’ll find a combination of those things, you know.

Jazz improvisation is a great example of automated behavior underlying a mediated skill. I mean, they’re creating an improvisation in real time in front of an audience, you know, in conversation with each other. But, if they don’t have the ability to play all the difference scales and patterns instantaneously, the performance will fall apart, you know. If the pianist plays a chromatic scale and the saxophone player wants to imitate it and they go, wait a second, what’s the fingering for that? I mean its game up, you know? So all this stuff gets all entangled together but now I’m going to drive to something which is going to connect to Creeley. That one of the things that I see, and I see this really true in education, and one of the reasons I’m very interested in it right
now, is that, in a sense, human beings face a constant internal struggle between falling asleep and staying awake. And I mean that metaphorically, but automated behavior drives behavior into your unconscious. Mediated behavior lifts it up into consciousness. And we have the risk whenever we do something the same way over and over and over again, that essentially, we tune out. And in that sense we aren’t any different from any other animals. But human beings love being awake. We love feeling connected to the present. We don’t like being on auto-pilot our whole life, you know what I mean?

I’ll give you an example right now. I drive the kids to school and I drive a particular way every single day. And for some reason it seems like they’ve lengthened the length of the red light at this intersection from my direction. I don’t know why, but I sat there for four or five minutes, and of course, it’s first thing in the morning, and I’m hollering at the light to change, and my kids are like, “Dad why don’t you just go another way?” And I say, “ok, tomorrow I’ll go another way,” and every single day, I keep going the same way because I’ve trained myself to do that. I won’t consciously remember and decide to do it differently, I’m just following the auto-pilot, you know? And the trouble of course with schools in which the tests, standardized testing is so paramount, is that it focuses on all the automated behavior; recognizing your letters, spelling your math tables, and so forth. And it’s no wonder that kids are bored because the natural outcome of automated behavior is to put you to sleep.

So human beings . . . the most precious gift we have is consciousness. And we are actually, in a way that I would love to be able to articulate even more powerfully than I can right now, are actually constantly in a fight to keep ourselves awake; to nurture, develop, and cultivate mediated behavior, because that’s something that we’ve got that nobody else does. And if you take that away from us, we don’t have the phone that we’re talking on, we don’t have the computers, we don’t have roads, we don’t have houses . . . we don’t have anything! It all comes from our mediated behavior. That’s what has allowed us to be the most adaptable species in the history of the world. And one of the things that the arts do for us, is that they help keep us awake. They take even the mundane and give us a reason to pay attention to it, and see it in a new way. You see what I mean? And so I completely agree with Robert Creeley. That’s, to me, how the arts connect with real life. They allow us to see what would otherwise become invisible to us, just because we’re so familiar with it, and we will tune it out.

One of the things that I’ll say in my Ted talk is that nobody, no human being, wants to live the same day twice because, it’s the nature of the brain, that even if it was the happiest day of our life, that happiness will eventually wear off. It will become automated. It’s just how the brain works. And so we are continually creative to keep ourselves interested, to keep ourselves engaged. I think in school, what we call ADD, is a lot of times probably kids fighting to stay awake in the face of so much automated drilling. And so there’re just distracting themselves as much as possible. It’s not constructive behavior. It’s not accomplishing anything beneficial for them, but they’re so desperate to stay awake, that they’ll do anything to try and distract
themselves from the natural outcome of falling asleep. I think that quote is a beautiful quote by Robert Creeley, and I see that’s one of the strongest ways that the arts connect to everyday life.

And how do you feel about his poetry.

What I think he does so masterfully, is build his poetry out of things that seem to be mundane. So that he thereby takes common languages, everyday speech, everyday situations, and he twists them. As we were talking about the last time, word to word makes perfect sense, but in the combination of the words, creates enigmas. And forces you to think, forces you to decipher. Problem solving is one of the greatest kinds of mediated behavior. You can just imagine your brain getting all the neural circuits collaborating. Solve a puzzle, and you know that’s one of the things that I think he does so incredibly beautifully.

And you mentioned, one time, that you felt like he left a place for you to put music in, or you said it in a different way?

Yes, I feel like. You know, one of the things that draws me to his poetry, is that he leaves space for the music. You know, that’s always a mysterious thing to quantify, and it would be interesting to try to dissect it and see exactly what that means. Sometimes I think in poets where a focus on, let’s say, rhymes, particular sounds of words are so obvious. It’s very difficult not to get in the way of that. That’s way Shakespeare is so difficult to set. The musical value of speech is so strong in his poems that music can’t help but compete with that. Here’s another thing that’s interesting. Forgive me for another digression, but I’ll loop it around to answer your question.

Ok.

I don’t know if I told you about this either, but I just co-authored a paper on music and early language acquisition with a neuroscientist. And if you are interested I can send you the link and you can see it online.

I would love to see that, and I would also love to... after you write that speech for the eighteen minute, is there any way I could...

Yes, sure. I’ll send it. It has a power point presentation, so I can send you the power point and you can read along with the power point.

That would be great.

That would be the most effective way to look at it.

That would be great, thank you.

If you do a good job they’ll post it on YouTube. I don’t know how soon though. I have no idea what happens. Since I haven’t done it yet... but I’m making a note here to send this to you.
Right now, if you talk to neuroscientists about the relationship between music and language, they would say one of two things; they would either say, which I think is the most common answer, that music and language are separate systems, and that they arose independently, and that we have a pretty clear idea of why we would have language, you know, because obviously the benefits are so tangible. But nobody really understands why it is that we have music and people have all sorts of thoughts about it. Is it about calming the young? Is it about mating? Is it about fitness? That’s the one point of view. And then the other point of view is that language came first. And that music is kind of a happy by-product of language. And that if you took music out of the brain, essentially nothing would change in our fitness. We’d be perfectly capable of doing everything we would do, maybe life wouldn’t be as much fun you know . . . there’s no biological purpose to it. It’s just a nice outcome of our language ability.

So we turn all that on its head and we argue that, actually, music comes first in the development of a child, and then language comes after that. And it depends on a very generous, open definition of music, and one of the things I’m proud of in the article, is that if you look in the scientific literature right now; you can look far and wide trying to find a definition of music. And so one of the things we attempt in the article, is to define music in a way that science can then reason about it. Because if you can’t define it properly, then you’re going to end up with all sorts of hidden assumptions which are going to cloud your reasoning, you know what I mean? So having a shared definition about exactly what you’re studying is really important. So that’s one of the things we strive for in the article. Now the other part about it, and what we show them, and our idea is not new in evolution . . . Darwin was the first person, in fact, to say that music came first and then language. But it is new in developmental psychology, nobody had ever really come out and said this before and what we show is that children are attuned to the musical features of speech first and then they acquire the meaning later. And so there are things that kids are listening to when they’re infants, and it has absolutely nothing to do with meaning, and in fact, you couldn’t listen to meaning and listen to this at the same time. For instance, they listen to the proportion of vowels and consonants in their native language, they listen to the stress patterns, they listen to the melodizing of the speech. They’re trying to learn how to par speech, because in this whole stream of words, how does a baby know what a word is and what is just a connection between words. So they hear, statistically, sounds that happen very rarely. They assume that represents a connection between a word, you see? Whereas sounds that they hear happen statistically very often . . . they start to assume is within a word. You can’t be listening for meaning and listening for portions of consonants and vowels at the same time. So essentially what a child does, is it starts by trying to master the acoustic features of their native language. And then once they’ve got a grasp of that, then they start to borrow down and realize the individual sounds mean individual things. Once they do that of course, in a sense, the music of speech falls away, it gets diminished and we focus on meaning cause that’s the thing that is most useful about language for us, right?
What poetry does of course, is it restores some of the music back in. It makes us listen to language; its musical features in addition to its meaning. I would say there are some poets where the music of language is so strong, that in a sense, it does its own musical performance. You know what I mean? And what I think is nice about Creeley is that, because he’s using such ordinary language, that he still keeps you very focused on meaning. Although, he creates all these puzzles then as you try and figure out what it means. And it’s not to say that his poetry doesn’t sound beautiful, but he doesn’t distract you with the sounds of it. He keeps you focused on the meaning of it, and the puzzles that it creates. And that leaves room for the composer to add some more music to it.

What do you feel your responsibility is to Creeley when you compose . . . when you set one of his poems?

The twentieth century has seen a lot of different perspectives. I love Pierre Boulez’s music and one of the famous things he said for his piece, “La marteau sans maître,” was . . . people said, you can’t understand the words, Pierre. And he said if you want to read the poem, read it in your program. I’m taking the sounds of the poem, and I’m using them almost like there’re tambours and musical instruments, and my job is not to represent the poem, it’s to take the language and treat it in a musical way. Um, but don’t have that point of view. I love his music, but that’s not my point of view.

My point of view is that I’m there to serve the poem a hundred percent. And of course, that’s a subjective thing, there’s no one right answer. But I’m going to put all my effort and attention to trying to amplify the features of the poem that I notice, care about, think are interesting. And you know, what I imagine is that of all the people who read Robert Creeley’s poetry, you know, anyone who sets his music, his text, are among the most careful, devoted, deep readers he’s every going to have. Cause we’re going to read the poems over and over and over again, and then we’re going to think a hundred times over about what is it that he’s trying to say, and what are the possible implications. And whereas most of us reading through a book will read that poem and go on to the next page and obviously if I’m setting it, I’m reading it every day, multiple times as I’m working on that song. And so I see myself as the most dedicated, attentive, careful reader with regards to the poem I’ve chosen. My job is to have a conversation with him and say, this is what I get out of your poem, but I’m going to tell you about what I get out of it in musical terms.

That’s wonderful. I want to ask you a question that relates to that, more of a musical question. Can you talk to me about when you wrote this particular cycle; can you talk about your compositional technique. For example, do you compose in sequence or some other way?

Ok, another great question. I feel very strongly about this. All my years of teaching and being around my colleagues, it’s very clear that there’s no one right way to compose. But there is an assumption, often in the general public, that the way somebody would go about doing it, would
be; their inspired by some melody or whatever comes to their mind, and they start in the first measure, and they go to the second, the third, the forth, the fifth, and they work their way through the piece. And that’s possible. There’s nothing that I’m going to say that excludes that possibility, but I think that happens more rarely then people think.

One of the nice things about the word compose, is that it means to assemble. It doesn’t mean to do it in chronological order starting from the left and going to the right. And so I find it very difficult to compose just working chronologically from one side of the piece to the other. And I liken that to taking a trip. When you take a trip, you know . . . I’ll say to my students, its Thanksgiving break, you guys decide you’re going to pile into the care with your roommates and go somewhere fun. So how do you plan the trip and one guys says, “Oh, well let’s drive up to the 7-Eleven and then take a left,” and the next one says, “Ok, well if we’re in that neighborhood then there’s an on-ramp to a highway; let’s do that and let’s drive down four exits,” and then the next person says, “Ok, at that exit let’s stop at that Burger King and then . . .” I mean, that’s not how you plan a trip. You plan a trip and say, “who has been to San Antonio?” “Oh, none of us, oh that’d be great. Let’s go to San Antonio. We’ll go to the river walk, and where can we stay, and what do we want to see and then we figure out how we’re going to get there.” And very often when you’re working with a student, what happens is, they start at measure one and they’re half way going along and they get to measure thirty and they have no idea what to do. They’re completely stuck. And the answer is always the same; jump ahead and figure out where you’re going in the piece. Where they get stuck, is always the transition. The transition is a blend between what has happened and what’s going to happen. And if you don’t know where you’re going, you can’t create that blend. That’s why they get stuck.

There are some people who say, “Well you can’t teach composition,” you know. I do think you can teach composition. I mean, I don’t think you can teach how to create a great idea. I mean, anybody’s lucky if they come up with one really, you know? One of the things that I think is most important that you can teach, is not to have to be a slave to chronology when you compose. It’s to be able to start anywhere in the piece and work from there.

And you know there are wonderful examples of that in the literature. One of my favorite demonstrations of that is Bach’s The Art of the Fugue, as a piece in invertible counterpoint. And the piece basically can break up in two halves. The first half of the piece is a canon at the fifth, and in the second half, he inverts one of the voices and turns it into a canon at the octave. So the music in the first half and the second half, is basically the same, only one part is transposed. And of course, it’s fantastic; it all works out harmonically. That’s the miracle of it. You can’t think of that half way through. Bach didn’t write the first half of the piece and then say, “Wait a second, if I just transpose this down a fifth it’ll still work. Oh cool!” No. He had to be writing in two places in the piece at the same time. And I can’t for the life of me tell you how he did it, you know, he wasn’t holding a pen in one hand and a pen in the other. But he knew that any decision he made in measure five was going to influence what was happening in measure fifty-two. And he had to take both things into account, and that to me is one of the most wonderful feelings you
can have when you’re composing; that the path of the piece influences the future, and the
decisions you make for something later in the piece changes the way the path is going to be.

Whenever I feel that when I’m writing something, then I feel really great about where I am in the
process, because things are all being connected together. There’re integrated, you know? In the
same way that choices that we make early in life determine our future. And the way we behave
now might influence how we look at our past, or whatever you know; whatever metaphor you
want to put into that.

I can tell you that the *Creeley Songs* are the . . . I told you I wrote them, the one song, when I
was engaged to my wife, “Mallarmé,” but the other five were all written for the cycle. And even
the second one . . . I revised it, I changed it a little bit when I put it inside the cycle, but I was
writing all five of them at the same time.

*Would this be the idea that you mentioned before, from Williams, called threading or pipelining?*

Yes, that’s right, because that also enables you to do that. You know, in other words, one of the
things that I can remember thinking right when I collected the poems together is, I have the first
poem called “The Drums,” and I have the last poem called “The Rhythm,” and I want a
connection between the drums and the rhythm. And so, inventing what that’s going to be, is one
of the first things I want to come up with.

I don’t know if you’ve ever had a chance to do Species counterpoint, but it’s something
composers are going to study and one of the great references of Species counterpoint is that, if
you start from the beginning and work towards the end, you can work all night and have trouble
figuring out a solution, you know? Either the *cantus firmus* is written in whole notes and
sometimes you’re just writing in whole notes, or you’re just trying to come up with something
that’s nine notes long, really, it doesn’t seem like much, but if you start in the left bar line and
just work towards the right bar line, you get stuck over and over and over again because there are
very rigid rules. So why is that? Well it’s because the end is the most constrained point. And if
you use up all of your freedom and choice at the beginning, without any understanding of where
you have to end up, usually you end up in a situation that you cannot get to the ending; you’re
just out of bounds. The best thing to do is start at the end, because that’s where you have almost
no choice. Know what your end is going to be. And then the next most constrained point is the
beginning. So know what the beginning is going to be. And then the climax which has to be out
of phase with the *cantus firmus*, that’s another constrained point, because it’s where the voices
are going to come. The climax of the *cantus firmus* is a very constrained point because it’s the
highest and you can’t have voice crossings. You have very few choices. So you’ve got to figure
out what are your options are there. And then you save for the end, the places where you have
the greatest freedom. So you start with your greatest constraints, and then leave yourself open,
the places where you have the greatest freedom, then you have a great chance of coming up with
a good solution.
And in a way, that’s how composing works. You figure out the places where your choices are the most clearly fixed, I mean you’re making them up, but there’s the most clearly fixed. Once you’ve got a good idea of that, then you see where you’ve left open these other things that can be filled in properly. I wouldn’t want the connection between the drums and the rhythm to be left as my last decision, because I’ve made too many other decisions until then, and I may have not left myself a good option. But, of course right from the beginning, I decided that the same material would be used in both songs. And I had to make sure that that would work, right? And test that out and say “ok” that will work, and now I’ve got that fixed. Now, how do I develop the material in each song in its own way?

*And is this called threading or pipelining? Are those actual composing terms?*

I don’t know, but it makes perfect sense and it probably is, and I wouldn’t be surprised if in Hollywood they talk about pipelining; with Williams it was straight down the line, “Hollywood talk” when he was speaking to us.

*Like for example in E.T.?*

Yes, right, that was the example that he used. That he was never going to play you the entire theme until the boy went up in the air with the bicycle. And that he would be giving you different fragments of it all along, and making you wait, and know what it was suggesting and hinting at, but never giving you the punch line until the movie gave you its punch line. So he was going to pick what he thought was the most emotionally powerful moment of the movie, and support that with the first time you hear the complete theme.

*You know I saw that movie, but you know, that was the most amazing part, I mean it was very emotional and it was just extraordinary. You were right, he gave little snippets of it but didn’t ever reveal . . . and then when he went over the moon . . . it was just…*

Right, and if you think about it, what’s wonderful about it; if he didn’t give the snippets, then it’s a pretty melody but it doesn’t have the same dramatic impact, you know. See, what would be an interesting exercise, and of course, I mean, none of us would have the time to do it, but what I wonder is, if they would do something like this in a film class; isolate the theme in which he uses a fragment of the melody, and just watch the theme back to back, and then watch the boy go up in the air, because what also happens is, the moment he goes back in the air, you remember . . . I bet you it’s the scene when they look at each other, you know what I mean? It casts your mind back to all the progression that leads up to this wonderful moment. Incidentally, usually the film score gets cut to the movie. They’re playing the movie and the film score has to fit with it and Williams says it was the first and maybe the only time . . . Spielberg was watching him struggle to stay in time with the film and he said, I’m just going to cut my movie to your music. The music is so great and it’s doing everything I want it to. I’ll just re-edit the theme. Record it the way you want it and then I’ll fix it so that he goes over the bumps in the highway on the bicycle, that it coordinates with the music.
That was a good decision.

Yes, it was a composers dream, right? You know, after going to all that trouble.

And I would expect that from Spielberg to know when he’s working with someone who is so talented as Williams.
June 1, 2013.

When and where were you born? Can you briefly describe the interests and activities of your immediate family when you were a child?

I was born at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City in 1961. My Dad was a magazine editor and history writer. My mother was an independent television producer who did a lot of work for PBS.

Can you describe your introduction to, and experience with music in your childhood?

My grandfather was Boris Kroyt, the violist of the Budapest String Quartet. As a result, I grew up around classical musicians: for instance, we spent many summers at the Marlboro Music Festival. Those I remember best—including Mieczyslaw Horszowski, Mischa and Sascha Schneider from the Quartet and Rudolf Serkin—were very tender towards children and full of life, humor, and wonderful enthusiasm. One summer, we shared a house with Pablo Casals. We found a kitten that I named Wolfgang. At the end of the summer, Mr. and Mrs. Casals adopted the kitten, changing its name to Pinky (go figure!).

My grandpa was a remarkable musician: a child prodigy, he was concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic as a teenager. Later, when the violist of the Budapest became ill, my grandpa learned the viola in one day and played so well that the Quartet asked him to take over permanently. He was also a bit of a rake as a young man. My sister and I once found a photo album that included a shot of him surrounded by women in a brothel. A Jew, he was forbidden to perform in public by the Nazis and changed his name to Tito Volare in order to get some gigs in Berlin. He, my grandmother Sonya, and my mother escaped from Germany, along with the other members of the Quartet.

I definitely wasn’t a prodigy. I loved playing the violin and got pretty good at it—I was assistant concertmaster of the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra—but I hated to practice, and as result, always had limitations in my technique. I had very poor practicing habits and often slashed my music with my bow out of frustration. Looking back, I wonder if my grandfather’s prodigious skill made it very difficult for me to be patient with myself.

How old were you when you first thought you would like to compose?

As soon as I started learning the violin at around five or six, I also wanted to compose. Many years ago, I found one of my early “compositions” in a storage box: it was a little Soldiers’
march, consisting only of oscillating fifths in a dotted rhythm—very silly and embarrassing!
When I was eleven, I did a recital of my own music at the Bowdoin Summer Festival, where I was studying violin; and my teacher, Lewis Kaplan, performed a piece I’d written on the radio.

What do you think was the catalyst for your wish to compose?

I give my parents a lot of credit. They only gave my sister and me construction toys, so we built everything we played with. They had strict rules about television—we were only allowed to watch on Friday and Saturday nights, and we had to make our own birthday and holiday cards. I think that instilled in me the desire to be creative.

Did you also enjoy other creative paths such as writing or poetry?

When friends would visit, I’d tape mystery stories on cassette with them. I loved to write murder mysteries, and eventually, more serious fiction. I haven’t thought about this in a long time but am just remembering that, in 6th grade, my mystery “The Open Window” was performed as the class play. In high school, I won two National Scholastic Writing Awards (my English teacher the second time was Frank McCourt, who eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for his memoir “Angela's Ashes.” Until graduate school, I was undecided between composing and fiction. I eventually decided that I knew of writers who had started as composers (e.g. Thomas Mann) but didn’t know of a single composer who had started as a writer. So I decided to give composing a shot first. Thinking about it now, I think I also preferred the abstraction and ambiguity of music: it made self-expression more private.

Please describe your early music training through high school, and can you remember certain people who helped to nurture or support your musical gift?

I studied violin privately, primarily with Lewis Kaplan, who taught at Juilliard. I didn’t compose consistently—the school year was often too busy. I took private counterpoint lessons for a while. But I was very unschooled. When I was sixteen, my parents sent me to the Fontainebleau Summer Academy to study with Nadia Boulanger, who turned 90 that August. It was the most terrifying summer of my life. Mlle Boulanger was ferociously demanding. The youngest student there, Emile Nauomoff, was a child prodigy; I was the second youngest and a total novice. As a result, I felt Mlle Boulanger’s wrath on more than one occasion. Composition class was held in her private apartment, which was dark and very grey. The class consisted largely of sight-singing Stravinsky’s “Abraham and Isaac” in the vocal clefs. I would hide behind her couch to avoid being called on. Every now and then, she would ask, “And where is Monsieur Brandt?” and I would rise up briefly, like a meerkat out of its hole, and reply “Here Madame.” At the end of the summer, after a particularly cruel incident, she wrote me a note of apology: she said she’d heard from the other teachers what great progress I’d made. (I looked for the note later but have
misplaced it.) Mlle Boulanger was the first pivotal figure in my compositional development: she showed me the incredibly high standards to which a musician should hold him or herself; that made an indelible impression.

My undergraduate training at Harvard was very disappointing. However, in my junior year, my roommate, who was also a music major, decided to take electronic music as an elective. Not to be outdone, I decided to take it as well. And that was a second turning point. Up until then, I had no interest in modern music. That course, which was taught by Ivan Tcherepnin, changed all that. I can only imagine how ridiculous those electronic pieces would sound today; but I loved the open terrain of new sounds and threw myself completely into the class.

Can you briefly describe your experience at the California Institute of the Arts and people who helped your artistic journey?

The biggest turning point of my compositional life was studying with Mel Powell at CalArts. He was the greatest teacher I ever had in any subject. Mel used to say that a teacher can say the same thing thirty-four times and the student doesn’t understand them; then the thirty-fifth time, the student thinks they thought it up themselves. The entire way I approach composing and teacher is rooted in Mel’s teaching. Too much to say right now, so I’ll continue later…

June 6, 2013

When I arrived at CalArts, I felt as lost as I’ve ever felt growing up. I had written a short scene for an electronic opera as my undergraduate thesis at Harvard. One of the thesis readers walked out and the other made a dismissive comment at the end. I was told by my advisor, Ivan Tcherepnin, that I had passed by “God's grace alone.” The same day, I was told I had received a prestigious fellowship to study electronic music at IRCAM. However, my eight weeks there were very frustrating: the computers kept crashing; I was so over-prepared that I ended up teaching a lot of the course. In the end, I didn’t succeed in writing any music. I had thought electronic music was my path into composing; but I saw the dangers of getting “lost in the machine.” So when I arrived at CalArts, I was at the low point of my confidence. I had the dream of being a composer but very little skill—and, frankly, not much apparent ability. Mel took me as a novice and turned me into a professional. As I’ve been thinking about the answers to your questions, I remembered the comments Mel wrote on my first year report card: he praised my progress and lauded my potential; it was the first time someone had said that I had talent as a composer. Those encouraging words—at such a critical time and from someone I respected so deeply—were life-changing for me. I served as Mel’s assistant for two years, co-founded and edited a music journal at CalArts called “Aperiodical” and won an ASCAP Young Composers Award for my Master’s thesis, “The Infinite Tiger.”
Studying with Mel was like an apprenticeship. He was very clear that the way to get the best out of him was to write music like he did. That’s what I did for the two and a half years with which I studied with him. My first finished work was a piano solo titled “Shifts.” I came into the lesson with the ending written as a long cascade of virtuosic arpeggios. Mel elegantly broke up the continuous rhythm into shorter, irregular fragments—he didn’t change any notes but made the flow more unpredictable. At the premiere, people came up to congratulate me and one friend said, “Beautiful ending!” To which Mel, braced on his cane, intoned in his deep baritone, “Thank you!” I felt comfortable enough with Mel to scold him afterwards for taking credit—“Don't do that again, Powell!”—but the story shows how master steered pupil.

But here’s the great thing about Mel’s teaching: its conceptual basis was so strong and so articulate that, in the end, you could write in your own style still using all of his principles. I remember sending Mel a piece a few years after I graduated. He was very kind but said he could no longer hear the “Powell” in it. I answered that it was always there—and, truth be told, it always will be. If I can find it, I’ll email you a tribute I wrote in his honor shortly before he died.

*Can you briefly describe your experience at Harvard for both your undergraduate and doctorate and people who helped your artistic journey?*

For my undergraduate years, I thank Ivan Tcherepnin for opening my mind to new music through the world of electronics. Dr. Yannatos, the conductor of the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, was also a great role model.

As a doctoral student, Karol and I developed a very close friendship with Earl Kim and his wife Martha. Earl was a great composition teacher: thoughtful, exacting, with incredible ears and a razor sharp sense of detail. I learned from him that “less is often more”: that musical ideas didn’t have to be over-crowded to be complex and engaging and that overwhelming the ear is often less effective than stating something clearly. He was great at sensing the essence of a musical gesture and showing you how to prune it down to its essentials.

He was also one of the greatest pianists I’ve ever heard: because of shoulder injury, he couldn’t play fast; but he had a supreme sense of touch and voicing—I’ve never heard anything like it before or since. We’d go over to their house regularly: Karol and Earl would rehearse lieder (primarily Schubert, Earl’s favorite composer); and then we’d all sit down for a game of poker. Sometimes, we would go to his favorite restaurant in Chinatown, where the owner would greet him enthusiastically and serve all the house delicacies. Earl had an incredible sense of humor and perfect comic timing; even more impressive, he seemed perpetually youthful. We moved to Houston in 1998. Earl was diagnosed with lung cancer and died in November of that year. It was heart-breaking loss to us. He’s more vivid in our memories than many people who are still alive.
The other great break for me was that Lucky Mosko, whom I didn’t have much chance to work with at CalArts, came to Harvard when I was there. Karol and I saw Lucky all the time: he taught us and introduced us to a lot of music. Harvard hired Lucky in part to direct a contemporary music ensemble; it was anticipated that would mean that Dorothy would be hired as its flute player. I can’t remember what happened, but that ended up falling apart and Lucky left Harvard before his contract was up. Lucky was the perfect counter-balance to Mel. In Mel’s view, a piece had to be well made first. Without skill, even the most interesting ideas would fail. Lucky was the opposite: he felt being adventurous came first; it was crucial to have something interesting to say; a composer could then acquire the particular skills to express him or herself in one’s own way. Whereas Mel gave me a technical and conceptual foundation for composing, Lucky challenged me to take risks. Mel and Lucky were close friends and I agree with them both—skill and risk!

*Can you describe your compositional style in general with regards to rhythm, harmony, text setting, and how you create musical ideas?*

This is a complicated question to answer; but in just a few words, I’d say that harmony is the basis of my song writing. A notated song is a fixed reading of the text. There are hundreds of convincing ways to sing a line of text. Why pick one over the other? To me, the answer is harmony. When I’ve created a harmonic progression that I believe is musically convincing—and has, to my ear, a sense of inevitability or inescapability—I then craft the vocal line within that progression. The challenge of doing this is that the vocal line has to have enough integrity as a melody that the listener can’t tell that it resulted from the harmony—I put a lot of effort into that!

In terms of creating musical ideas, Morton Feldman’s “Anxiety of Art” was very influential. One thing I got from that is to generate ideas without censorship or judgment and see where they lead. Once I’ve sketched something, I’ll see what else I can turn it into: those ideas that seem to lead to the most interesting places are the ones that I keep.

*How do you choose texts for your works in general?*

I have a simple criterion for choosing texts: I have to hear music in my head when I’m reading it. It can be just the germ of an idea, but it has to be something. There are many texts I would love to set but when I read them I only hear the words, nothing else. If I can imagine even just one phrase supported musically, then I start to feel confident that I can set the text.

*What was the catalyst for the Creeley cycle?*
Shortly after I arrived at Rice, the Dean, Michael Hammond, offered to fund a demo disc of the composition faculty: each of us would contribute one work. I decided to write something new—that was the catalyst for the Creeley cycle.

_How and why did you choose these particular six Creeley poems?_

The first poem I chose was “The Drums.” I remember that the very opening was one of the first passages I heard in my head. It then seemed to me that “The Rhythm” would make a good complement to “The Drums;” the titles are related; and “The Rhythm” speaks of the “time returning,” which suggested to me that I bring back material from the earlier song. The opening of “I Know A Man” also came to me right away when I read the poem. So the cycle assembled itself song by song based on my aural responses to the poems.

The only exception was “After Mallarmé;” it was originally written as an engagement gift for my wife. After I’d started to put together the whole set, I felt that “After Mallarmé” would make an interesting counter-weight to the rest of the cycle. So I revised it, making some small changes. It’s the only song not motivically connected to the rest of the cycle: I though this thematic “isolation” supported the meditative, private sense of the text.

Which leads to me to my conceptual vision for the cycle: Creeley makes his poetry out of everyday language. Taken one word at a time, his poetry is very direct and plain. However, his word combinations are much more paradoxical and electric. Take the line: “John, I said, which was not his name.” It’s plain English—but what does it mean? Why call him John if that isn’t his name? Out of shared language, he makes something very personal and uncommon.

So my idea in setting the text would be the use the building blocks of tonal music—our most deeply shared musical language—but assemble it both linearly and harmonically in unusual ways. Harmonically built from clusters, “After Mallarmé” would function as the one point which was truly separated from the shared language; the rest would take the “ordinary” in unexpected directions.

_Why did you choose soprano and piano accompaniment?_

I wrote the cycle for Karol. At that point, Musiqa didn’t exist yet and there wasn’t a professional contemporary ensemble in Houston; I was still new at Shepherd. So, voice and piano seemed a practical combination and one which I enjoy a lot as well. I’m very thankful to Brian Connelly, the great collaborative faculty pianist at Rice, who worked closely with me on the piano writing. (I know it’s still very difficult!)
What year did you compose the cycle and how long did it take you? What year did you write “After Mallarmé,” and did you make changes to the song to fit within the cycle?

The cycle was written in 1999. Karol and I were married in November 1990, which was when I wrote “After Mallarmé.” I can’t remember the original version but I do recall that the changes were relatively minor: I basically preserved the original song but made some adjustments to the pacing and vocal line. I can’t remember exactly how long it took me to write the cycle but I think two-three months.

What was your compositional process with this cycle? For example, how do you decide what you wanted the vocal line and accompaniment to sound like and what was your chronological process from start to finish. How did you know when you were finished with the cycle?

I never compose chronologically: that is, I am not a so-called “left to right” composer. Instead, I think of composition more like a developing photograph, with the entire image gradually coming into focus. I’ll work on multiple sections/songs at once, write backwards from the ending, basically follow wherever my ear leads me. One of my favorite feelings is when I change a detail here, it forces changes there: that’s how I sense that the piece is an inter-connected whole.

Knowing when one is finished is one of the trickiest parts of writing music. Composing takes more concentration than anything I else do. There comes a moment where my attention starts to leave the piece and I no longer feel like I’m holding it in my head. That’s when I consider myself to be done. It’s often a very emotional moment, because of the effort it’s taken me to get to the finish line.

August 18, 2013

Can you describe your artistic journey after your PhD?

My artistic journey since my PhD has operated on several fronts: giving myself the time and opportunity to write, which isn’t always easy; advocating for the importance of music in general and new music in particular in education and society, as a way of building a receptive community for modern works—that’s why I’m Artistic Director of Musiqa and also why I’m involved in brain science. I see the composing, producing, researching, and teaching as all part of one artistic whole.

I took a seminar a few years back which talked about the difference of sitting in the stands versus being on the playing field. After one particularly upsetting review, I spent a few years up in the stands. In the last couple of years, I’ve made it back onto the field. That’s greatly lifted my spirits; more than anything, I would like to stay there.
Can you share your thoughts regarding contemporary composition of our time?

I like to say that the greatest collective contribution of Western concert music since approximately 1900 is that it represents, as far any anyone knows, the first musical culture in the history of the world without a Common Practice. The breakdown of Common Practice resulted from a combination of artistic, social, political and even scientific factors. But, most importantly, it came from the recognition that music is “creative play with sound;” the diversity of indigenous musical traditions around the world are an indication of music’s open-endedness and flexibility. Have I sent you my Frontiers article on music and early language acquisition? It includes a more rigorous discussion of the definition of music.

I see the loss of Common Practice as contributing something unique and powerful to musical culture and can’t imagine that has happened is reversible.

Second, I see the roles of the arts as “bending, breaking and blending” what has come before--thus, the arts are extremely dynamic and in a constant state of reinvention. (I lay out the case for this in my TEDx talk and am currently co-authoring a book on creativity).

Rather than being guided by a steadfast vision of style or method, I like to take each piece on its own terms and not impose anything on in advance. Morton Feldman’s writings have particularly influenced me in this regard: his idea that the only way to achieve something original is to accept the anxiety of not knowing the outcome is something that made a strong impression on me.

Can you please share some of your future goals as a composer?

I would reduce my artistic goals to a few key phrases: explore new creative territory; write music that is worthy of multiple hearings.

I love collaborations as a way of getting outside oneself and forcing oneself into new situations. Here are some recent ones:

“The Birth of Something” - chamber opera with a libretto by playwright Will Eno (2006)
“America” for narrator and choir to poetry by Tony Hoagland (2007)
“Focus” for chamber ensemble with lighting designer Christina Giannelli (2010)
“Maternity” for soprano and chamber orchestra with a libretto by neuroscientist and author David Eagleman (2012)
“C O'Clock” - electronic musical installation with artist Jo Fleishhaeuer and composer Chapman Welch, to be performed for six months at the Market Square Clock Tower in Houston starting in late September (2013)
New chamber opera, with a libretto by playwright Neena Beber (in progress)
March 3, 2014

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VITA

Penny Shumate is a native of Waynesboro, Virginia. She received her Bachelor of Science in Voice Performance from Radford University in Virginia, and earned her Master of Music in Opera Performance from Temple University in Philadelphia. Robert Grayson was her principle voice teacher at Louisiana State University where she was awarded a full scholarship and expects to complete her Doctor of Musical Arts in Voice Performance and minor in Vocal Pedagogy with a 4.0 in 2014.

The New York Times has praised her for singing with “appealing bell-like clarity and surpassing sweetness.” She has been a frequent soloist at Carnegie Hall and at Lincoln Center has appeared at both Avery Fisher Hall and Alice Tully Hall.

She has sung with opera companies and orchestras across America including Baltimore Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Opera Roanoke, Opera Saratoga, Des Moines Metro Opera, Utah Festival Opera, Ash Lawn Opera, Annapolis Opera, Baltimore Concert Opera, Jacksonville Lyric Opera, Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, Acadiana Symphony Orchestra, Rapides Symphony Orchestra, Berkshire Choral Festival Orchestra, Little Orchestra Society of New York City, Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra, and the Kennett Symphony Orchestra, among others.

She is an award winner with the Gerda Lissner Foundation, Marie E. Crump Vocal Arts Competition, MacAllister Awards, New Jersey Association of Verismo Opera Vocal Competition, Annapolis Opera Vocal Competition, Octave Artist Management Excellence in Arts, James Parkinson Opera Competition, Kennett Symphony Orchestra Vocal Competition, and the Altamura/Caruso International Vocal Competition.