2014

A Performance Guide To Jake Heggie's From 'The Book of Nightmares'

Kristen Bauer Marchiafava
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations

Part of the Music Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2356

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO JAKE HEGGIE’S *FROM ‘THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES’*

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

Kristen Bauer Marchiafava
B.A., Loyola University New Orleans, 2003
M.M., Mannes College of Music, 2006
May 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my incredible committee, whose collective artistry, knowledge, and experience have helped me to realize my vision for this final project. Ms. O’Neill, your wisdom, grace, experience, and whimsical approach have guided me throughout this journey. You have helped me to find my voice in more ways than one, and for that, I will be eternally grateful. Dr. Loraine Sims, your technical approach to singing and pedagogy have given me a better understanding of the vocal instrument, and your passion for teaching has inspired new techniques in my own studio. Mr. Grayson, I will never forget your support throughout this journey. Your advice and coachings have helped me so tremendously, and your dynamic personality and legacy at LSU are inspiring. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with the LSU voice faculty, and I would like to thank Dr. Lori Bade, Mr. Dennis Jesse, Ms. Terry Patrick-Harris, and Ms. Sandra Moon for their help and guidance, as well as Dr. Daniel Novak for his time and expertise as my outside committee member.

Jake Heggie was instrumental in the completion of this performance guide. I feel so honored to have been given the opportunity to interpret such an inspired work. Thank you so much for your time, generosity, and artistic vision. Lisa Delan, your passion and interpretation of this piece are such a gift to the art form, and I thank you for your time and attention to detail in your responses. To Keilor Kastella and Caio Diniz, it has been a pleasure collaborating with you on this cycle, and I look forward to many more collaborations.

Without the influence of my early musical mentors, I would not have taken this path. Ellen Phillips Frohnmayer and the late Philip Frohnmayer, you were instrumental in the discovery and nurturing of my talent, and you were the reason I took such a chance changing majors to music my
fourth year in college. Special thanks also to Carol Rausch, David Morelock, Ruth Falcon, Anthony Manoli, Michael Borowitz, and Dugg Mc Donough for your guidance and artistry.

The love and support of my family has sustained me throughout my artistic endeavors. Thank you Shanon, Shelby, and Tia for helping me to keep it together to the end. Thank you Mom and Dad for the perfect example of love and tenacity. And thank you to my husband, Paul. You are my best friend and my biggest supporter. You have selflessly sacrificed throughout these ten years so that I could achieve my dreams.

Finally, this document is dedicated to my son, Daniel. May you always remember that without hard work, dreams are just dreams.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES ............................................................................................. vi

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ viii

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1: JAKE HEGGIE, COMPOSER ................................................................. 3
  Biography ......................................................................................................................... 3
  Stylistic Overview .......................................................................................................... 12
  Compositional Process .................................................................................................. 16

CHAPTER 2: GALWAY KINNELL, POET ................................................................. 19
  Biography ....................................................................................................................... 19
  Works and Style ............................................................................................................ 21
  The Book of Nightmares ............................................................................................... 25

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTION, PREMIERE, AND RECEPTION ......................... 29
  Conception ..................................................................................................................... 29
  Premiere and Reception ............................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER 4: PERFORMANCE GUIDE ................................................................. 33
  Overview ......................................................................................................................... 33
  You Scream .................................................................................................................. 37
    Text ............................................................................................................................. 37
    Performance Analysis ................................................................................................. 38
  In a Restaurant .............................................................................................................. 46
    Text ............................................................................................................................. 46
    Performance Analysis ................................................................................................. 47
  My Father’s Eyes .......................................................................................................... 54
    Text ............................................................................................................................. 54
    Performance Analysis ................................................................................................. 54
  Back You Go .................................................................................................................. 63
    Text ............................................................................................................................. 63
    Performance Analysis ................................................................................................. 64

CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................... 72

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................. 73

APPENDIX A: COMPLETE WORKS LIST FOR JAKE HEGGIE ...................... 76
  Opera and Stage Works .............................................................................................. 76
  Works with Chorus ........................................................................................................ 78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Song Cycles with Piano</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs with Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs with Chamber Accompaniment</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Songs with Piano</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestral Music</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber Music</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duo Pianos</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Solo</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEWS WITH JAKE HEGGIE</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPT OF E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH JAKE HEGGIE</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIPT OF E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH LISA DELAN</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM JAKE HEGGIE</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM GALWAY KINNELL</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 4.1 *Moby-Dick* chord progression ................................................................. 33
Example 4.2 “You Scream” mm. 1-4 ............................................................................ 34
Example 4.3 “You Scream” mm. 1-2 ............................................................................. 35
Example 4.4 “You Scream” mm. 73-80 ......................................................................... 36
Example 4.5 “You Scream” mm. 1-3 ............................................................................. 39
Example 4.6 “You Scream” mm. 4-5 ............................................................................. 40
Example 4.7 “You Scream” m. 20 ............................................................................... 40
Example 4.8 “You Scream” m. 23 ............................................................................... 41
Example 4.9 “You Scream” mm. 24-25 ......................................................................... 41
Example 4.10 “You Scream” mm. 28-30 ....................................................................... 42
Example 4.11 “You Scream” mm. 42-52 ....................................................................... 43
Example 4.12 “You Scream” mm. 61-64 ....................................................................... 44
Example 4.13 “You Scream” mm. 71-74 ....................................................................... 45
Example 4.14 “You Scream” mm. 78-82 ....................................................................... 46
Example 4.15 “In a Restaurant” mm. 1-4 ...................................................................... 47
Example 4.16 “In a Restaurant” mm. 14-17 .................................................................. 48
Example 4.17 “In a Restaurant” mm. 22-26 .................................................................. 49
Example 4.18 “In a Restaurant” mm. 31-39 ................................................................. 50
Example 4.19 “In a Restaurant” mm. 44-51 ................................................................. 51
Example 4.20 “In a Restaurant” mm. 65-72 ................................................................. 52
Example 4.21 “In a Restaurant” mm. 78-88 ................................................................. 53
Example 4.22 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 1-8 ................................................................. 55
Example 4.23 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 9-16 ............................................................................. 56
Example 4.24 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 21-28 ........................................................................ 57
Example 4.25 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 29-32 ........................................................................ 58
Example 4.26 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 42-49 ........................................................................ 59
Example 4.27 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 50-57 ........................................................................ 60
Example 4.28 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 58-60 ........................................................................ 61
Example 4.29 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 69-72 ........................................................................ 62
Example 4.30 “My Father’s Eyes” mm. 73-83 ........................................................................ 63
Example 4.31 “Back You Go” mm. 5-20 ................................................................................. 65
Example 4.32 “Back You Go” mm. 21-25 ................................................................................. 66
Example 4.33 “Back You Go” mm. 38-45 ................................................................................. 66
Example 4.34 “Back You Go” mm. 46-48 ................................................................................. 67
Example 4.35 “Back You Go” m. 49 ....................................................................................... 68
Example 4.36 “Back You Go” mm. 52-60 ................................................................................. 69
Example 4.37 “Back You Go” mm. 88-92 ................................................................................. 71
ABSTRACT

The document will examine the four songs of the cycle, *From ‘The Book of Nightmares,’* in detail and give suggestions for stylistic interpretation and performance. The written document contains four chapters: Chapter One provides biographical information and a stylistic overview of the composer Jake Heggie. Chapter Two contains biographical information and a stylistic overview for the poet Galway Kinnell. Chapter Three will provide information about the premiere and recording of *From ‘The Book of Nightmares,’* as well as biographical information about soprano Lisa Delan, for whom the song cycle was written, and reviews of her recording “The Hours Begin to Sing,” which contains the premiere recording of the cycle. Chapter Four will discuss in detail the songs of the cycle, including poetic and musical interpretation from the perspective of the composer, Ms. Delan, and the author, along with a performer’s guide. A Bibliography and Appendices will be included to provide transcripts of interviews and email correspondence with the composer and Ms. Delan, and a list of works for Jake Heggie.
INTRODUCTION

Jake Heggie’s opera *Moby-Dick*\(^1\) was, “an undeniable success: The end of its maiden voyage was greeted with a sustained, rousing ovation, with shredded programs fluttering down from the highest seating level.”\(^2\) The opera’s Dallas premiere and subsequent success, including the world television premiere of the opera by PBS in 2013 as part of Great Performances’ fortieth anniversary season, was a triumph for Heggie paralleled only by his opera *Dead Man Walking* in 2000. The American composer (b. 1961) has had considerable success in the operatic genre.\(^3\)

It is to the composer’s song compositions, however, that I turned when seeking a subject for my doctoral project. While performing in Atlanta in the Summer of 2013, I met Frederica von Stade, who had just returned from the premiere performance of a song cycle called *From ‘The Book of Nightmares.*’ She described the cycle as “hauntingly beautiful,” and encouraged all singers to explore the music of this masterful composer who has had an incredible impact on the genre of American song.

Throughout my research I was struck by the beautiful melodic lines and the unusual blending of popular and classical styles that permeate Heggie’s music, but most striking was his lyrical setting of the poetry. This is especially the case in *From ‘The Book of Nightmares.*’ The composer set four poems from the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Galway Kinnell. The poems were taken from *The Book of Nightmares*, a book-length poem that was influenced by Kinnell’s experiences during the Vietnam era, but were framed by images of life through the births of his

---

\(^1\) Libretto by Gene Scheer.


\(^3\) See a complete list of works in Appendix A.
two children. As a parent, Jake Heggie was able to draw from his own experiences to capture the joy which coexists with the nightmares and struggles of life.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the reader to Jake Heggie’s song cycle From ‘The Book of Nightmares’ by examining the four songs and offering performance suggestions. Chapter one will discuss the composer’s biography and compositions, including a discussion of his most important works and their critical reception, and will include an examination of his most influential teachers and colleagues. This section will also address stylistic influences and Heggie’s compositional process. Chapter two will explore the author of the text, Galway Kinnell, including a biography detailing his work as an author, professor, and social justice activist. Chapter three will discuss the commission, premiere, recording, and public reception of the piece, and the final chapter will provide a performer’s guide to From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’ Heggie’s own performance suggestions will be included for each song, as well as suggestions from Lisa Delan and the author. The following elements will be examined in each song: 1) text setting—this is most important to the composer as he feels that the story is first; 2) melody—range and tessitura; 3) ensemble—the relationship between singer, pianist, and cellist; 4) thematic elements—appearance and reappearance of motives throughout the work and the relationships between the songs; 5) stylistic elements—tempi, dynamics, and articulation suggested by the score and composer suggestions. Appendices will be included to provide additional information about Jake Heggie and From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’
CHAPTER 1
JAKE HEGGIE, COMPOSER

Biography

“The story is the most important thing because if the story is valuable, the right words will emerge…and the right way to tell the story, and from that will come the music.”

The music of Jake Heggie’s life, a life which New York Times writer Paul Blumenthal calls “Operatic” in his article titled “For an Operatic Life, Check Out the Composer’s,” is for that very reason characterized by eclecticism. The journey taken by this composer who mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade calls “one of the dearest, gentlest souls God ever put on this earth,” has been far from ordinary.

John “Jake” Heggie was born on March 31, 1961 in West Palm Beach, Florida to John and Judy Heggie. Heggie’s father was a doctor:

He was an M.D. who served in Japan for a year after the Korean War was over. During the time I was growing up, my mom didn’t work—she was trained as a nurse, but she stayed at home to raise four children, so the demands weren’t on both parents’ careers, just my dad’s. He liked to move a lot because it kept things fresh and exciting for him—and kept his depression demons at bay for a while.

The family finally settled in Bexley, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus. It was in Ohio at the age of 6 that Heggie became interested in the piano. “Heggie loved the instrument…. He already liked music, thanks to his father, who played jazz saxophone for fun and had introduced him to big-

---


6 Jake Heggie, email correspondence with the author, February 7, 2014.

7 Blumenthal.
band music and jazz by spinning records by Tommy Dorsey, Herb Alpert, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee at home.”

John Heggie’s tragic death is a painful subject not often talked about by the composer, but an experience from which he drew when composing Last Acts for the Houston Grand Opera. “He was 10 when his father, an Army doctor and amateur saxophone player who had served [in Japan after the Korean Conflict] and was struggling with depression, left their house outside Columbus, Ohio, one day and vanished. They found him three days later in a field where he had shot himself. Jake’s mother, a nurse, had to break the news to him and his two older sisters.”

When asked what he remembered about the incident, Heggie recalled:

He was a very sick man, alas. He suffered from terrible depression and had told my mom many times that he wanted to kill himself throughout their years of marriage. He was with a therapist, but back then they didn’t have the medications we have today – so there was nothing to help his suffering. It just got worse and worse. So, one day he just took off and killed himself where nobody could stop him or interfere. He needed to stop the suffering and felt the world would be better off without him.

Heggie immersed himself in his music—the only place he was always comfortable—and he continued to study piano.

Heggie’s interest in composition began at age eleven. He recalls, “I decided to compose because I thought, ‘Hey, I could do that.’” His early pieces featured lots of notes and gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his precocious virtuosity. Heggie says, “I was impressed with

---

8 Ibid.

9 There was actually an error in the New York Times article. The article stated that Heggie’s father served in Japan during World War II, but he actually served in Japan for a year after the Korean Conflict (See Appendix C).

10 Blumenthal.

11 Jake Heggie, Email correspondence with the author, Feb 7, 2014.

12 Jake Heggie, email correspondence with the author, March 2, 2014.
making lots of noise with lots of notes. I spent all my extra money from my paper route buying scores, records and especially music paper.”

In high school, Heggie’s family moved from Ohio to Martinez, California. After the death of his father, his mother wanted to move closer to family. “Mom decided we would move to California where her sister lived, and I was like, ‘yes’! I was really ready to get out of Ohio. I had a great childhood there, but I was ready to get out. I was not happy there.”

Though excited about the move, the music scene proved to be even less active in Martinez, California, than it had been in Ohio. “I came from a school where there were two orchestras, two bands, a choir, an opera and musicals. College Park High School was culturally deprived. They had a marching band and a jazz band. I wound up playing the Grieg piano concerto with a band arrangement.”

It was in California, however that Heggie met his first great artistic mentor, Ernst Bacon, in 1977. “There was a group called Performing Arts Society and it was mostly these aspiring composers. Most of them were women in their forties, fifties, sixties, and once a month they’d go to Ernst Bacon and show him what they were working on, and he’d do a sort of a class lesson. So I tagged along a couple of times, and I liked him so much and what he had to say that I asked if I could study privately with him, and he said yes.” According to Heggie, the private tutelage of Ernst Bacon, which began in 1978, “opened the door to what music could be.”

---

13 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, November 17, 2013.
14 Ibid.
passion for setting text began with Ernst Bacon, who introduced him to the poems of Emily Dickinson, whose poetry the composer adapted in 1995 to win the G. Schirmer Art Song Competition. “The most valuable [lesson from Ernst Bacon] was about word setting and connection to the text—a deeply personal connection…He was the foundation that set me on the whole route of art song. Because before that, everything to me was a Broadway ballad.” Bacon helped Heggie to find this personal connection through various exercises.

First we started writing canons, and then we started writing three-part counterpoint, but the canons were always based on someone’s name. So you’d take someone that mattered to you and their name, and you’d figure out a tune based on the letters in their name, so what he was giving me was that there was a personal connection to the line that you were writing. It wasn’t just this abstract thing. It wasn’t just an academic exercise. It had emotional meaning.

Ernst Bacon helped Heggie to develop a technical understanding of harmony and voice leading, but perhaps his greatest influence was in helping Heggie to begin to find his voice as an emotionally-connected song composer.

Jake Heggie’s own personal struggle with his sexual identity began to wreak havoc on his development as an artist, however. The self-doubt that had plagued him since his father’s suicide when he was ten began to resurface as he struggled to find his place. He knew in 1979 that his life would be about music, but he also knew he was gay, and it terrified him that someone might find out. Heggie attended schools where it was not acceptable to be gay. It was ingrained in him that gay people were bad, and he did not want to be a bad person. So he suppressed these

---


20 Ibid.
feelings. He buried himself in piano and composition because it was the one area in his life where he felt powerful and successful.

After seeing a poster in high school French class about the American College in Paris, Heggie applied. He hoped to escape his emotional baggage and meet like-minded people. “Burying myself in music felt like a really safe, empowering place, and running to Paris felt like a great place to find out who I was.”\(^1\) For Heggie, Paris was a liberating experience. It was there that he was introduced to classical singing. He immersed himself in the cultural arts of Paris while composing and studying piano.

After two years in France, Heggie felt pressure from his mother to return home. So, in 1981 he left Paris and returned to California to study at UCLA with pianist Johana Harris. Friends and former teachers recommended her very highly because they knew she would be a great complement to Heggie’s style. At UCLA, he began to fit in and found some like-minded company, or “music geeks” as he affectionately calls them. Heggie remembers this time in his life very fondly because through Johana Harris he began to understand what being a composer fully entailed. “It really was not just about the notes, but the composer, and what was going on in their life at the time they wrote this. What were they reading? What were they listening to? Who were their friends and influences? Why did they write this piece? What compelled them to take the time to put these notes on the page? ‘Cause as a composer, I can tell you. It takes a commitment.”\(^2\)

Heggie had had several great teachers before Johana Harris, but none of whom talked about music the way she did. He was completely in awe of her. “She was the most natural

\(^1\) Ibid.

\(^2\) Ibid.
musician I have ever met where music was her first language. It was in the core of her. . . . What I didn’t realize was happening was that not only had she become very fond of me, but she had fallen in love with me. And that was terrifying.”

At the age of twenty-one Heggie married his teacher who was nearly seventy. Heggie justified the union because he thought it would be more acceptable to his family and friends than the truth—that he was gay. “If I have one regret in my life it’s that I wasn’t strong and wise enough and really independent enough at that time to really put things in perspective. ‘Cause she and I should have been great friends our entire…you know…till she died. And instead, I let her believe that I was in love with her as she was with me, and then we got married, because she wanted to get married, and it was really tough.”

The pair became a two-piano team and traveled performing. Through Harris, he met Leonard Bernstein, John Browning, Lorin Maazel, William Schuman, and Isaac Stern. After a year of denying his feelings, Heggie was finally able to confess to Johana his homosexuality—a fact which she likely already suspected. She understood but would not accept divorce as an option, so the couple remained married and opted to live a celibate life. Heggie graduated from UCLA in 1984 and helped to create a composer’s group called Lo Cal Composers. He began to claim his identity as a creative artist but realized he still needed more education and experience, so in 1986, he began graduate school at UCLA. As a graduate student, he was afforded the opportunity to turn pages for performances at the UCLA Center for the Performing Arts where he was privileged to be onstage with Leontyne Price, Montserrat Caballe, Renata Scotto, violinist Itzhak Perlman, and many others. This experience for him only enhanced his overall vision of emotionally-connected artistry.

---


24 Ibid.
During his graduate school years, Heggie began to develop a condition called focal dystonia, in which the fingers of his right hand curled up uncontrollably. Because of this condition, he was forced to quit performing. Devastated by this news, he stopped playing and composing and left graduate school. Although he had already revealed his sexual orientation to his family and friends, he remained married to Johana Harris. Heggie’s identity up to this point had been as a musician, and the debilitating hand condition left him questioning his identity once again.

In 1991 Johana developed cancer and retired from UCLA in 1993 at the age of eighty. The couple decided it was time for him to move on. Johanna did not want him to stay in Los Angeles out of obligation to her. So in 1993 Heggie made the fortuitous move to San Francisco, where he was eventually offered a job at the San Francisco Opera as the company’s writer.\textsuperscript{25}

The move was important for so many reasons. First, I needed to start living my own life as a gay man, and Johana recognized and supported that. We always remained very close and the best of friends, and she was more than understanding. I was feeling stifled professionally and personally in Los Angeles and knew I had to start over in a new place—but not so far away that I couldn’t be near her or see her often. I also felt that if I was going to have a chance at pursuing a musical career, it would be much more likely in San Francisco. The cultural climate and the support for the arts are tremendous here. It turned out to be the right choice on all levels.\textsuperscript{26}

It was at the opera that Heggie began to receive the remarkable opportunities that would bring his music to the attention of important people in the world of classical music, such as Frederica von Stade. While working at the opera in Public Relations, he presented “Flicka”\textsuperscript{27} with some of his folk song arrangements, which he composed as a gift for her. Heggie met the


\textsuperscript{26} Savage, 12.

\textsuperscript{27} “Flicka” is Frederica von Stade’s nickname.
famous mezzo-soprano during the 1994 production of *The Dangerous Liaisons* by Conrad Susa. Von Stade instantly became one of Heggie’s biggest advocates and began programming his works on her recitals.\(^{28}\)

The instrumental support of Frederica von Stade gave Heggie the confidence he needed, and the composer entered and won the G. Schirmer song competition with a setting of Emily Dickinson’s poem, “If you were coming in the fall,” recorded by soprano Kristin Clayton.\(^{29}\) Very soon famous singers, including Renee Fleming and Brian Asawa were approaching Heggie for new compositions, and the humble composer was flattered but surprised.\(^{30}\) “I was surprised about the singers who approached me because the song literature is already so vast—but they were looking for pieces that they connected with on an immediate, personal and very American level.”\(^{31}\)

In 1995 after undergoing physical therapy, Heggie’s condition subsided and his technical prowess at the piano returned. He began to compose prolifically, as well as to concertize with singers. Harris and Heggie stayed in touch until her death that same year, and the couple never divorced.

In 1996, the San Francisco Opera commissioned Heggie to write an opera for their 2000-2001 season. Heggie had never composed for the genre before, but the company believed in his talent and took an enormous gamble. “They took a risk on me, and I took a risk, too, by jumping into such a big project. I knew I had the drama for an opera in my music, but I never realized I

---

\(^{28}\) Keenan, 7.

\(^{29}\) Robins.

\(^{30}\) Keenan, 8.

\(^{31}\) Jake Heggie, email correspondence with the author, March 2, 2014 (See Appendix C).
could do it on such a large tableau.” The same year, Jennifer Larmore was the first of many to record his songs. Her album *My Native Land* included five of his songs, and in 1998 BMG recorded a collection of his songs. “The Faces of Love,” featured Renee Fleming, Sylvia McNair, Frederica von Stade, and other famous artists.

In 1998, the general director of San Francisco Opera, Lotfi Mansouri, officially announced the premiere of *Dead Man Walking* and named Heggie the company’s first composer-in-residence. “I owe everything to Lotfi. Who gets a break like that when you’re on the PR staff? I was called in to see him, and I thought I was going to have to write another press release or a speech. Instead, he said, ‘I’m going to send you to New York to meet Terrence.’ I thought, ‘I can’t believe it. Are you sure you have the right guy?’” *Dead Man Walking* connected Heggie with some of the most sought-after talent in the operatic genre, including playwright Terrence McNally as librettist, Joe Mantello as director, Patrick Summers as conductor, and a cast that featured superstar mezzo-sopranos Susan Graham and Frederica von Stade. The opera premiered at San Francisco’s War Memorial Opera House in October 2000 and has been produced in over fifty productions on five continents.

Due to the success of *Dead Man Walking*, Heggie was finally able to focus solely on composition. From 2000-2002, he was composer-in-residence for Eos Chamber Orchestra in New York, and that summer he premiered his song cycle *The Deepest Desire* at the Vail Valley Music Festival. *The End of the Affair*, his opera based on the novel by Graham Green, opened in 2004 in Houston, and *To Hell and Back*, Heggie’s one-act retelling of the Persephone myth,

---


premiered in 2006. His opera that was originally titled *Last Acts (Three Decembers)* debuted in Houston in February of 2008.

Heggie’s most recent success has been as epic as the novel on which it is originally based. *Moby-Dick*, with a libretto by Gene Scheer, was commissioned by a consortium of five opera companies, including the Dallas opera, where the work premiered in 2010. The opera’s 2012 San Francisco production was filmed for the 2013 PBS world premiere broadcast as part of Great Performances’ fortieth anniversary season. Heggie is working on an innovative “choral opera” called *The Radio Hour*, which will premiere in May of 2014 by the John Alexander Singers of the Pacific Chorale. The Dallas Opera has announced the commission of Heggie’s next opera, *Great Scott*, with librettist Terrence McNally, the librettist of *Dead Man Walking*. And, in February of 2015 the Berkeley Symphony will be the first to perform an orchestral version of *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire.*

Jake Heggie currently lives in San Francisco as a free-lance composer with his husband Curt Branom and their son.

**Stylistic Overview**

When asked to describe his own compositional style, Heggie does not hesitate. “Lyrical drama.” According to the composer, his music has a very American sound with lyricism and a long vocal line that is in service to the drama. “In that way it’s very much related to the traditional opera world…maybe of *bel canto* because I’m always looking for that long line.” Heggie is known by others as an expert at crafting beautiful, singable melodies. It is for this

---

34 Originally written for mezzo-soprano and string quartet (2012).


36 Ibid.
reason that his compositions consist mostly of vocal works. His compositions for voice include
five full-length operas, three shorter “operatic scenes,” eleven works for chorus, and more than
two-hundred songs.

When asked why his compositions focus mainly on the human voice, Heggie explains,
“The voice still takes my breath away. It is the most expressive, most magical instrument ever.”
And, while he has received most attention for his operatic compositions, it is the American song
that permeates his overall compositional output.

I love songs. I’m a songwriter by heart and by nature so that’s why I keep going back to
it. It’s the kind of texts that I’m drawn to that there seem to be recurring themes. As I get
older and I set more texts, I realize what it is that draws me in. The song and the song
cycle is a great form to explore all that stuff, but it’s the text that keeps drawing me back
more than anything.38

While studying with Ernst Bacon as a teenager, Heggie discovered the art of song
composition and started setting his own texts to music. His soprano song cycle, Songs and
Sonnets to Ophelia, begins with original text, and On the Road to Christmas, a cycle for mezzo-
soprano, ends with texts by Heggie. While he sometimes uses his own texts, Heggie most often
turns to the poetry of great American writers, such as Emily Dickinson, Maya Angelou, and
Terrence McNally. Although he originally had aspirations of becoming a Broadway composer,
Heggie discovered that he excels at song composition.39 He admits that he focuses on what he
does best.

I found out that what I do well is to bring out the things that I love about musical
theater—the pacing, the story telling, the clarity with words, the clarity with characters—
and bring that to the opera house, but write well for opera singers, so that we have the
best of both worlds, which is what I think all along… that’s what Mozart, Verdi, and

37 Savage, 11-12.
38 Keenan, 10.
Puccini…that’s what they wanted. They wanted to have that vitality and sense of pacing and thrill that we get from a great night of theater.\textsuperscript{40}

Because Heggie focuses on the story and the characters, a style emerges that is both praised and criticized for being eclectic. But Heggie explains that each piece is so different because his musical settings come from the nature of the poetry and the emotions experienced by the characters depicted. “The story is the most important thing because if the story is valuable, the right words will emerge…and the right way to tell the story, and from that will come the music.”\textsuperscript{41} Heggie says, “I think of it [my music] as lyrical.” It is this lyrical quality that makes his compositions work so well for the voice, and its emphasis on melody is what Heggie considers to be the most fundamental part of his songs.\textsuperscript{42}

Despite his own description of his compositional style, critics, such as Anthony Tommasini, have reservations about the eclectic nature of his music. Tommasini, a critic for the \textit{New York Times}, describes his songs as neo-Romantic, noting that “his harmonic language, rooted in tonality, is spiked with astringent bits of dissonance and enriched with murky Impressionistic colors.”\textsuperscript{43} Tommasini and others criticize Heggie and other modern American song composers for blending genres. “It's fashionable today to applaud creative artists who blur categories and blend elements of popular and serious traditions. But there is no inherent value in doing so, and there are a lot of pitfalls.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 17, 2013.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Carolyn Redman, “Songs to the Moon: A Song Cycle by Jake Heggie” (D.M.A. diss., Ohio State University, 2004), 10.


\textsuperscript{44} Tommasini.
Heggie, however, embraces the role of popular music in his work. “In these songs, the singer encounters the full gamut of the influences I grew up with: folk music, jazz, pop, opera, rock, art song. I encourage performers to embrace these elements in the songs and not shy away from them. If it feels jazzy, well, it probably is.”

If a musical situation calls for something jazzy, he composes it that way. And still, critics are frustrated by the use of popular styles within classical music. Critic for the American Record Guide, John Boyer, addresses this issue in a review of Heggie’s songs.

He’s clearly a multi-talented man, but his eclecticism is a problem. . . . Bernstein could write for the Broadway stage and the concert hall with equal facility, but he knew how to keep those talents separate. Heggie doesn’t. We are left with an eclectic hybrid that stubbornly defies classification.

Tommasini, however, groups Heggie in a category of “composers who have embraced the art song genre anew. Mr. Musto, Mr. Hagen and Mr. Heggie are serious and gifted musicians clearly enthralled with the singing voice and engaged by the practice of setting words to music. Mr. Heggie works especially hard to tailor his songs to the specific qualities of the artists who sing them. This diligence has won him powerful supporters, many of whom he first met while working in the press office at the San Francisco Opera.”

While working in the Public Relations department at the San Francisco Opera, Heggie’s talent was noticed by mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, and other world-class singers such as Renee Fleming, Joyce di Donato, and Brian Asawa, are also drawn to Heggie’s work when searching for new music to perform in recital. In the summer of 2014, for example, Kiri Te

---

45 Jake Heggie, The Faces of Love, Foreword.


47 Ibid.
Kanawa will perform new songs composed by Heggie to celebrate her seventieth birthday in Ravinia.48

**Compositional Process**

“Sometimes modern song composers try too hard. Jake doesn’t have to try; he’s a natural.”49

—Jennifer Larmore

This “natural” quality Heggie possesses seems to lie at the heart of his compositional process. He does not construct a harmonic trajectory before setting the piece. Although educated in the art of composition and harmonic analysis, Heggie chooses not to think about the logistics when composing a piece:

> I don’t analyze my music. I was terrible at harmonic dictation and analysis. I never think that way. I just feel it. And, it’s like, “That sounds right” or “That doesn’t sound right.” I don’t know what the name of the chord is. I really don’t. That’s for someone else who cares about it. That’s not what interests me. The feeling of it, and if it feels right to me inside, and I’ll know it.50

The composer credits his mentor and former-wife for his ability to trust his instincts and compose organically. For Heggie (and Harris) composition is more about trusting what sounds right.

> All the great composers—they weren’t sitting there analyzing their music. They were writing what sounded and felt right to them. You know? And afterwards somebody analyzed it and said “That was so ground-breaking.” But I don’t think they were groundbreaking in the moment and thinking, “I’m going to change the chord to this. That’s never been done.” They were listening to what was going on. They were all products of their time, and then pushing the envelope to something personal that they heard and felt. So, that process comes later, but it’s definitely not for me.51

---


49 Mermelstein.

50 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 17, 2013.

51 Ibid.
For Heggie, the compositional process begins with the poem. Heggie begins with the text before he sits at the piano. In a 1999 interview, Heggie stressed the importance of understanding the nuance of the text and poetry first. “I think you have to look between the lines and behind the lines and think about the character who’s talking. Who are they? What’s their frame of mind . . . All of these things count.”

This organic feature of Heggie’s compositional style is not an original concept. As a young composer, Heggie sought the advice of Roger Vignoles, who told him (paraphrased by Heggie), “If you’re really going to make music, you’ve got to mess with the poetry. You’ve got to mess with it all. Read a poem that a great composer has set. Read the poem, and then listen to what they did with that and what isn’t found in there when you read it. They’re messing with the poem. Because someone else would have set it completely different, but look what they did. And it feels so right. They weren’t just setting words. They were writing music.” And, Heggie says, it is music written in a way that you can understand it even if you do not speak the language. “So when I started writing music again, I said, ‘That’s what I need to aspire to.’ It’s that you know what’s going on, even if you don’t understand a word of English.”

Once Heggie has lived with a poem for a while, he says, “Suddenly a poem will just start singing to me.” At this point in the compositional process, he develops a theme or motif that permeates the entire piece. He recalls composing The Deepest Desire, a song cycle to texts by Sister Helen Prejean. The theme for Heggie, “represents a calling—an internal something that is very unstable that is pulling you in some direction, and maybe you aren’t even aware, but when

---

52 Keenan, 13.


54 Ibid.

55 Keenan, 13.
you get to it you’ll know.” Throughout the piece he uses the theme in various permutations, but the theme is ever-present and evolving.

Once the theme or motif has been established, Heggie says it will begin to evolve based on the dramatic direction of the piece:

“I need to know where I’m going dramatically. I have to have a basic sense of what the shape of the piece is going to be—the architecture: who it’s being written for, what forces, all of that has to be in my head. I guess I just need to dwell on that and the journey… the different threads of the journey that the piece is about.

Once the overall theme and the journey are planned, according to Heggie, the rest of the piece reveals itself organically. A composer who is “marvelously intrepid in his ability to match words and text,” Heggie continues to write innovative settings of America’s best literature.

56 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.
57 Ibid.
58 Keenan, 13.
CHAPTER 2
GALWAY KINNELL, POET

Biography

Charles G. Bell, teaching poetry at Princeton University during the winter of 1946-47, was approached by “a dark-schocked student, looking more like a prizefighter than a literary man,” who showed him a poem “maybe his first,” a Wordsworthian sonnet with “no modern flair.” Nevertheless he was astounded by the “romantic fierceness” of the last couplet. This poem was written by a young man who, he recognized, “could go beyond any poetic limits assigned.” The student poet was Galway Kinnell.60

Galway Kinnell emerged as a noteworthy American Poet when he won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983. Although he is not as well-known as other American poets, such as James Dickey or John Asherbery or James Merrill, the poet has distinguished himself, according to the Columbia Literary History of the United States, as one of the “deep image poets” or “surrealist” poets.61

Born in Providence, Rhode Island on February 1, 1927 to Irish and Scottish immigrants, Galway Kinnell is a self-described introvert and grew up in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, with a fascination for reclusive American writers, such as Edgar Allen Poe and Emily Dickinson.62

Kinnell attended public schools in Pawtucket until he received a scholarship to Wilbraham Academy in Massachusetts for his senior year. In 1944, the writer enrolled at Princeton University, where he met fellow student and aspiring poet W. S. Merwin. Kinnell’s Princeton education was interrupted in 1944 when he served in the U. S. Navy, but he returned to Princeton in 1946 for training in the naval officer training program. In 1947, he followed his teacher and

61 Ibid.
mentor, Charles G. Bell to Black Mountain College in North Carolina to experience Charles Olson’s “open form” theories.

After graduating summa cum laude from Princeton University in 1948 and receiving his Master’s degree in English from the University of Rochester in 1949, Kinnell worked for the University of Chicago in its downtown educational program. However, in 1955, he traveled to France on a Fulbright grant. In France, he taught at the University of Grenoble, and translated Rene Hardy’s novel *Bitter Victory* into French.63

The tragic death of his brother, Derry, in an automobile accident in 1957 began Kinnell’s obsession with death and mortality—an obsession for which Kinnell has received praise and criticism. Kinnell has used his poetry on death to come to terms with this family tragedy. In 1959 Kinnell received a Fulbright lectureship in Iran, returning to the United States in the 1960’s. The poet’s early years are marked by his experiences as a civil rights and anti-war activist. In 1963 he was active in the civil rights movement and joined the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in Louisiana. While working as a volunteer for the voter registration campaign in Louisiana, Kinnell was sentenced to a week in jail for his activities.

The sum of his experiences as a civil rights activist, world traveler, and anti-Vietnam war demonstrator, eventually surfaced through Kinnell’s poetic works. “One of the first voices to mark the change in American poetry from the cerebral wit of the 1950’s to the more liberated, political work of the ‘60s, Kinnell ‘is a poet of the landscape, a poet of soliloquy, a poet of the city’s underside and a poet who speaks for thieves, pushcart vendors and lumberjacks with an unforced simulation of the vernacular.’”64 Poet James Dickey once observed that Kinnell’s first

63 Calhoun, 3.

64 The Poetry Foundation, “Biography,” http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/galway-kinnell (accessed February 13, 2014). This is from the poet’s biography but the quote is by Vernon Young of the *Hudson Review*. 
book of poetry, What a Kingdom It Was (1960) was an authentic beginning by a poet who “recognized the difference between knowing something because you have been told it so” and “knowing it because you have lived it.”

In 1964 Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock was published, and the following year he married Inés Delgado de Torres. Soon, Kinnell became involved in public readings in protest of the war in Vietnam, including the highly publicized “Poets for Peace” reading at Town Hall in New York City. In 1966, his daughter, Maud, was born, and in the same year his novel Black Light was published. His son, Finn Fergus, was born in 1968 alongside his most studied book of poetry, Body Rags.

While Kinnell seemed to reinvent himself with the book-length poem The Book of Nightmares, which he dedicated to his children, his triumphant success was his 1982 book Selected Poems, which received the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The author’s national success earned him the Samuel F. B. Morse Professor of Fine Arts at New York University in 1985—the same year he divorced his wife Inés Delgado de Torres Kinnell and published The Past. A former MacArthur Fellow and State Poet of Vermont, Kinnell has been a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets, and in 2002, he was awarded the Frost Medal by the Poetry Society of America. Galway Kinnell lives in Vermont, and continues to perform public readings of his poetry.

Works and Style

The New York Times Book Review essayist Morris Dickstein called Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Galway Kinnell “one of the true master poets of his generation,” adding, “there are

---


66 Calhoun, xvi.
few others writing today in whose work we feel so strongly the full human presence.”

Kinnell is best known for connecting the experiences of normal, everyday life to much larger poetic, spiritual and cultural forces.

The poet has authored ten books of poetry, including *The Book of Nightmares*, *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*, *Imperfect Thirst*, and most recently *A New Selected Poems*, and *Strong Is Your Hold*. His *Selected Poems* won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1982, but the prize sought after by Galway Kinnell is the realization of his vision. Kinnell possesses “the ability to direct the imagination inward, linking a vision of the world to an understanding of the self.” Kinnell’s work is characterized by its humanity. “At a time when so many poets are content to be skillful and trivial, [Kinnell] speaks with a big voice about the whole of life.” Other works include his novel, *Black Light*, a selection of interviews called *Walking Down the Stairs*, and a book for children. The author has also translated works by Yves Bonnefoy, Yvan Goll, Francois Villon, and Rainer Maria Rilke.

Kinnell’s most praised and anthologized poems are mostly contained in his 1968 book *Body Rags*. Poems, such as “The Bear” use animal experiences to explore human self-awareness and consciousness. His poems are often frank and make use of unflattering imagery, but Kinnell embraces the ugly in his work. “I’ve tried to carry my poetry as far as I could, to dwell on the ugly as fully, as far, and as long, as I could stomach it. Probably more than most poets I have

---


68 Ibid.


70 The Poetry Foundation.

71 Ibid.
included in my work the unpleasant because I think if you are ever going to find any kind of truth to poetry it has to be based on all of experience rather than on a narrow segment of cheerful events.”\textsuperscript{72} Despite the animal and outdoor imagery contained in his poetry, Kinnell does not consider himself a nature poet. “I don’t recognize the distinction between nature poetry and, what would be the other thing? Human civilization poetry? We are creatures of the earth who build our elaborate cities, and beavers are creatures of the earth who build their elaborate lodges and canal operations and dams, just as we do…Poems about other creatures may have political and social implications for us.”\textsuperscript{73} Galway Kinnell has said that poetry should be “simply the voice of a creature on earth speaking.”\textsuperscript{74}

And, indeed, having heard Kinnell read or recite poetry, be it his own or written by someone else, one cannot fail to realize that his uncontrived, strong, and clear voice belongs to a person whose love for words and verse goes beyond his literary profession.\textsuperscript{75}

The form of Kinnell’s poetry has evolved throughout his lifetime. His earlier writings seemed “almost psalmodic.” His poem “Under the Maud Moon” from \textit{The Book of Nightmares}, as Rosanna Warren points out, illustrates the psalmody of his earlier poetry:

\begin{quote}
…the oath broken,
the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit, broken,
to be sworn again,
over and over, in the clouds, and to be broken again,
over and over, on earth.
\end{quote}

“‘Poetry, Personality, and Death’ (1971), offers Kinnell’s version of the other pattern: for poetry to avoid the self-absorbed, closed ego of our time, the poet must seek to get beyond his

\\textsuperscript{72} Gardner, 423.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
personality by going through it. He proposes that we ‘move toward a poetry in which the poet seeks an inner liberation by going as deeply into himself—into the worst of himself as well as the best—that he suddenly finds he is everyone.’”

Kinnell, who says, “I don’t know of any poetry whose music has moved me as much as that of Whitman; also the King James Bible,” often returns to Whitman when discussing his own poetry. “Whitman did not like us to see his troubled side. He wanted us to see him as he wished to be.”

Critics most often compare the poetry of Galway Kinnell to that of Walt Whitman because of its transcendental philosophy and personal intensity. Kinnell uses the poetry of Walt Whitman, but especially “Song of Myself” as a constant touchstone, and the poet was the editor for The Essential Whitman (1987). Thomas Gardner of Contemporary Literature notes that “It is Whitman’s embrace of the world around him which powers Kinnell’s poetry as well. Both are poets of empathy; both insist, with ringing conviction, I am the man, I suffered, I was there.”

In his book, The Past, Kinnell develops a new form and tone. The art becomes compressed and “exposes itself to greater psychic risk.” The poems become more subtle and economical. “Kinnell is now an artist so fully a master of his means, he can reinvent the sublime, in large or small format, in *basso profondo* or in a whisper.”

---

76 Gardner, 423.


80 Gardner, 423.

81 Warren, 23.

82 Ibid.
One theme which appears most often is an obsession with death and mortality. Some, including Robert Peters in his review of *The Book of Nightmares*, criticize Kinnell for his overuse of words, such as “darkness, light, bone/bones, haunted, existence, dying, graves, scars, rot.” Peters adds, “Consider *darkness*. Not only is the word sentimental; its vagueness belies precise meaning. The reader is lulled. A flag with darkness written on it goes up, and we are excused from any potent engagement with the poem. We experience a general gloom, a hissing blackness.”

Kinnell, however makes no apology for his obsession with death. His most recent volume of Poetry *Strong Is Your Hold* (2006), was titled after the last lines in Walt Whitman’s “Last Invocation”: “Strong is your hold, O mortal flesh, / Strong is your hold, O love.” Kinnell continues to approach the questions of life and death from a neoromantic perspective and asserts that living with death is the only way to live:

I doubt that, in serious poems, death and life can be separated at all. It is obvious that poems expressing a craving for heaven involve the death-wish. In the great poems affirming life we may be even more clearly in the presence of the hunger to die. Freud says: “The most universal endeavor of all living substance [is] to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world.”

*The Book of Nightmares*

To

MAUD and Fergus

But this, though: death, the whole of death, --- even before life’s begun,

---

83 Malecka, 29.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid, 40.

to hold it all so gently, and be good:
this is beyond description!
—Rilke

Galway Kinnell’s book-length poem *The Book of Nightmares* (1971) begins with this dedication to his daughter, Maud (b. 1966), and to his son, Fergus (b. 1968). Kinnell explains this dedication as follows:

From one point of view, the book is nothing but an effort to face death and live with death. Children have all that effort in their future. They have glimpses of death through fatigue, sleep, cuts and bruises, warnings, etc., and also through their memory of the non-existence they so recently came from. They seem to understand death surprisingly clearly. But now time passes slowly for them. It hardly exists. They live with death almost as animals do. This natural trust in life’s rhythms, infantile as it is, provides the model for the trust they may struggle to learn later on. *The Book of Nightmares* is my own effort to find the trust again. I invoke Maud and Fergus not merely to instruct them, but also to get help from them.

The experiences of the births of his children seem to have altered Kinnell’s approach to poetry and life. When Galway Kinnell first started writing poetry, his work was relatively formal, but with *The Book of Nightmares*, Kinnell began to “strip away formal, verbal, and even surface emotional constructs, anything that might dissipate or impede the poet’s continuing exploration of his deepest self and experience.”

When one interviewer asked Kinnell why his sense of the transience of human life became more intense, Kinnell responded:

Those little lumps of clinging flesh, and one’s terrible, inexplicable closeness to them, make one feel very strongly the fragility of a person. In the company of babies, one is very close to the kingdom of death. And as children grow so quickly, as they change almost from day to day, it’s hardly possible to put mortality out of mind for long.

---

87 Sources disagree as to whether this is a collection of poems or a single book-length poem. Some call it a collection of ten poems, each in seven sections.


The births of the poet’s two children are the framework of the poem.

When the poem began I knew the first section would be about birth, in particular the birth of my daughter, Maud. I didn’t know until later, when Fergus was born, and the form of the whole began to come clear, that the last section would include a description of his birth too. The two births are the framework of the poem.\(^91\)

Section I, “Under the Maud Moon,” sets the overall theme of *The Book of Nightmares*, which is also the theme of Heggie’s song cycle, *From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’* The last poem in this first section presents Kinnell’s desire for his daughter to find her way in the world after his death. We are presented with the raw emotion of a father who fears his own mortality—only fully realized through the birth of his first child. The final poem in Section I concludes:

> And in the days
> when you find yourself orphaned,
> emptied
> of all wind-singing, of light,
> the pieces of cursed bread on your tongue,
>
> may there come back to you
> a voice,
> spectral, calling you
> *sister!*
> from everything that dies.
>
> And then
> you shall open
> this book, even if it is the book of nightmares.

Kinnell recounts, “In *The Book of Nightmares* I seem to face time’s passing as if for the first time. It is bound up now with the twin fears that parents of small children feel, the fear of losing the children and the fear of leaving them.”\(^92\)

\(^91\) Ibid.

\(^92\) Calhoun, 74.
*The Book of Nightmares* is criticized for its preoccupation with death, but through the poem, Kinnell gives the reader his own true reactions to the experiences of fatherhood. Thomas Lask sums up the major themes in the poem as follows:

There is no more moving love letter to a young daughter than the lines Mr. Kinnell has written that begin, “I would blow the flame out of your silver cup.” One line in that passage sums up all the rest: “I would alchemize the ashes of your cradle back into wood.” Our lives begin a retrograde motion as soon as we are born, and men poison the time between the poles of life and death. One section, the sixth in the book, with its refrain, “Lieutenant! / This corpse will not stop burning,” stands for all the acts of cruelty to which the innocent are exposed. There is no more than enough violence in the book, but it is somehow dissolved into the overall mood of the work.”

Despite its raw look at life and death, *The Book of Nightmares* has the potential to appeal to all humankind, for we were all born and we will all die. What lies ahead beyond the human experience is a timeless question.

---

93 Nelson, 83.
CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTION, PREMIERE, AND RECEIPTION

Conception

“It was always the song literature that sparked my keenest interest—whereas opera cuts wide swaths on large canvas, art song allows for infinite shading with fine bristled brushes. Singing these texts is, for me, the highest intersection of music and literature.”

—Lisa Delan

The idea to set songs from The Book of Nightmares began on the floor of a book store in California with Lisa Delan, the soprano for whom the song cycle was written.

One afternoon I was sitting on the floor of Bay Books in Half Moon Bay, California, with my shoes kicked off, perusing volume after volume of poetry, and I happened to open the Kinnell volume The Book of Nightmares to “Little Sleep’s-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight.”

American soprano Lisa Delan is the director of Rork Music Company in San Francisco, and has been Director of the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation since 1996, and through her work with composer and patron of the arts, Gordon Getty, has been instrumental in helping Jake Heggie with his musical endeavors. Heggie credits Gordon Getty for having made personal contributions which have helped him to complete many of his projects, such as the recording of the album Here/After and the PBS telecast of Moby-Dick. “Pretty much any time I have gone to him for help with a project—an opera premiere or a recording, something like that—he has been really generous and very supportive of me as a composer and of my work. And Lisa is always the one who sort of helps to make that happen, and so I was thrilled to be able to write the piece for her as a thank you, and also because I believe in her as a performer.”

---

94 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
95 Ibid.
96 Rork Music Co. is a music publishing company in San Francisco, California.
97 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 17, 2013.
As a performer, Delan has won acclaim as “an interpreter of a vast repertoire,” but the soprano is best known for her interpretation of American song. Joanne Sydney Lessner of Opera News writes “Lisa Delan has established herself as a passionate advocate of contemporary art song, commissioning and singing the premieres of new works, as well as extending the life span of repertoire that might otherwise slip into oblivion.” The soprano premiered the title role in the world premiere of Gordon Getty’s Joan and the Bells in 1998, which she reprised in France, Germany, Russia, and the United States. Critics praised her “beautifully sung” premiere performance and characterized it as “refreshingly unpretentious.”

Delan and Heggie have been close friends for over a decade, having first collaborated when the composer prepared her for her performances of the folk songs he originally wrote for Frederica von Stade. The soprano later recorded the songs for PentaTone Classics on the album And if the Song Be Worth a Smile. Planning to record a new album of American song, Delan approached Jake Heggie in 2011 about a new song cycle. She recalls:

Jake had told me that he wanted to write a cycle for me, which was deeply meaningful. I love him dearly as a friend and as a composer, and just knowing he was thinking about it was a tremendous gift. When I began to develop the ideas that would become “The Hours,” I told Jake about the planned recording, and we began to think about poets. Once PentaTone had set a date for the recording, Jake made sure that the songs would be ready in time (including time for me, Kristin and Matt to prepare them with Jake), and that he could be at the recording session at Skywalker Sound.


99 International Record Review.

100 Gramophone Magazine.

101 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.

102 Pianist Kristin Pankonin, and cellist Matt Haimowitz are the artists who recorded the cycle with Lisa Delan on her album The Hours Begin to Sing (2012).

103 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
When asked why she chose these particular poems, Delan recalls:

I was immediately struck. Aside from the profundity of the narrative voice and the exquisite beauty of the language Kinnell uses in these poems, I was deeply moved as a mother as I knew Jake would be as a father. I purchased the book and went home and typed a word document containing the seven poems of “Little Sleep’s-Head” and sent them off to Jake. I received an exuberant email back from Jake that night. He loved the poems and proposed setting four of them to create the new cycle, and I loved his choices.\textsuperscript{104}

Heggie composed the cycle in January of 2012 and worked with Delan, pianist Kristin Pankonin, and cellist Matt Haimowitz, to prepare them for the recording that summer on the album \textit{The Hours Begin to Sing}. Delan first reacted to the pieces with goose bumps and tears.\textsuperscript{105} “It was as if the music must have been in the words all along. The experience was so organic. And I was completely overwhelmed that Jake had written such heartbreakingly beautiful music for me to sing.”\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Premiere and Reception}

The song cycle premiered May 19, 2013 at the Noe Valley Chamber Music 20th Anniversary Gala concert at Saint Mark's Church in San Francisco. Jake Heggie played for the premiere, along with Lisa Delan and cellist Emil Miland. The premiere was not reviewed, but Delan recalls, “My perception was that the audience was very much drawn in; there was a feeling of suspension, a kind of ‘held breath’ atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{107}

The recording of the cycle by Lisa Delan appears on her album, \textit{The Hours Begin to Sing}, which contains works by Bolcom, Corigliano, D. Garner, Getty, L.P. Woolf, and Heggie.

William Hedley’s review of the cycle criticizes:

\textsuperscript{104} Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
A child’s nightmare is the subject of Jake Heggie’s short cycle. Not every composer would have found Galway Kinnell’s poetry suited to musical setting, and you might not have grasped that the cycle is a “tender meditation about our brief, impermanent time on the planet” had the composer not told us so in the booklet. The musical language can be challenging, though there are sweeter sounds in the last song, a kind of lullaby as the child returns to bed.  

And one of the most important periodicals in opera and classical singing, *Opera News*, praises not only Heggie, but Delan for her “sense of ownership and true connection. Spooky cello harmonics and wispy piano roulades beckon the listener into Heggie’s looking-glass world. Delan approaches the first song, ‘The Nightmare,’ with tenderness and bright, poignant tone, and in the quirky ‘In a Restaurant,’ she imitates a loud child’s inappropriate expostulation (‘caca’) with deadpan authenticity.”

---


CHAPTER 4
PERFORMERMANCE GUIDE

Overview

Moby-Dick (2010), like his opera Dead Man Walking (2008), was a work so significant in Jake Heggie’s compositional development that it influenced all of his writing for the next several years. While composing From ‘The Book of Nightmares,’ he was working simultaneously on his song cycle, Camille Claudel: Into the Fire (2012), a chamber piece for mezzo-soprano and string quartet. According to the composer, these two pieces were greatly influenced by Moby-Dick. The main chord progression from Moby-Dick, according to Heggie, influenced the “sound world” of From ‘The Book of Nightmares’ in the same way that Dead Man Walking influenced his song cycle The Deepest Desire.\(^{110}\)

Heggie recalls of the Moby-Dick chord progression (Seen in Example 4.1):

Example 4.1 Moby-Dick Chord Progression

“When I found this, I mean, this is very Phillip Glass, but it made sense to me. Because while this is pulling up on the top (he plays the progression, highlighting the top notes of the chords) the bottom is going down and back up. So, it’s constantly undulating, and I really had never worked with that sort of texture before, and that dictated the entire opera basically. It’s based on these four chords, and so to find different permutations of that in the harmony and melody was really cool, but it’s almost crept into everything that I’ve written since then.”\(^{111}\)

---

\(^{110}\) Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.
The composer calls the progression “a meditation on a root position E-minor triad.” The functionality of the chords is represented in the Roman numeral analysis in Example 4.1, but simply put, it is an E-minor chord with contrapuntal elaboration.

Heggie has attributed the discovery of this compositional technique to his work on Dead Man Walking. “I learned that you can say a lot with very little. I learned the value of melodic and rhythmic gestures that repeat in different dynamics—leitmotifs, you could say, but beyond that gestures that might be just a drop in the pond, but the ripple effect is strong. I learned that it is important for the characters to each have a musical language that defines them so they are recognizable immediately…”

When composing From ‘The Book of Nightmares,’ Heggie was searching for a theme that was relentless (See Example 4.2).

Example 4.2 “You Scream” measures 1-4

This theme will be called the “nightmare theme” throughout the chapter. For Heggie, the theme (represented in measures 3 and 4 of Example 4.2) represents a nightmare that is two-fold: a child’s nightmare that wakes him in the night, and a parent’s nightmare. As a parent, Heggie

---

112 Jake Heggie, email correspondence with the author, February 26, 2013 (This email is not included in the appendix because it was only a description of this chord, which the composer describes as “a meditation on a root position E-minor triad”).

113 Keenan, 24.

114 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.
relates his own experience: “For us the nightmare is being separated or disconnected, or losing control, or knowing that we’re not always going to be around.”¹¹⁵ For Heggie, the piece takes the listener on a journey from the perspective of a parent through the development of this theme, or motive. The theme first appears at the outset of the piece in the piano (See Example 4.3).

Example 4.3 “You Scream” measures 1-2

The overall journey for the “nightmare theme,” according to Heggie, is represented in the transformation from the first appearance of the theme in Example 4.1 to the “love melisma” in the last movement (seen in the vocal line of Example 4.4). For Heggie, the piece illustrates the beauty of the temporal nature of life. “There is actually great beauty in the fact that it is only temporary because you really have to appreciate every moment.”¹¹⁶

All of the poems in the cycle are from Chapter VII of Galway Kinnell’s book-length poem The Book of Nightmares. The poems do not follow a chronological order or present a narrative. They do however seem to have an underlying theme, which is the realization of mortality through the experiences of parenthood. In the first song, “You Scream,” a parent soothes her sleeping child after a nightmare and realizes her own mortality. The second song, “In

¹¹⁵ Ibid.
¹¹⁶ Ibid.
Example 4.4 “Back You Go” measures 73-80

a Restaurant,” presents a caricature of a child’s disruption in a crowded restaurant. In the third song, “My Father’s Eyes,” the parent recalls the vision of her own reflection in her father’s eyes as he takes his last breath. Finally, in the fourth song, “Back You Go,” the parent comes to the realization that “the wages of dying is love.”

Each of these movements presents the theme in different permutations, and each instrument presents the theme. The vocal line most often represents the parent’s thoughts or words, but in some instances the vocal line takes the role of the child. The cello and piano take
on varying roles throughout the cycle. Heggie uses them to create a mood or “sound world.” In the second song, for example, the instruments create the sounds one would hear in a crowded, noisy restaurant. Other times the cello and piano represent an inner voice or ever-present idea. For example, the cello in the third song seems to take on the role of the ever-present reminder of mortality.

The level of difficulty for these songs for the singer is moderate, due to the often murky tonality and tonal juxtaposition among the instruments, combined with its rhythmic difficulty. Ever mindful of the singer and her ability to communicate text and story, Heggie has set all of these songs in a tessitura that lies in a soprano’s middle range, making these pieces wonderful tools for the voice studio for developing the middle voice while teaching intelligibility and interpretation of text. Understanding the poetic themes, tracking the development of the main theme, or “nightmare theme,” and identifying the roles of the instruments will enable the performer to deliver a successful, engaging performance of From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’

**You Scream**

**Text**

You scream, waking from a nightmare.

When I sleepwalk
into your room, and pick you up,
and hold you up in the moonlight, you cling to me hard,
as if clinging could save us. I think
you think
I will never die, I think I exude
to you the permanence of smoke or stars,
even as
my broken arms heal themselves around you.

---

117 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.

118 The representation of the range of each song will appear in the performance analyses.
Performance Analysis

Vocal Range:

The first song of the cycle, “You Scream,” is the first poem in Chapter VII of The Book of Nightmares titled “Little Sleep’s-head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight.” The poem tells the story of a mother waking up to the screams of her child, who is having a nightmare. Through this experience, the mother realizes there will come a day when she is not able to soothe her child in his time of need. This opening song presents the underlying musical and emotional theme of the piece, which is an ever-present nightmare. When preparing this piece, Lisa Delan discovered the importance of this first song:

In many ways this is the hardest of the four songs; you are establishing the relationship between the parent and child but entering through the lens of the child’s visceral experience. Whereas the other songs evoke humor or tenderness, there is a great tension and passion contained in this song, and a balance must be struck…the tremendous vulnerability of a parent is held here; the dichotomy of omnipotence and impotence, the profound duality of responsibility and surrender.  

The piano has the first appearance of the “nightmare theme,” (See Example 4.3 on page 35) which is tonally unstable and pulls in both directions, much like the main chord progression in Moby-Dick, which seems to create an unstable image of riding the waves in the ocean. This same instability is illustrated throughout the piece by the reappearance of the nightmare motive. Heggie sees the nightmare as two-fold. It is not only the sleeping child’s nightmare, but the nightmare of the mother in her realization of her own mortality and the future of her child once she is no longer present. Table 4.1 outlines the emotional journey in the first movement.

---

119 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
Table 4.1 Emotional Journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Numbers</th>
<th>Emotional Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-29</td>
<td>The child experiences a nightmare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>The mother hears the child screaming and enters his room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-77</td>
<td>The mother first realizes her own mortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-97</td>
<td>The mother desperately clings to her child and the present.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The movement begins with a child’s nightmare, which is characterized by the restless intonation of the “nightmare theme”—first by the piano and then echoed by the cello. The piano presents the theme in the right hand in measures 1 and 2. Heggie establishes the anxiety of the child with a duple meter (8/8) that is uncharacteristically notated 3+3+2 and marked “restlessly” (See Example 4.5).

Example 4.5 “You Scream” measures 1-3

However, when the cello enters at measure 3 with the theme, the piano plays an undulating pattern of 16th notes which are subdivided into 4 beats per measure, so that there is 3+3+2 in the cello against 2+2+2+2 in the piano. This creates rhythmic instability and an immediate sense of struggle, as the instruments compete for rhythmic dominance. This struggle presented in measures 1-30 represents the child’s nightmare. The cello’s first entrance at measure
3 is marked “very smooth” as if it were the child being roused from his sleep by the nightmare.

In measure 5, the theme is rhythmically subdivided and accented (See Example 4.6).

Example 4.6 “You Scream” measures 4-5

These devices could perhaps represent the child’s fear and subsequent panic and racing heartbeat. The various effects used throughout the instrumental prelude, including rhythmic accents and *sul pont.*\(^{120}\) by the cello, effectively create a child’s thrashing and screaming in the panic of a nightmare. In Example 4.7 the meter changes to 10/8 with the marking *poco*

Example 4.7 “You Scream” measures 24-25

\(^{120}\) An abbreviation for *sul ponticello*, which means “near the bridge.”
accelerando. The uneven phrases marked by the composer in the cello create an effect that imitates a disoriented mother awakened by the sounds of her screaming child, who only fully awakens at the end of the poco rit. at measure 23 (See Example 4.8).

![Example 4.8 “You Scream” measure 23](image)

Measure 24 returns to *Tempo I* as the mother, now awake, fears for her child. Now the instruments represent both nightmares as a thicker, more articulated texture ensues (See Example 4.9).

![Example 4.9 “You Scream” measures 24-25](image)
The prelude concludes with the screams of the cello in measures 28-30 (See Example 4.10), representing the screaming child, perhaps screaming, “Mama!” Delan notes, “Jake’s scoring for cello in this song is ingenious—he is well familiar with Matt’s extraordinary range as a cellist, and used this to great effect in the opening as the cello ‘tosses and turns’ and becomes increasingly feverish until it screams into the ‘nightmare waking’ of the vocal line” (See Example 4.10).122

Example 4.10 “You Scream” measures 28-30

The next section is marked “slower,” and the composer stresses the importance of maintaining the slower tempo throughout measures 30-41.123 As Tempo I returns at measure 42 (See Example 4.11), a duet between soprano and cello imitates the clumsy wandering down the hall of a mother who is still half asleep. When the piano returns at measure 51, the soprano must color the word “moonlight.” Heggie explains, “There is a little bit of a sense of magic happening when you say the word, ‘moon’… it has to conjure… that magical feeling.”124

---

121 Matt Haimowitz is the cellist for whom the piece was written.

122 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.

123 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.

124 Ibid.
Example 4.11 “You Scream” measures 42-52

For Heggie, this song gives us the first glimpse of the mother’s own sense of mortality (See Example 4.12). As she consoles her child in the dark room, lit only by the moonlight, she becomes aware of her mortality—of a day when she will not be there to console her child.
Example 4.12 “You Scream” measures 61-64

Heggie establishes this underlying sense of doubt with the mocking echo of the cello after she sings “I think you think I will never die” in measures 62-63 (Note the change of dynamics to *forte* in measure 63 by the soprano).

After a frustrated outburst by the mother from measures 63-68, in which she says, “I think I exude to you the permanence of smoke,” she finally submits to her overwhelming sense of mortality, illustrated by the *decrescendi* in the following measures. In Example 4.13, the
Example 4.13 “You Scream” measures 71-74

*portamenti* on the word “stars” in measures 71-74, according to the composer, represent a “loving caress and sigh.”\(^{125}\) Heggie suggests a *portamento* with *vibrato*, toward the end of the measure.

A dramatic shift of thought and mood happens at measure 78, which, according to the composer, is the first real sense of tonality in A-major by the piano. The cello continues to create

\(^{125}\text{Ibid.}\)
unsettling echoes that contradict the piano in its tonality (See Example 4.14). This contradicting cello part represents the mother’s inner turmoil.  

Example 4.14 “You Scream” measures 78-82

Heggie says:

There is a little bit of a desperation in the last bit of it. “Even as my broken arms heal themselves around you,” and that’s when you… all of a sudden you’re holding as tight as you possibly can. Which is why it gets more and more intense…. To your child you’re trying to be strong, but the minute their head is turned there is a sense of desperation. You’re clinging to them as hard as they are to you.  

In a Restaurant

Text

In a restaurant once, everyone
quietly eating, you clambered up
on my lap: to all
the mouthfuls rising toward
all the mouths, at the top of your voice  

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Heggie omits, “at the top of your voice” from the original poem.
you cried
your one word, caca! caca! caca!
and each spoonful
stopped, a minute, in midair, in its withering
steam.

Performance Analysis

Vocal Range:

As the second movement begins, the listener is taken to a restaurant. The *pizzicati* of the cello and the syncopation of the piano oscillate between 6/8 and 5/8, giving the listener a sense of the back and forth traffic of the wait staff, as the theme has now evolved rhythmically and melodically to take on the character of the child. Heggie says of the motive’s evolution in this song, “The second song takes the 8/8 rhythmic pattern of 3+3+2 and stretches it out to 3+3+2+3 (i.e. 6/8 & 5/8 instead of straight 8/8) -- and then plays around with it, because the text is playful and fun (See Example 4.15).”129

Example 4.15 “In a Restaurant” measures 1-4

---

“The notes in the figure are also leaps apart rather than close together as in the first song…. This is just precious and elegant, and you can hear teaspoons sort of hitting on the plates.”\textsuperscript{130} The tempo marking is “very polite, not too fast,” and the cello is instructed to play a gentle \textit{pizzicato} in G-major.

As the singer begins, she must communicate a quiet sense of decorum, as the soprano part is marked \textit{piano}. This song is a caricature of a child’s disruption in a crowded restaurant. As a parent, Heggie has experienced attempting to bring a small child out to a restaurant, which any parent knows is quite a feat if successful. The challenge for a parent when faced with such a task is maintaining decorum. At any moment, an elegant dinner could result in catastrophe.

In measures 1-20, the soprano successfully maintains a sense of elegance and decorum as she sings her long, legato phrases over the disconnected \textit{pizzicati} of the cello. The sweet humming at measure 16 almost seems to be a celebratory hum by a parent who has successfully avoided public embarrassment (See Example 4.16).

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
The sense of key is lost at measure 22 as the cello paints a picture of the clumsy climb of a child into his mother’s lap (See example 4.17).

Example 4.17 “In a Restaurant” measures 22-26

Delan notes, “I love that even as the parent recounts, with palpable laughter, the antics of the young child, the music itself speaks the child’s language—the fidgeting between the 5/8 and 6/8 meters, the sudden sweeps of motion, the toddling push and pull of the tempo.”\(^{131}\) As the mother continues to overzealously attempt to create a sense of decorum at measure 31 (See Example 4.18), Heggie says, “Suddenly, the child has emerged as being in control of everything because they’re going to take the room for a minute.”\(^{132}\) At this point in the piece, he suggests, “Go baroque. It should sound completely different… this is the child. The child is determining what’s going to happen.”\(^{133}\) This sense of a shift in control is colored by a shift in key to E-flat major.

\(^{131}\) Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author.

\(^{132}\) Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 17, 2013.

\(^{133}\) Ibid.
Example 4.18 “In a Restaurant” measures 31-39

At measure 34, Heggie says, “While you’re trying to maintain this decorum, suddenly this is a description of what the child is doing.”

At measure 44 (Example 4.19) the soprano becomes the child, and must proudly and happily communicate the fact that she has something very important to say, before she blurts out

\(^{134}\) Ibid.
a *forte* “caca!” It is important that the singer give both notes accent and sing the notes for their full duration.

Example 4.19 “In a Restaurant” measures 44-51

Heggie warns, “Don’t do them too short, so that people really get them.” He also advises, “Take your time on the last one so that each one is a little different.” The composer also calls for a bright, straight tone. Each “caca” should have a different feel in order to communicate a childlike personality. The third “caca” at measure 50 should be suspended just a bit to give the listener a sense of anticipation. The entire measure of rest at measure 51 represents everything in the restaurant coming to a halt in response to the child’s unexpected exclamation. In the very

---

[135] Ibid.
next measure, however, the hustle and bustle begin and things return to normal. The soprano is once again the mother trying to regain a sense of decorum after the incident.

At measure 69, *Tempo I* returns (See Example 4.20).

Example 4.20 “In a Restaurant” measures 65-72

The text, “in its withering steam,” recalls a brief sense of fleeting time, with the image of the escaping steam withering away. In order to paint the word “steam,” Heggie suggests
anticipating the consonant “s” on the fourth beat of measure 70 to give the hissing sound of escaping steam (See Example 4.20).136

The instrumental postlude suggests that all return to normal as the cello and piano in their rising parallel sixths end in a G-major chord in second inversion (See Example 4.21). The accelerando paints the picture of the curtain gaining momentum as it closes on the scene.

Example 4.21 “In a Restaurant” measures 78-88

Delan says, “I find the end quite moving, as the memory trails away like the vapor of the steam.”137 This is just another example of Heggie’s brilliance at setting text. He so expertly

136 Ibid.
137 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
captures the essence of this poetic snapshot of a child who is ever growing and changing. Heggie says that this movement is necessary to the development of this cycle. “The thing any good composer looks for is something inevitable but still has surprises along the way.”

This charming piece, “In a Restaurant,” provides a surprising contrast to the first movement and demonstrates Heggie’s sensitivity to the human experience, which would not be human without laughter.

**My Father’s Eyes**

_text_

In the light the moon
sends back, I can see in your eyes

the hand that waved once
in my father’s eyes, a tiny kite
wobbling far up in the twilight of his last look

and the angel
of all mortal things lets go the string.

**Performance Analysis**

_Vocal Range:_

![Music notation]

“I cannot image a more poignant setting, nor one with more quiet power to break your heart.”

—Lisa Delan

The mood dramatically shifts in this third song to one of quiet introspection. Once again pondering her own mortality through the experience of motherhood, the mother is alone with her

---


139 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
child in his dark bedroom. In the key of A-minor, the piano and cello create a beautiful moonlight “sound world”\textsuperscript{140} with a tempo marked “slowly,” which seems to remain suspended in time with the piano’s steady, gentle repeated roulades. The cello is marked \textit{con sord.}\textsuperscript{141} and “very pale” as it repeats the same note (A, notated here in tenor clef) over and over throughout measures 1 through 12 (See Example 4.22).

![Example 4.22 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 1-8](image)

This repetition by both piano and cello creates for the listener a sense of inner turmoil, or a question that is longing to be resolved. Heggie cleverly keeps the listener waiting for that resolution.

\textsuperscript{140} Jake Heggie uses this term to describe the overall sound of his pieces. He prefers not to think of his music in terms of Roman numeral analysis.

\textsuperscript{141} A term that means, “with the mutes.”
The opening measures, for Delan, capture the essence of Kinnell’s poignant poem:

The beginning holds a steady but distant gaze, moving from the moonlight (“memory”) into the immediate intimacy of looking deeply into the eyes of your child—as the connection is made of the parent, once the child, to his/her own father, we return to the wavering distance of memory as it is released, like the string of a kite, into the vastness of the night sky.¹⁴²

As the soprano enters at measure 9 (See Example 4.23), she must quietly echo the cello with the same pale color, as if her thought began with the cello’s intonation of the note. Note

Example 4.23 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 9-16

the pencil markings in Example 4.23.¹⁴³ These markings were made by the composer in the author’s score and indicate a subtle crescendo at measure 12 on the word “light,” followed by a

¹⁴² Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
¹⁴³ Jake Heggie wrote these notes while coaching the pieces with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 17, 2013.
decrescendo at measure 14 on the word “moon.” This phrasing paints the image of the piercing light of the moon whose reflection causes the mother to experience an introspective emotional reaction before she voices her next thought. At measure 17 the cello plays the “nightmare theme” marked ppp as the piano continues with the same roulades (See Example 4.24).

Example 4.24 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 21-28

As the soprano takes on the theme in measures 22 and 23, the theme is in G-minor. Note again the composer’s pencil markings, which indicate a decrescendo at measure 21 on the word “eyes” and a mercato accent on the word “hand.” The text “once in my father’s eyes” should be one phrase, observing a poco rit. at measure 26 which immediately returns to a tempo at measure 27.
The rhythmic dichotomy Heggie creates between the cello and piano at measure 31 represents the dichotomy between natural and supernatural here as the vocal line paints the image of a kite wobbling delicately in the breeze (See Example 4.25) to represent the fleeting of her father’s natural, mortal life. The mood changes at m. 31, as the composer colors the kite imagery with a “new feel and spirit,” which he calls, “a little playful.” Heggie describes this sentiment as playful because the image of a kite brings to mind his own childhood.144

Example 4.25 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 29-32

Again note the composer’s handwritten notes in the author’s score. These handwritten notes allude to the composer’s interpretation of the poem. They indicate that the composer sees death, not as a sad, dramatic, jolting event, but as a kite wobbling playfully before being released into the wind.

---

144 While coaching this piece with the author, Heggie wrote these notes in the author’s score.
The interlude in mm. 42 through 49 returns to A-minor and is almost an exact replica of
the prelude in measures 1 through 8 (See Example 4.26). Here, Heggie repeats the idea of a
suspended sense of a desire for resolution through the repeated arpeggiated seventh chords.

Example 4.26 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 42-49

The daughter’s desire to cling to her father manifests itself here in the return of the
nightmare motive by the cello at measure 50, when the rhythmic dichotomy returns as 3+3+2 in
the cello against 2+2+2+2 in the piano (See Example 4.27). As the soprano sings the text, “and
the angel of all mortal things lets go the string,” Heggie keeps the rhythmic dichotomy which
creates a sense of the daughter’s hesitation to let go as the tonality shifts back to G-minor in
measure 56.
Example 4.27 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 50-57

As the she repeats the text, “lets go,” in measures 60 through 63, the dichotomy ceases as the cello plays half note figures (See Example 4.28), suggesting that here the daughter comes to terms with letting her father go. The rest in the vocal line at measure 64 seems to represent the quiet, open-eyed passage of life as the soul is released like the string of a kite into the wind.
Example 4.28 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 58-60

As the piece returns to Tempo I at measure 65, the wills of both father and daughter have accepted death, and the hum in measures 69-72 resembles the sweet “amen” cadence\textsuperscript{145} at the

\textsuperscript{145} Although this is not technically an “amen cadence” (IV-I), it is reminiscent of the “amen” at the end of a church hymn in the vocal line.
end of traditional church hymns, indicating that the soul has become immortal (See Example 4.29).

Example 4.29 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 69-72

As the piano continues its steady roulades, the singer should imitate the color of the cello, and should decrescendo at measure 72 to represent the release of the soul into the wind like the disappearance of the kite into the clouds.

The interpretation by Lisa Delan best describes the instrumental postlude in mm. 73-83 (See Example 4.30):

In the receding cello pattern that closes the song you can feel the loft of the kite, gently disappearing into the sky as the arpeggiated pattern in the piano—the ceaseless rhythm of time passing and life moving on—continues without interruption.\(^{146}\)

\(^{146}\) Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
Example 4.30 “My Father’s Eyes” measures 73-83

**Back You Go**

Text

Back you go, into your crib.

The last blackbird lights up his gold wings: _farewell_.
Your eyes close inside your head,
in sleep. Already
in your dreams the hours begin to sing.
Little sleep’s-head sprouting hair in the moonlight,
when I come back
we will go out together among
the ten thousand things,
each scratched too late with such knowledge,
*the wages of dying is love.*

Performance Analysis

Vocal Range:

“Whatever shape this ‘lullaby’ takes it must be always exceedingly gentle; it holds this moment of laying the sleeping child down without waking them, the soft stroke and whispers while they transition back to deep sleep and drift back to dreams.”

—Lisa Delan

As this last song begins, the tempo marking is “Slightly playful and a little lazy.” As Ms. Delan points out, this song paints the picture of laying a sleeping child back into his crib. But this opening cello solo more specifically paints the image of the child’s fight to stay awake—the opening and closing of his little, lazy eyes (See example 4.31).

“If the first song is the hardest to sing, this one sets an incredible task for the cello!”

While playing the motive, the cellist must be able to pluck the bass clef notes with the remaining left hand fingers. Heggie advises that these pieces require a certain amount of skill by the cellist.

“You really need a great cellist. They’re really hard.” He also advises the singer:

Tell your cellist that this just has to be really free and easy, this last song…this prelude. This is really demanding of a cellist. And to try to make it smooth and beautiful and meaningful, and when I say slightly playful and a little lazy, it’s just the idea [that] you’ve finally calmed everybody down and it’s time to put him back in the crib, and he’s just a little bit in that partly sleepy zone, and it’s just really sweet.**

---

147 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.
148 Ibid.
149 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, November 17, 2013.
150
Example 4.31 “Back You Go” measures 5-20

At measure 5, the left-handed *pizzicati* give the motive a new, dance-like feel as the mother rocks her child to sleep. At measures 8 through 20 the meter changes back and forth between 8/8, 6/8, and 5/8 and continues to alternate similarly until the end of the prelude, creating the feeling of the child falling in and out of slumber. At measure 20, the child finally submits to sleep, indicated by the *decrescendo* beginning at measure 18, and ending in measure 20 with the *pianissimo* D by the cello. The long silence indicated by the *fermata* over the rest in measure 20 seems to represent the mother’s realization that her child has finally succumbed to her rocking. Though her children are now teenagers, Lisa Delan recalls using her own experiences as a mother to interpret this song. “Whenever I begin this song I feel the fragile

---

150 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.
weight of a sleeping toddler in my arms.”151 As the soprano begins her “gentle lullaby” at measure 21, she and the cello begin a duet which is marked sempre l.v. for the cello152 (See Example 4.32).

Example 4.32 “Back You Go” measures 21-25

In Example 4.33 the mother is still gently rocking the child, just to be sure he is fully

Example 4.33 “Back You Go” measures 38-46

151 Lisa Delan, email correspondence with the author, February 19, 2014.

152 The abbreviation l.v. means, “let vibrate.” Sempre is an Italian word meaning “always.” The cellist should not stop the notes from ringing at the end of their notated duration.
asleep, until she finally sets him in the crib at measure 40 on the word “sing.” As the cello begins a clumsy 5/8 version of the theme, the listener envisions the gentle stirring of the child as he drifts back to sleep after being put back in his crib—perhaps even rolling onto his belly at measure 44.

Heggie stresses the importance of creating a different color at the next vocal entrance. A trio between voice, cello, and piano begins at measure 46, when the piano enters for the first time, creating with its murky dissonance a dark bedroom lit only by the moonlight (See Example 4.34).

![Example 4.34 “Back You Go” measures 46-68](image)

The color change suggested by Heggie here should be one that tells the listener that the mother is now sure that the child is truly asleep. Heggie adds, “This is a prayer, not only for them, but for you.”

While the soprano sings “warmly” in a major key, the dissonance by the D-natural in both instruments seems to suggest the subtle return of an awareness of mortality, confirmed by the

---

153 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.
reappearance of the “nightmare theme” in measure 49, this time from the piano (See Example 4.35).

Example 4.35 “Back You Go” measure 49

At measure 50, the song finally takes on the tonality of the key signature—B major—as the cello and piano begin a beautiful duet. The use of the motive here in the major key and its near parallelism at the octave in measures 54 through 58 suggests the end of the turmoil (See Example 4.36).

From Heggie’s perspective, the cello part throughout the cycle is “a little bit of what’s going on in your head and your heart as a soloist. So it’s another version of you and your observation of the world. Maybe while you’re saying one thing, it’s doing another. Because very often we are saying one thing while we’re feeling and thinking another.”

So, when the cello and voice begin their duet at measure 54, Heggie says, “There’s great harmony suddenly, instead of this fight.” The line, “When I come back we will go out together,” represents for Heggie the

---

154 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.

155 Ibid.
idea that everything is going to be okay. The composer interprets this idea musically through this duet between soprano and cello:

We’re all in, and we’re all together. This is the first time that we can all agree. That no matter when it is, when I come back we’re going out together. Whereas, there is uncertainty through other things, or there’s vagueness, or there’s something not quite settled. But, on that, suddenly there is this realization, like “yeah.” And in that way, it is okay.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
The line, “We will walk out together among the ten thousand things,” represents a parent and child going out together and playing and looking at all the world has to offer. “Each scratched too late with such knowledge” is a puzzling line. Heggie suggests that we often do not gain wisdom from the experiences of life until it is too late.157

Lisa Delan offers an interpretation of the last line of the poem, which is haunting in the many ways in which it can be interpreted:

That last line slays me—“the wages of dying is love”—Jake’s setting perfectly underscores the swelling of this sentiment—from the quiet moment in the deep of night, from this space out of time, emerges the powerful revelation that in the face of mortality and loss we are given the great recompense of love.

Even after this revelation by the mother, Heggie chooses to musically allude to the returning sense of self doubt:

Because just as you feel that everything is settled and your child is going to sleep and you’ve convinced them and yourself that it is all okay, there’s still this haunting question behind you. Is it really okay? You know, you say what you need to say to comfort your child, but in the end when you go to sleep, you just don’t know…. There’s a scene in Dead Man Walking where the mother has to say goodbye to her son who is going to be taken away and executed, and she’s saying goodbye to him for the last time. And instead of falling apart in front of him, she says, “Look I’m smiling. I’m okay. You know what I’m remembering? I’m remembering when you were little and laughing and splashing around. That’s what I’m gonna remember.” And the minute he goes, she falls to pieces. But it’s a little bit a similar kind of thing of staying positive and upbeat for yourself to give yourself hope, as well as for your child who needs that sense of peace and comfort. But then there’s that question and that sense of reality in that “I don’t know,” which is your own nightmare. I don’t know. So it leaves the question mark at the end.158

Heggie transposes the motive, which is in B major throughout the “prayer” section, back to the original G-minor, and the theme appears in the piano exactly as it did in measure 1 of “You Scream” (See Example 4.37). This return of the original motive brilliantly expresses the

---

157 This is paraphrased from the interview with the author from November 18, 2013.

158 Jake Heggie, interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, November 18, 2013.
underlying sense of self-doubt by the parent and the nightmare created by the parent’s awareness of her own mortality.

Example 4.37 “Back You Go” measures 88-92

Heggie creates even further instability at the end with his final chord, which is a G-minor chord with G in the bass, but altered with the added C by the cello. Since Heggie believes the cello often represents the inner thoughts of the soprano, it can be deduced that Heggie’s final expression here further asserts his opinion that the nightmare for a parent is the self-doubt created by overwhelming realization of mortality.

For Heggie, the poetry in this last piece represents the end of an emotional journey. “I think it’s an interesting journey to go from ‘You scream waking from a nightmare’ to ‘the wages of dying is love.’ That’s a big journey, and it’s kind of amazing to get there. And we even get to laugh once in the middle of the journey, and that’s important. It’s so important to laugh.”

Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Jake Heggie and Galway Kinnell share the artistic ability to exquisitely express the depth found in the raw emotional experiences of everyday living. Even those who have not experienced parenthood can relate to the overall theme of the work, which is the nightmare of mortality. Throughout the cycle, Heggie’s “nightmare theme” is ever-present and relentless, but evolves to reveal the reward for enduring the hardships of life—love.

This cycle is so different from Heggie’s other song cycles, perhaps because of the effect of Kinnell’s poetry on Heggie, who has experienced both the joys and fears of parenthood and the profound sense of loss in the sudden death of his father. Heggie has taken poetry that has never before been set to music and has colored it with the sum of his own life experiences. Kinnell’s poems address issues of every mortal soul, and Heggie has bravely mined Kinnell’s words to fully express the entire range of the human experience.

Upon each look at the cycle, I discover some new way in which Heggie has enhanced Kinnell’s brilliant poetry. I would encourage any soprano, cellist, and pianist with the necessary technical ability to study this beautiful American song cycle. Its creative blending of text and music is both a challenge and an inspiration.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


______________. Interview to author. 17 November, 2013. Digital Recording

______________. Interview to author. 18 November, 2013. Digital Recording.

______________. Email correspondence with author. 7 February, 2014.


APPENDIX A
COMPLETE WORKS LIST FOR JAKE HEGGIE

The bulk of Heggie’s compositions are published by his own company, Bent Pen Music, Inc., and are available at billholabmusic.com, except for the three books titled “The Faces of Love: The Songs of Jake Heggie” and “If You Were Coming in the Fall” (distributed by Hal Leonard, Inc.).

Opera and Stage Works

Again (2000)
Operatic scene in 10 minutes (libretto by Kevin Gregory). Four solo voices (soprano, mezzo, tenor and baritone) with chamber orchestra (24 instruments). Commissioned by the EOS Orchestra; Jonathan Sheffer, music director. Premiere: May 4 & 5, 2000; Society for Ethical Culture, New York City. sop. Susannah Waters (Lucy); m-s Kimberly Barber (Ethel); ten. Matthew Chellis (Ricky); bar. Dean Ely (Fred).

Another Sunrise (2012)
Dramatic 30-minute scene for soprano and chamber ensemble (clarinet, violin, cello, bass, piano) with libretto by Gene Scheer, based on the life and work of Holocaust survivor Krystyna Zywulksa. Commissioned by Music of Remembrance (Mina Miller, artistic director) and premiered May 14, 2012 at Nordstrom Recital Hall in Benaroya Hall, Seattle. Soprano Caitlin Lynch with Laura DeLuca (clarinet), Mikhail Shmidt (violin), Walter Gray (cello), Jonathan Green (bass), Craig Sheppard (piano).

At the Statue of Venus (2005)
A musical scene for soprano and piano. Libretto by Terrence McNally. Commissioned by Opera Colorado to celebrate the grand opening of the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, Sept. 10, 2005.

Dead Man Walking (1998-2000)

The End of the Affair (2003; rev. 2004-05)
Opera in 2 Acts based on the novel by Graham Greene. Libretto by Heather McDonald. Revised libretto by Heather McDonald, Leonard Foglia, and Jake Heggie. Six singing roles (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, three baritones) and one non-singing role (nine-year old boy). Original orchestration for chamber orchestra of 24 instruments (1-1-1-1, 1-1-1-0, perc, harp, pno, strings...
4-3-2-3-2); also performed with larger string section. Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera with Madison Opera and Opera Pacific. Premiere: March 4, 2004 at the Cullen Theatre, Wortham Centre, Houston, TX. Conductor: Patrick Summers. Director: Leonard Foglia. Sets: Michael McGarty. Costumes: Jess Goldstein. Lights: Donald Holder. Cast: Cheryl Barker (Sarah), Teddy Tahu Rhodes (Maurice Bendrix), Peter Coleman-Wright (Henry), Katherine Ciesinski (Mrs. Bertram), Joseph Evans (Smythe), Robert Orth (Parkis).

**For a Look or a Touch (2007)**
A 35-minute music drama for one actor and a lyric baritone with flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano. Libretto by Gene Scheer, based on interviews from the documentary film Paragraph 175, produced by Rob Epstein. Commissioned by Music of Remembrance (Mina Miller, artistic director) to conclude its 9th season. First performance at Nordstrom Recital Hall in Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA, with actor Julian Patrick, baritone Morgan Smith, and Zart Dombourian-Eby (flute), Laura DeLuca (clarinet), Mikhail Shmidt (violin), Amos Yang (cello) and Craig Sheppard (piano).

**Moby-Dick (2010)**

**Three Decembers (2008)**
Chamber Opera in One Act for soprano, mezzo-soprano and baritone with ten instruments (oboe/EH; reed doubler on fl, cl, sop sax, alt sax; two pianos; percussion; 3 violins; 1 cello; 1 bass) with libretto by Gene Scheer, based on Terrence McNally's original play *Some Christmas Letters*. Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera and co-commissioned by San Francisco Opera in association with Cal Performances at UC Berkeley. First Performance: February 29, 2008 in the Cullen Theatre at the Wortham Center, Houston, TX. Cast: Frederica von Stade (Madeline), Kristin Clayton (Bea), Keith Phares (Charlie). Patrick Summers, conductor; Leonard Foglia, director and designer; Brian Nason, lighting; Cesar Galindo; costumes.

**To Hell and Back (2006)**
Opera in One Act for Soprano, Broadway Soprano and Period Instrument Orchestra (2-2-0-1, 2-0-0-0, 1 perc, 1 harpsichord, 5-5-3-3-1); Libretto by Gene Scheer, based on *The Rape of Persephone*. Commissioned by the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra to celebrate its 25th season, and the 20th anniversary of music director Nicholas McGegan. First performance: Nov. 2, 2006 at the Mountain View Performing Arts Center in Palo Alto, CA with soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and Broadway soprano Patti LuPone; Nicholas McGegan, conductor.
Works with Chorus

**Ahab Symphony (2013)**
Texts by Melville (from *Moby-Dick*) and W.H. Auden (from his poem "Herman Melville"); for tenor solo, SATB choir and full orchestra (2-2-2-2 4-3-3 harp, 3 percussion, strings) First performance: April 24, 2013 at Murcheson Hall, University of North Texas with Richard Croft, tenor, and the UNT Symphony Orchestra and Grand Chorus; David Itkin, conductor. Commissioned by the University of North Texas.

**Anna Madrigal Remembers (1999)**
New text by Armistead Maupin (based on his character from "Tales of the City"). Mezzo-soprano solo and 12 male voices (SATB) a cappella. Commissioned by SF Chanticleer. First performance: August 6, 1999 at Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. Mezzo-soprano: Frederica von Stade (Anna); Conductor: Joseph Jennings

**Faith Disquiet (1987)**
Three poems by Emily Dickinson. SATB chorus a cappella. First performance: November 1987 at Royce Hall, UCLA. UCLA a cappella choir conducted by William Hatcher. 1. "Why do I love" You, Sir? 2. What if I say I shall not wait! 3. If you were coming in the fall

**For a Look or a Touch (2007; rev. 2011)**

**He Will Gather Us Around (2003)**
SATB a cappella. An arrangement of the original hymn tune from the opera "Dead Man Walking." First performance: April 6, 2003 at Wichita State University.


**John Adams’ Prayer (2004)**
Chamber Chorus a cappella. A short canon composed to a text by President John Adams and contributed to "Mr. President," a new choral cycle based on presidential speeches (also featuring compositions contributed by Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Jason Robert Brown, Daron Hagen, Paul Moravec, and others). Premiere: October 26, 2004 at the Library of Congress (Coolidge Auditorium), Washington DC. The Election Singers conducted by Judith Clurman.
Poetry by Hart Crane. Full chorus (SATB) and orchestra. Commissioned by the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia; Donald Nally, artistic director. Premiered April 1, 2001 in Philadelphia.

Patterns (1999)

Seeking Higher Ground:

Six Christmas Traditions (2012)
Lyrics by Mark Campbell; for SATB choir with piano, flute & oboe; commissioned by Renaissance City Choirs in Pittsburgh, PA and premiered Dec 9, 2012 at Carnegie Music Hall; Jeffry Blake Johnson, conductor.
1. Santa
2. Christmas Sweaters
3. Fruitcake (or "Unjust Desserts")
4. Presents
5. Loneliness (or "A Midnight Drear")
6. Families

Song Cycles with Piano
Soprano

Eve-Song (1996)
Poetry by Philip Littell. Commissioned by James Schwabacher. First performance: February 27, 2000 at Old First Church, San Francisco; Kristin Clayton, soprano; Jake Heggie, piano. (Even, Listen and Snake orchestrated for chamber orchestra, 2001)
1. My name
2. Even
3. Good
4. Listen
5. Snake
6. Woe to Man
7. The Wound
8. The Farm
Facing Forward/Looking Back (2007)
1. Motherwit (Baldridge)
2. Grounded (Zukerman)
3. Hummingbird (Carver)
4. Mother in the Mirror (Maupin)
5. Facing Forward (Heggie)

How Well I Knew the Light (2000)
Poetry by Emily Dickinson. First performance: January 23, 2000 at Hertz Hall, UC Berkeley, with soprano Nicolle Foland and pianist Jake Heggie.
1. Ample Make This Bed
2. The Sun Kept Setting

Natural Selection (1997)
1. Creation
2. Animal Passion
3. Alas! Alack!
4. Indian Summer - Blue
5. Connection

Rise and Fall (2007)
Poetry by Gene Scheer. Composed for soprano Constance Rock on a commission from the University of Connecticut at Storrs, generously funded by Dr. Raymond and Beverly Sackler. First performance: March 29, 2007 at the University of Connecticut in Storrs with soprano Constance Rock and pianist Jake Heggie.
1. Water Stone (Noguchi)
2. Incantation Bowl
3. Angels Wings
4. The Shaman

Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia (1999)
Composed for Peggy Kriha-Dye. First performance: May 9, 1999 at Old First Church, San Francisco. Peggy Kriya-Dye, soprano; Jake Heggie, piano.
1. The Spring is Arisen; Ophelia's Song (Heggie)
2. Women have loved before as I love now (Edna St. Vincent Millay)
3. Not in a silver casket cool with pearls (Millay)
4. Spring (Millay)
Mezzo-Soprano

The Breaking Waves (2011)
1. Advent
2. Darkness
3. Music
4. Return

Camille Claudel: Into the Fire (2012)
Prelude: Awakening
1. Rodin
2. La Valse
3. Shakuntala
4. La petite châtelaine
5. The Gossips
6. L'age mûr
7. Epilogue: Jessie Lipscomb visits Camille Claudel, Montdevergues Asylum, 1929

The Deepest Desire (2002)
1. The Call; More is required; Love
2. I catch on fire
3. The deepest desire
4. Primary colors

Facing Forward/Looking Back (2007)
1. Motherwit (Baldridge)
2. Grounded (Zukerman)
3. Hummingbird (Carver)
4. Mother in the Mirror (Maupin)
5. Facing Forward (Heggie)
1. In the beginning...
2. Once upon a universe

Paper Wings (1997)
1. Bedtime Story
2. Paper Wings
3. Mitten Smitten
4. A Route to the Sky

Songs to the Moon (1998)
Part 1: "Fairy-Tales for the Children" Poetry by Vachel Lindsay. Commissioned for Frederica von Stade by MUSIC ACCORD. Songs To The Moon was commissioned by MUSIC ACCORD, INC., a consortium of music presenters, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood; The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York City; The Krannert Center, University of Illinois, Urbana; The Library of Congress, Washington, DC; The Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, IL; San Francisco Performances, San Francisco, CA; Spivey Hall, Clayton State College, Morrow, GA; University Musical Society, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; and the Wolf Trap Foundation, Vienna, VA. Premiere: August 20, 1998 at the Ravinia Festival, Illinois, with Martin Katz, pianist
1. Prologue: Once More - To Gloriana
2. Euclid
3. The Haughty Snail-King
4. What the Rattlesnake Said
5. The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky (What the little girl said)
6. What the Scarecrow Said
7. What the Gray-Winged Fairy Said
8. Yet Gentle Will the Griffin Be (What Grandpa told the children)

The Starry Night (2001)
1. The Starry Night (Anne Sexton)
2. Celestial Locomotion (Van Gogh)
3. Go Thy Great Way (Dickinson)
4. Reflection (Van Gogh)
5. The sun kept setting (Dickinson)
6. Touch (Van Gogh)
7. I would not paint a picture (Dickinson)
Statuesque (2005)
New texts by Gene Scheer. Commissioned by University of Kansas at Lawrence for mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle. Premiere schedule for December 5, 2005. Also with chamber accompaniment.
1. Henry Moore: Reclining Figure of Elmwood
2. Pablo Picasso: Head of a Woman, 1932
3. Hapshetsut: The Divine Potter
4. Alberto Giacometti: Standing Woman #2
5. Winged Victory: We're Through

Counter Tenor

Encountertenor (1995)
Lyrics by John Hall. Commissioned by Brian Asawa. First performance: November 21, 1995 at Wigmore Hall, London; Brian Asawa, countertenor; Melvyn Tan, fortepiano
1. Countertenor's Conundrum
2. The trouble with trebles in trousers ... (Pitch can be a bitch!)
3. A Gift to Share

Tenor

Friendly Persuasions: Songs in Homage to Poulenc (2008)
1. Wanda Landowska
2. Pierre Bernac
3. Raymonde Linossier
4. Paul Eluard

Medium Voice

Three Folk Songs (1994)
Dedicated to Frederica von Stade. First performance: October 1995 at First Congregational Church in Berkeley: Frederica von Stade, mezzo-soprano; Jake Heggie, piano
1. Barb'ry Allen
2. He's Gone Away
3. The Leather-Winged Bat

Baritone

A Great Hope Fell: Songs from Civil War (2001)
Songs for baritone and chamber orchestra. Poetry and texts by authors including Maya Angelou, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Emily Dickinson and Stephen Foster. Commissioned by the Eos Orchestra, Inc. First performance scheduled for February 21, 2002 at the Society for Ethical
Culture in New York with baritone Gordon Hawkins and the Eos Orchestra conducted by Jonathan Sheffer.

Prologue: Ships that Pass in the Night (Dunbar)
1. Africa (Angelou)
2a. When Johnny Comes Marching Home (Gilmore)
2b. Letter to President Lincoln from Annie Davis, 1864
2c. Was My Brother in the Battle? (Foster)
3. A great Hope fell (Dickinson)
4a. Glory (Howe)
4b. America (Angelou)

**The Moon is a Mirror (2001)**
1. The Strength of the Lonely (What the Mendicant Said)
2. What the Miner in the Desert Said
3. The Old Horse in the City
4. What the Forester Said
5. What the Snowman Said

**A Question of Light (2011)**
New texts by Gene Scheer. Commissioned by The Dallas Opera in association with The Dallas Museum of Art for baritone Nathan Gunn. First performance: April 8, 2011 at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, TX.
1. The Light of Coincidences (Magritte)
2. Eccentric Flint (Maya c. AD 600-900)
3. Yellow Flowers in a Vase (Caillebotte)
4. Place de la Concorde (Mondrian)
5. El Hombre (Tamayo)
6. Watch (Murphy)

**Thoughts Unspoken (1996)**
Lyrics by John Hall. Commissioned by Earle Patriarco. First performance: November 1996, Vocal Arts Festival at The George Washington University: Earle Patriarco, baritone; Kevin Murphy, piano
1. A learning experience over coffee...
2. You enter my thoughts
3. To speak of love
4. Unspoken thoughts at bedtime

**Trois Poemes Interieurs de Rainer Maria Rilke (1988)**
Poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke.
1. Portrait intérieure
2. La porteuse de fleurs
3. Epilogue: C'est pour t'avoir vue...

**Songs with Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra**

1. More is Required; Love
2. I catch on fire
3. The deepest desire
4. Primary colors

**On the Road to Christmas (1996)**
Mezzo-soprano and string orchestra; commissioned by the New Century Chamber Orchestra.
First performance: December 13, 1996 at Herbst Theatre, San Francisco. Frederica von Stade, mezzo-soprano; New Century Chamber Orchestra with Stuart Canin, leader
1. The Night is Freezing Fast (A.E. Housman)
2. The Car Ride to Christmas (von Stade)
3. Good King Merrily on High (traditional)
4. I wonder as I wander (Niles)
5. The Road to Bethlehem (Dickinson)
6. And then the Setting Sun (von Stade)
7. Christmas Time of Year (Heggie)

1. Bedtime Story
2. Paper Wings
3. Mitten Smitten
4. A Route to the Sky

**So Many Notes! (1997)**
Text by the composer. 11 solo singers and full orchestra. Commissioned by San Francisco Opera to celebrate its 75th Season. First Performance: September 5, 1997 at the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco. Conductor: Donald Runnicles; San Francisco Opera Orchestra; sopranos Nicolle Foland, Peggy Kriha Dye, Alison Buchanan, Christina Lamberti; mezzo-soprano Zheng Cao; tenor Stuart Skelton; baritones John Autry, David Okerlund, Mel Ulrich; bass-baritones John Relyea and Chester Patton.
**Three Folk Songs (1994, orch. 1997)**
1. Barb'ry Allen
2. He's Gone Away
3. The Leather-Winged Bat

**Songs with Chamber Accompaniment**

**Before the Storm (1998)**
1. Before the Storm (Judyth Walker)
2. It sounded as if the streets were running (Emily Dickinson)
3. What lips my lips have kissed (Edna St. Vincent Millay)
4. The Thin Edge (Dorothy Parker)

**Camille Claudel: Into the Fire (2012)**
Prelude: Awakening
1. Rodin
2. La Valse
3. Shakuntala
4. La petite châtelaine
5. The Gossips
6. L'age mûr
7. Epilogue: Jessie Lipscomb visits Camille Claudel, Montdevergues Asylum, 1929

**From Emily’s Garden (1999)**
Poetry by Emily Dickinson. Soprano with flute, violin, cello and piano (first two songs from 1987 revised for this set). Premiere: May 29, 1998 at Old First Church in San Francisco with Nicolle Foland, soprano.
1. Here, where the Daisies fit my Head
2. In lands I never saw
3. To make a prairie
4. It makes no difference abroad
From 'The Book of Nightmares' (2012)
Poetry by Galway Kinnell; for soprano, cello and piano; composed for soprano Lisa Delan and premiered May 19, 2013 at the Noe Valley Chamber Music 20th Anniversary Gala, St. Mark's Church, San Francisco.
1. You Scream
2. In A Restaurant
3. My Father's Eyes
4. Back You Go

Here and Gone (2005)
1. The Farms of Home (Housman)
2. In Praise of Songs That Die (Lindsay)
3. Stars (Housman)
4. The Factory Window Song (Lindsay)
5. In the Morning (Housman)
6. Because I Liked You Better (Housman)
7. The Half-Moon Westers Low (Housman)

In Our House (2009)

My True Love Hath My Heart (1996)
Poetry by Sir Philip Sidney. Soprano, cello and piano (also arranged as a duet for soprano, mezzo, cello and piano).

Pieces of 9/11: Memories from Houston (2011)
For Soprano, Baritone and Girl Soprano (age 14-18) with flute, guitar, violin & cello. Texts by Gene Scheer, based on interviews with Houstonians and their stories regarding the Sept 11 attacks. Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera and generously underwritten by Bill & Sara Morgan. Premiere: Sept 11, 2011 at Houston City Hall with soprano Talise Trevigne, baritone Liam Bonner, girl sopranos Ekaterina Gorlova & Ashley Traughber; Lisa Nickl (flute), Elizabeth Mang (violin), Marc Garvin (guitar), Rosanna Butterfield (cello).
1. Prelude; Lauren
2. Lessons
3. Phone Calls
4. That Moment On
5. Beyond
6. An Open Book
**Some Times of Day (2004)**
1. The Minuet (Carver)
2. Simple (Carver)
3. The Best Time of the Day (Carver)

**Statuesque (2005)**
New texts by Gene Scheer. Song for mezzo with flute, alto sax, clarinet (doubles on bass clarinet), violin, cello, bass and piano. Commissioned by the University of Kansas at Lawrence for mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle. Premiere schedule for December 5, 2005. Also with piano accompaniment.
1. Henry Moore: Reclining Figure of Elmwood
2. Pablo Picasso: Head of a Woman, 1932
3. Hapshetsut: The Divine Potter
4. Alberto Giacometti: Standing Woman #2
5. Winged Victory: We're Through

**Vanity (Blah Blah Me) (2004)**
Soprano, clarinet, cello, bass, piano and percussion (also a version for piano solo). Text by the composer. Commissioned by Carnegie Hall for Audra McDonald as part of a new cycle "The Seven Deadly Sins" (also featuring compositions contributed by Michael John La Chiusa, Stephen Flaherty, Ricky Ian Gordon and others). Premiere: June 2, 2004 at Zankel Hall, New York. Soprano: Audra McDonald; Piano and Music Director: Ted Sperling.

**Winter Roses (2004)**
Prologue: Winter Roses (Charlene Baldridge)
I. Two Birds
   1. The Wren (Baldridge)
   2. The Robin (Dickinson)
II. Three Shades (in memoriam C.v.S.)
   3. A Hero (Frederica von Stade)
   4. Sleeping (Raymond Carver)
   5. To My Dad (von Stade)
III. Looking West
   6. Sweet Light (Carver)
Epilogue: Late Fragment (Carver)
Individual Songs with Piano

Soprano

Final Monologue from Master Class (2007)
Text by Terrence McNally from his Tony Award-winning play, Master Class. Composed for mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Merola Opera Program and to remember the late James Schwabacher. Commissioned by Rusty Rolland. First performance: May 19, 2007 in San Francisco with mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato and pianist Jake Heggie. NOTE: a revised version in a higher key and with optional notes was created for soprano Kiri Te Kanawa.

The Years Roll By (2011)
Duet for soprano & mezzo-soprano with next text by Charles Hart. Created for soprano Kiri Te Kanawa and mezzo Frederica von Stade. First performance: March 29, 2011 at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center in Tulsa, OK.


Vanity (Blah Blah Me) (2004)
Text by the composer. Commissioned by Carnegie Hall for Audra McDonald as part of a new cycle "The Seven Deadly Sins" (also featuring compositions contributed by Michael John La Chiusa, Stephen Flaherty, Ricky Ian Gordon and others). Premiere: June 2, 2004 at Zankel Hall, New York. Soprano: Audra McDonald; Piano and Music Director: Ted Sperling. (First performance featured a version with chamber accompaniment.)

Poems of Emily Dickinson

Mezzo-Soprano

The Faces of Love
Selections:
Away in a Manger (1986) Traditional.

The Years Roll By (2011)

Baritone

Epilogue: Under the Blessing of your Psyche Wings (2012)
Poetry by Vachel Lindsay; composed to celebrate the opening of the National Opera Center in New York, commissioned by Opera America; first performance Sept 27, 2012 by baritone Nathan Wyatt and pianist Lucas Wong at the opening ceremony of the National Opera Center.


In Our House (2009)

Orchestral Music

“Cut Time” Variations for Piano and Chamber Orchestra (2001)

Flute Concerto: Fury of Light (2010) for solo flute and orchestra, inspired by Mary Oliver's poem, “Sunrise.” Orchestration: 2 flutes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 1 trumpet, 1 trombone, 1 percussion, harp, strings. This orchestration of the chamber piece by the same name was commissioned for flutist Carol Wincenc by Linda & Stuart Nelson. First Performance: Aug 13, 2010 at the National Flute Association Convention in Anaheim, CA, with flutist Carol Wincenc and conductor Steven Byess.

Orchestral Episodes from Dead Man Walking (2002)
A 20-minute work for full orchestra featuring music from the opera Dead Man Walking. Commissioned by the Dallas Symphony; Andrew Litton, music director. Premiered June 28, 2002 at Meyerson Hall in Dallas, TX.

Chamber Music

Coward/Cabaret (1996)
Songs by Noel Coward freely arranged for cello and piano. Dedicated to Emil Miland. First performance: May 10, 1996 at Old First Church, San Francisco: Emil Miland, cello; Jake Heggie, piano. 1. Mad About the Boy 2. Someday I'll Find You 3. Même les anges

Fury of Light (2009)


One Day at the Duck Pond (1987)
Strings, winds, guitar, piano and percussion. Music and illustrations for children to write stories to. 1. At the Duck Pond 2. The Old Tree 3. The Rainy Day

Orcas Island Ferry: Suite for Violin/Viola & Piano (2012)
Commissioned by the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival; First Performance: Aug 11, 2012 at the Orcas Island Center in Eastsound, WA, by violinist/violist Aloysia Friedmann and pianist Jon Kimura Parker.
1. Crossing
2. On and Off
3. The Shoreline Lullabye
4. Whistling and Listening
5. In Tows and Threes (Motor Rhythm)


Duo Pianos


Inisfree (1985)

Rhosymedre (1987) arrangement of a work by Vaughan-Williams

Skellig Variations (1986)
Piano Solo


Indiana Bound (1982)

So, you’re working on two operas?

Yeah, and actually I have to finish this one first. This one is actually a one-act opera for a 24-voice chamber choir.

Wow!

Yeah. That’s why it’s two and a half months late already. It’s really hard.

Yeah, I think I heard you playing it when I arrived. It sounded like you were hard at work, and I was early anyway, so I walked down the block and listened for a bit. I could hear you playing from the street. Your neighbors must love it.

I hope so, but it’s been a really tough one because I am trying to figure out what to do with all these people in a dramatic situation, because choirs usually just stand there and make sound. They don’t generally move around or take on roles or characters, but every piece that I write…there has to be a story, and there has to be a reason for every musical gesture or rhythm. Everything has to mean something towards the story. You know? Even a song cycle.

Yeah, I read someone else’s dissertation who interviewed you, and in the interview you expressed the importance of the words first.

The story is even more important first. The story is the most important thing because if the story is valuable, the right words will emerge…and the right way to tell the story, and from that will come the music. When I’m coaching singers, what I often describe is that a story is like a well, right? And what the writer does is they go deep into that well to mine the words, right? So then they come up with the words. Then my job is--because I’m not just setting words--Setting words is one thing. Writing music is another thing, right?

Right.

And you want to write music in which the words are set well so that they make sense in telling this feeling or this journey or whatever is happening. So my job is to go back into that well too…really deeply… and find out what the spirit is behind those words and what it means to mean, and then come out of the well with those words, plus the music. And that takes them to another level. And then the singer’s job is not just to take what we’ve mined and look at the pretty jewelry. It’s to go back into the well too and see what that experience means to them. You know? To see what was behind the words, the music, where we started. Because you are a re-creator. That’s why great artists…it suddenly sounds like it really is theirs. They own a piece because they’ve done the work behind it. They know it better, maybe, than the creative team.
And that’s what a great performer will do. They’ll show us things that we didn’t even know were on the page, or that we had missed in the well. That’s what’s exciting when you’re working with people…

Who get it.

Who get it, you know? There’s a lot of young singers who, when they see the music on the page and they’re told, “This is what you do. You learn these notes, and then you’re done.” And it’s like learning the notes is just the beginning.

In the university community you’re always in this hurry to finish. And to take all these classes that have nothing to do with what you are going to do when you’re done. You’ve got to get good grades on everything, so text, rhythms, notes…check. You know? Approaching it like a scientist, rather than like an artist.

Exactly, but that’s where, you know, when I do classes with singers, you can tell the people who are really going to emerge…wow that glass is really scratched up. Sorry about that. It’s clean. I promise.

That’s ok.

Well, it’s where you can really tell who the people are that get it on a fundamental level. Because they have an intuitive sense that there’s more than what’s there on the page. That, I think, is something that’s really innate…you know…people who really feel music rather than just perform it. And what’s great is when you can crack the shell of someone who’s blocked themselves off to that because they’re so in their head, and then you see something start to really emerge. That (pointing at the manuscript on the piano) has been hard to get my head around because the well has been…I mean…can you name another one-act opera for 24-voice choir?

Umm…no.

See. It’s not just doing something that I’ve done before like a song cycle or a regular opera. It’s like creating a new form for that. There’s no precedent that I know of for it. There are choral works that seem operatic, but they’re not, you know, asking the choir to actually act and interact and become characters.

That’s interesting. Is that an outside commission outside of San Francisco Opera?

Yes.

Are you still under the umbrella of San Francisco Opera?

No. I haven’t been for a long time. I was on their PR marketing staff for four years, and then I was Composer-in-Residence, and when that ended, that ended my official association. Although, it’s my home town company, and I know the people there pretty well, and they’ve produced two…no three… of my operas. The first one was Dead Man Walking. Then David Gockley took over a few years ago, and he co-produced an opera that originated in Houston called Three Decembers, and he and Cal Performances at UC Berkeley--they co-produced it out in Berkeley--and he was co-commissioner and co-producer of Moby-Dick, and of course that’s the production
that got telecast, so I have a long association with the company, but I am not officially employed. Though the next thing after I’m finished this is the new opera Great Scott that I’m writing for Joyce DiDonato for the Dallas Opera.

I love her!

Who doesn’t? Come on? Right?

Right.

And she’s amazing, and so generous! You know? So gifted and so generous. And just so beautiful inside and out. She reminds me so much of Flicka…Frederica von Stade…because Flicka, too, is so authentic and genuine. The person that you see onstage is exactly the person she is offstage. There’s just no difference. She brings her whole authentic, truthful self to everything she does.

That’s great.

Yeah…and that’s what Joyce does too.

I think I had mentioned to you that I did meet Flicka and that’s what prompted my looking into your music.

Right. You did tell me that.

Because she did mention you--and this song cycle in particular--in a masterclass….Lisa Delan…that she had premiered the pieces, and she just fell in love with the pieces, and she told us that we should all look at this music.

She’s amazing, and she’s the one who got me started, you know. When I was at the opera writing, I was so impressed with her generosity and kindness, and I hadn’t composed a lot for years, and so I wrote some folk song arrangements for her. Gave them to her opening night of the production, and lucky for me she loves to tell people when she likes something, so she told everybody. I did a concert with her in town at 2 o’clock yesterday…a family matinee. It was fun. It was a one hour concert. She had some of the young kids that she helps from the East Bay ages 14 to 17, and they sang. It was a wonderful concert.

I bet.

What’s the concert that you…

It was this past summer in May or June. We did the 50th Anniversary Gala at Harrower Summer Opera Workshop, and she came and was the big name for the gala, and we were her chorus. And, I sang an aria. I was so star struck by her, I must say. She was just so gracious and human.

And then she sings, and it’s this big voice! Much bigger than most people expect. It’s a sizable voice and still so beautiful at 68 years old.

She seems so much younger. The way she moves is just like a feather.
She’s incredible. She’s effervescent and, you know, sort of lighter than air in that way, and she’s just a burst of joy wherever she goes.

*When I sang my aria in the gala... here I am talking about myself, and it’s supposed to be an interview about you...*

No, please, I’d love to hear it. What did you sing?

*I sang Anna Maurrant’s aria. We were doing Street Scene. That really long, 7-minute aria. And she stood in the back and watched the whole time. She could have gone to her dressing room, but she sat in the back for my whole aria, and when I came out, she grabbed me, and said, “That was JUST amazing.” And then she walked away, and I was like, “Ah!”*

She’s taught me a lot. She’s been a mentor to me as well—just watching her. The way she treats everyone so well, and she doesn’t judge anybody. She’s just present. She likes to celebrate good things, so that doesn’t surprise me at all. I’ve learned a lot from her about how to approach life. Get rid of the professional jealousy, and if you feel it, then do exactly the opposite and go to that person and tell them how great they are. And you can even say, “You know what? I was a little jealous.”

*It’s flattering too—to tell someone you were jealous.*

RIGHT?! That is kind of one of the highest forms of praise. I’ve said that to composers. But then, you know, you’ve cut through that nonsense of resentment or professional jealousy and gone to something really positive, which just makes everything better, and that’s a big lesson that I’ve gotten from her. How great that you had that experience?

*It is really great, and I’ll always remember it fondly, but... I had some questions that I wrote down, speaking of people that were important in your life along the way. I’ve read—through other people’s work—that you studied piano at age 6, composing at 11—there’s this whole chronology that I have written out, but I was just wondering if you could shed some light on some experiences that you’ve had along the way that have shaped your...*

Which ones haven’t, you know?

*Yeah. You know...*

Do you have any particular experiences that you want to know more about?

*Ernst Bacon... you studied with him?*

I did

*And the particular dissertation that I read said really nothing about that, so maybe you can tell me what that relationship was like.*

Sure. When I was 16, my mom decided it was time for us to leave Ohio, and move to northern California where her sister lived. You know, my father had died when I was 10, right before I turned 11, so it had been just about 5 years, and it had been 5 very difficult years for my mom, and she had no immediate family where we lived in Ohio, and so she decided she needed to be
near some family. So she said that we were going to move to California, and I was like, “Yes! I was really ready to get out of Ohio. I had a great childhood there, but I was ready to get out. I was not happy there. I wanted out. It was a very small town mentality, and I had grown up with the same people my entire life. I had no perspective on the world really. You know? YOU understand.

_Chalmette, Louisiana (both laugh) Yes. I understand._

So when she was looking for a place for us to live she did some scouting out for piano teachers and other opportunities, and she found me a great piano teacher. I mean, I have to give her great credit for that. The piano teacher was Doris Marliave, who lived in Walnut Creek. She just died recently. She was the one that introduced me to this performing arts group—this performing arts society that was in the East Bay. And this group—really frankly little old ladies—not that old. Some of them were in their 50’s and 60’s, but some of them were in their 80’s—who like to compose. They were all women, and once a month they would go and have a class lesson with Ernst Bacon. My teacher put me in touch with the gals, and here I was sixteen years old, and so I went and I listened to what he was saying, and I could tell he was being very kind and very understanding. He was pretty old already. By then he was pretty close to eighty, and but he was like very vital and very interesting. He was really supportive of the pieces that I brought too, and finally one day at the end of the group lesson I asked him, “Do you think I could take private lessons with you? I really need someone on a regular basis to really help me, ‘cause I’m just doing this by instinct. I have no technique or training.” And so he said yes. It was a very happy day. So my schedule during the week was school, and once a week a piano lesson, and once a week a composition lesson. And he was…and I really didn’t know that much about him. I knew that he was a song composer and that I was a song composer. And I knew that he was insane about Beethoven….loved, worshiped Beethoven everything. Knew all the sonatas, knew all the music, loved it, worshipped it. He was a big Beethoven advocate, and he would give big lectures on it. But, he had also been the head of Syracuse or Cornell…I can’t remember at this point, but he started asking me things—basic things like overtones. “Do you know about overtones? Basic harmony?” No. So we started with fundamental lessons, but he also gave me challenges with analyzing and doing chord progressions, and also he gave me fun things to do. First we started writing Canons, and then we started writing 3-part counterpoint, but the canons were always based on someone’s name. So you’d take someone that mattered to you and their name, and you’d figure out a tune based on the letters in their name, so what he was giving me was that there was a personal connection to the line that you were writing. It wasn’t just this abstract thing. It wasn’t just an academic exercise. It had emotional meaning. You know? And I think I was very lucky all the way along that I had teachers that were very connected to the emotional content, and not just the technique or the black and white on the page. So, I studied with him for close to a year and a half, and I started bringing songs to him that I wrote the texts for, and he said, “You know you can set other people’s poetry.”

_Did he say it gently?_

Oh yeah. I think he appreciated that, and he appreciated my instinct for setting the text that I was setting, but he said, “Read some Dickinson poems, or read some Whitman,” and he introduced
me to poets that I hadn’t really thought about setting. So he was the foundation that set me on the whole route of art song. Because before that, everything to me was a Broadway ballad. I didn’t know Schumann and Schubert or Wolf. I didn’t know that whole world. Nor, was I really interested in classical singing. I was interested in good singing, but there’s good pop singing, and good jazz singing, and rock singing. There’s all kinds of good singing. I just hadn’t been introduced to great singers—great classically trained singers. And he sort of sent me on that path, and that was really—basically from when we arrived in the summer of 1977 when I was 16 in California, and I must have had my first group lesson with him in that fall, and I must have asked him for lessons right around my 17th birthday in 1978, so then I had about a year with him before I took off for Paris. But, he gave me a lot of tools, and I think most valuable was about word setting and connection to the text—a deeply personal connection. So, he gave me some fundamental technique that I think was invaluable at that point in my life.

That is so amazing.

Yeah. He was a great man. I’m still in touch with his widow. She just sent me a big packet of stuff. ‘Cause she was a lot younger. And they had a five-year-old child when I was studying, and so she is still in touch with me, and I’m glad to be an advocate for his work.

So when you studied in Paris—that was after Ernst Bacon?

Yeah. It was after I graduated High School. My mom had entrusted the whole college application process to me, which she regretted later because she thought that I would—I mean I was a very good student. I had straight A’s and was very motivated, and she thought I was going to apply. First she wanted me to go to UC Berkley ‘cause it was close to home, and it was in the California state system and it was going to be a lot more affordable, or she wanted me to apply to some other UC school or get a scholarship to some ivy league school, which I might have been able to get into, but I don’t know. BUT, I wanted to go to Paris.

Who doesn’t?

And I saw this sign, in my French class in high school that said the American college in Paris, and it was fully accredited, and all my credits would transfer, so even if I came back, it wouldn’t have been wasted time. And so it’s the only place I applied to, and I didn’t tell my mom. I was so excited when I got accepted. I told my mom, “Mom, I got into the American College in Paris.” And she said, “Great! Where else did you apply?” I said, “Umm….nowhere.” She screamed, “WHAT?!” Then it was too late. Acceptance letters were already coming in. So she relented and I went to Paris. It was amazing. I needed to. For multiple reasons. First of all, I knew that I needed to break away completely. I needed to go somewhere where I couldn’t run home for safety. I wanted to challenge myself. I wanted to find out what kind of musician I was…what kind of person I was…who I was. I had known since I was really little that I was gay, but in that period especially I had been basically taught that gay people were bad…that being gay was bad, but I didn’t feel like a bad person, but everything that I ever saw was like, “you’re bad.” So I spent all of my time trying to hide that. So burying myself in music felt like a really safe, empowering place, and running to Paris felt like a great place to find out who I was. Even when we moved from Ohio to California, I stopped being Jake for a couple of years. My birth name
was John, after my father, but I was Jake from the day I was born, as a nickname. It’s not my official name though, so I decided to find out who that was. Who was John Heggie? So I went by that for my last two years of high school, and when I went to Paris I went with John as well, or Jean (he laughs).

(In a French accent) Jean Eggie. (Both laugh).

So I went to Paris, and it was an amazing experience, and my shell may have cracked a little, but I was still just terrified of myself and so afraid, but I went to amazing concerts, and I really was introduced there to the trained operatic voice. Student tickets were so inexpensive then. As were Eurail passes to travel and see all over Europe, and so I saw great performances of opera, ballet, modern dance, art exhibits. . . . Boy, to be eighteen years old and running around Paris and Europe with really cool friends that I met through the school. And, the school was an international school. It was only fifty-one percent American. Everything else was from other countries—from the Middle East, and from all over Europe, Asia. . . . So I met people from all over the world that I would have never met otherwise. It was a really amazing experience, and I had a private piano teacher. I had a somewhat composition teacher. Really, I mostly checked in with him a couple of times. He wasn’t… he was really old and sweet, but he wasn’t real helpful. But, I did study with a piano teacher still, and I wrote a lot. I was just writing songs though at that point, and I still at that point thought I was going to write a Broadway show.

Yeah?

I was writing ballads.

That’s fun. Do you ever cross the genres? Do you ever write for Broadway?

What I figured out that I do well…and I think it’s important to know what you do well…you know, whatever field you’re in…is…I found out that what I do well is to bring out the things that I love about musical theater—the pacing, the story telling, the clarity with words, the clarity with characters—and bring that to the opera house, but write well for opera singers, so that we have the best of both worlds, which is what I think all along that’s what Mozart, Verdi, and Puccini…that’s what they wanted. They wanted to have that vitality and sense of pacing and thrill that we get from a great night of theater. You know? They wanted that combination. So, I don’t think my gift lies in writing a Broadway show. It lies in writing things for opera houses and for opera singers and bringing things that we love about great theater along with it.

Ok, so that brings me to your relationship with Joanna Harris.

You got a bottle of vodka? (Both laugh)

Seriously?! I don’t want to ask anything too personal.

No. That’s fine. I actually just wrote an essay about exactly the stuff we are talking about, so it’s very fresh in my mind. Well, my mom decided it was time for me to come back to the states. I would have stayed in Paris. I was thrilled there.

Oh, I know. I would still be in Italy if I didn’t have my husband and son at home.
Intense, right? So good. On every level, it’s amazing. So, she decided it was time for me to come back, and I thought, you know, I need to kind of get serious about this education thing and finish it up, so I knew that I was tempted to just become a wandering minstrel in Europe. I just loved it over there so much. So, I decided to go to UCLA because there was a teacher there, Johanna Harris, who I had heard about from Ernst Bacon, and my piano teacher Doris Marliave, and some friends in high school through this performing arts group that I was involved with. Other people who I had gone to concerts with as well told me that she was a great teacher. She is exactly the right person for who you are as a musician. So, I went to UCLA, and it was amazing there. It is a gorgeous campus. It was 1981 that I went to UCLA, and I met really fun, geeky people…total music geeks. I hadn’t found my people in that regard in Paris. I found really fun people, but not people who I could talk to about music who cared about it the way I did. At UCLA it was just like music geeks everywhere, and I loved it.

_Yay! I love music geeks. I am a music geek._

But, I was still very, very closeted and afraid of myself, and I started studying with Johanna, who was kind of a magical teacher, in that it really was not just about the notes, but the composer, and what was going on in their life at the time they wrote this. What were they reading? What were they listening to? Who were their friends and influences? Why did they write this piece? What compelled them to take the time to put these notes on the page? ‘Cause as a composer, I can tell you. It takes a commitment.

_Right._

You just write something because, “Oh, I feel like writing this today.” It’s because you NEED to get it on the page. But I had never thought about that. Or that there was a time when these pieces didn’t exist. Great music feels timeless—like there was never a time when it wasn’t around. Someone invented that, and put that on the page for the first time. So, she was…it wasn’t just about learning to play well. It was everything, and very often lessons weren’t about playing the piano. They were “Let’s go for a walk and talk about this piece.” Or, “We’re gonna go have coffee and really discuss it.” And that was invaluable. I had never had a teacher like that.

_That’s great._

I had really great teachers who talked about the music, but not to that degree. And, she was the most natural musician I have ever met where music was her first language. It was in the core of her. So I was kind of in awe of her. What I didn’t realize was happening was that not only had she become very fond of me, but she had fallen in love with me. And that was terrifying. When it got really terrifying was when she was engaged to marry the violinist Joseph Gingold at Indiana University, and she was going to move there, and there was a group of students who were talking about going to IU to follow her, and I was one of them, and I just realized, “I don’t want to go to Indiana.” I didn’t want to move back to the Midwest. I didn’t like the Midwest. And, I felt like I wanted to stay, and plus I was really scared ‘cause I could tell she was already way too fond of me, and I felt very vulnerable myself, so there was a lot of personal mess going on. So, I told her on the phone that I wasn’t going to be able to go. And she burst into tears and said, “Then I’m not going.” And she broke off her marriage like a day before the wedding and told me that she
did that for me. Now imagine being barely twenty-one, and the teacher that you are in awe of
tells you this information. I was so scared, and there was no one that I could really talk to about
it. I didn’t feel like I had anyone that I could really talk to about it. And so I…if I have one regret
in my life it’s that I wasn’t strong and wise enough and really independent enough at that time to
really put things in perspective. Cause she and I should have been great friends our entire—you
know till she died. And instead I let her believe that I was in love with her as she was with me,
and then we got married, because she wanted to get married, and it was really tough.

*She was much older than you, right?*

She was nearly seventy. She turned seventy right after we got married.

*And you admired her so much. I couldn’t imagine…*

And I did love her. I mean I cared about her deeply. And I cared that…I was very flattered that I
made her so happy and that she found such hope and promise in the connection with me. But
now that I’m a lot older I can see that she was like the child in the relationship. You would think
she had the perspective. Plus, I know there were people telling her, “You know he’s gay, right?”
Even though I couldn’t say it, I know that there were people talking to her about that, but she
didn’t want to see it or hear it. She just wanted to live in this fantasy. So we did get married, and
we lived in this sort of illusion for about a year. We became a two piano team, and we traveled
and played, and she continued to teach me, and she also became a very important composition
teacher to me because she was so intuitive with music, and she taught me about being intuitive,
but also questioned things like, “Is that actually the right harmony? What about this? What about
broadening the scope of this and pushing the envelope a little bit.” She taught me about that as
well, and so it was…I definitely grew a lot as an artist even though I became very stunted a lot in
my own personal growth. She was also extremely jealous and possessive. She was suspicious of
any friend that I had from school, so it was tough. It was tough. Um…it was only about two
years into the marriage that we actually sat down to talk about what was going on, and she said,
“Well, I don’t want to get divorced.” And I said, “So, ok. Then this is what the marriage has to
be. We are great pals and everything, but that’s it. You’ll live a celibate life, and I’ll live a
celibate life, and that’s how it’s going to be.” And that’s what she wanted, so all through my
twenties, that’s the way it was, which was again real hard, and…but then after I graduated
college I had a two year break, and I had great friends, and we formed this composer group
called LoCal composers, and that was in 1984, and it was these great friends who saw the whole
situation of my life and still stood staunchly by me and embraced me as a friend and a colleague,
and so we created art together, and we challenged ourselves to put on concerts. Each one had to
have all new work, and so we would ask the people we had gone to school with. So we would
pool our money and pay them a pittance to play on these concerts, but they were great
challenges, because you had to write a new piece for each one of these things, and you have to
work hard to make sure we can afford to pay for this to happen. And that was really powerful.
But when I realized that not only was I stagnating as an individual, but I was starting to stagnate
as a creative artist, I needed more education, and I needed more perspective. I needed everything
that the university environment could bring to me, so I went back to grad school. And, I put my
emphasis more on composition than piano. And that was the first time that I’d done that.
And where did you go to grad school?

At UCLA

Oh, ok....then

Johanna and I were together in grad school, and that’s when I developed this thing called focal dystonia. And my hand started curling up, so I had to stop playing the piano, and I stopped composing, and I sunk into this depression. It was basically—now that I look back it was essential—because I was not leading an authentic life on any level. I was not an authentic person. I was not living my life truthfully. I was not an authentic artist. I was still stuck in this thing of looking for approval, you know?

You were being what everyone else wanted you to be.

Right, rather than speaking truthfully through my own voice, and that’s unsustainable. Well, I guess a lot of people try to sustain that through their entire life, but I was so unhappy with that, and the hand curling up made sense because of the tension in my life and stress from this facade that finally the whole thing crumbled. So, I walked away from grad school before I finished my Master’s, and that’s when I started figuring out that I could write ABOUT music, rather than write music, so I got a job running a private performing arts series, and then I worked at the UCLA Center for the Art of Performance in PR Marketing doing their writing. And then eventually I worked at Cal Performances for four months, and then I got the job at San Francisco Opera.

I was wondering where the PR came in. That makes what I read a little bit clearer.

Because I found out that I could write successfully about music because I had the background and the success and the passion for it. Rather than people who were writing at these places who had no background in it. So, I became a rare commodity, which is why I was able to get all this work, which was lucky because I was having to rebuild my technique from zero basically with a different teacher—the first teacher who I had studied with outside of Johanna for many, many years. But I was also, through that, not only developing a sense of my own self of what I needed and making my own way in the world, but finding out whether I could be happy as a person adjacent to music, rather than a person inside music. That’s a long answer to your question.

No! It’s great! I love hearing about all of it.

Well, it’s a huge chunk of my life. She’s still, to this day, one of the most remarkable people that I’ve ever known. I mean, just an amazing, inspiring presence...nobody like her anywhere that I’ve ever met, and I think really taken for granted in her own time because she was a woman. A really strong, powerful female artist, and the only one I could compare her with would be like Clara Schumann. She was that kind of powerful.

That’s powerful. So, when she was diagnosed with cancer, you were still with her, or had you already...
We never divorced. No. She didn’t want to, and I honored that. We lived separately for about a year after I left graduate school, and then she was having this big crisis in her family, and she was so impractical...no common sense, so I was so worried about her living by herself, so we decided to buy a house together and try living together again. Oh, so hard. Actually, it wasn’t so hard with her. It was her family. Her family made it so difficult. By then I was completely out. Well, not completely out, but I was out with her and with them and they saw the whole situation, and they were not happy about this. So when she developed cancer, they decided to step in and finally take care of her. So she and I had a talk and said, you know, she acknowledged that I had to get on with my life, and that it wasn’t fair for me to stay there because she was sick and wait till she died. And she didn’t want that. So, I was so eager to get out of L.A. that it just seemed like such a dark, horrible place for me at that point. I was no longer a musician. I was an injured artist. Anyone who knew me knew that I was an injured pianist, and, you know, an injured musician...you’re never gonna get work or the full respect of the people that you used to work with 'cause they’re afraid it’s gonna come back. And it just felt like a really...it was hard...and I never loved Los Angeles. I had always wanted to move to San Francisco, so in 1993 she had been diagnosed with cancer, and we agreed that it was time for me to move up here. She was being looked after very well, so I came up here and started my life over, and it was just almost instantaneous—my love affair with the city—and I finally was just able to be who I am. I didn’t have to be in the closet anymore. I finally met people who just... If you’re in the arts, and you’re in San Francisco, and you work at the opera house or something, it’s pretty much assumed that you’re gay! (he laughs).

But I had never been in that situation before, and it was so normal. And people talking about other people’s...you know, women and men having no problem with it. First it was like really throwing me off, and then it was like so liberating because I didn’t have to spend all of my time worrying about that. I could finally just focus on things that mattered to me, and so I could start to write again. I stayed in touch with her, but she died about a year and a half after I moved up here. But I was, by then, writing a lot. I was writing for Flicka, who had asked me to do concerts. I submitted songs for a competition for G. Schirmer, and I won, and within...literally within a year after starting working for the opera house, the director talked to me about writing an opera for the company. And I was in the PR marketing staff. That is how quickly things changed. And that opportunity did not even seem in the realm of possibility for me in Los Angeles till I moved up here, and within a year and a half of moving up here, it was already a different world. I was writing music for not only Flicka, but for Renee Fleming, who was still not known at that point, Dawn Upshaw, Sylvia McNair, BrynTerfel, Carol VaNess, Jennifer Larmore, who recorded a bunch of my pieces. She was the first one. And then the General Director is talking to me about writing an opera for the mainstage. But that’s how fast it happened.

That is amazing.

It’s insane. It really was. So, I started there in April of 1994, and in January of 1998, I was the first Composer-in-Residence working with Terrance McNally on writing Dead Man Walking.

Wow.
That’s how fast that happened.

So, what do you...How would you describe your style? I've read other people's opinions, but I'm curious what you think.

I would think it’s lyrical drama. So, it’s very American. To me it sounds very American, but it has this sort of...I always look for the lyricism of the phrase and a vocal line that makes sense to me. In that way it’s very much related to the traditional opera world...maybe of bel canto because I’m always looking for that long line.

Yes, the melody.

And the tune. I love tunes and motifs that return and give you information about who’s singing this and why, and what’s going on inside of them. I like to be very economical with the music so that there’s a few ideas out of which a bunch of material springs. And that was something that I learned to develop while I was at the opera. The great thing about that was I was listening to rehearsals constantly. And that was my job. It was my job to know everybody in every department and write stories and get information to the press, and write speeches, and write articles. It’s the greatest apprenticeship I could have asked for. Not only getting to know all these singers, but also watching how opera is done.

The business side of it.

The business side of it, and also listening to what works and what doesn’t work, and then trying to find that in my own voice. But I’d say it’s long line lyricism and story-telling. And everything in service to the drama. Everything. Trying to get my equation so that everything is about telling that story and getting out of my head. Write from the heart through the head. People are always asking me, “Well, you did this, and this is this kind of chord. Was that on purpose?” And, you know, I don’t analyze my music. I was terrible at harmonic dictation, and analysis. I never think that way. I just feel it. And, it’s like, “That sounds right” or “That doesn’t sound right.” I don’t know what the name of the chord is. I really don’t. That’s not what interests me. The feeling of it, and if it feels right to me inside, and I’ll know it.

So, you trust your instincts?

Yes. And it’s the thing I really got from Johanna.

That’s good. I have a hard time analyzing music, and I’m looking at The Book of Nightmares and I started writing down letter names and writing out the chords, and to me, that doesn’t...it doesn’t...I feel your melody and the main motive throughout the set, and how it evolves throughout the piece. So, I’m glad you said that.

It makes no sense to me at all. If someone told me, “Your job right now is to analyze this piece of yours,” I think I’d want to just like slit my wrists.

Because then you take the humanity out of the music. It becomes...

And I’ll tell you all the great composers—they weren’t sitting there analyzing their music. They were writing what sounded and felt right to them. You know? And afterwards somebody
analyzed it and said “That was so ground-breaking.” But I don’t think they were groundbreaking in the moment and thinking, “I’m gonna change the chord to this. That’s never been done.” They were listening to what was going on. They were all products of their time, and then pushing the envelope to something personal that they heard and felt. So, that process comes later, but it’s definitely not for me.

Yeah.

I figured out too, even through all my grad school trauma that I’m not meant for the academy because that stuff just doesn’t matter to me. When I do masterclasses for singers and pianists, or even composers, we talk about the music. I listen to what they’re doing, and I just respond. I say “This just feels like this is great, but then it doesn’t go anywhere, so what are you trying to say? Was that deliberate, or was that convenient?” And so it’s that way. But my style. It all stems from storytelling. I’m so interested in character, and the thread of journeys that we go on, and transformative journeys…they have to be transformed as if we’re learning something, or if we’re seeing the world in a different way, so whether it’s a song cycle or we’re learning something about ourselves or about our place in the world.

So when you put together—like the Kinnell poetry—isn’t exactly a story, per se, but

It isn’t, but there’s a theme. There is a universal theme to it, which is we’re not going to be on this earth all that long, and our time is finite. We don’t know what it is. We don’t know what the expiration date is, and us as adults knowing that . . . seeing a child who has no sense of that, and holding them and them holding us and them thinking, “Well, it’s always going to be that way.” The way we do when we’re kids, and the hard reality that an adult knows is no it’s not. And that’s the perspective of that song…it’s a meditation on that theme. So each song tells a little story based on an incident that is happening. The first one being the kid having a nightmare, and you holding on to them. The second one in the restaurant.

You so expertly captured that. I’m glad to know now that you have a child, because me as a mother, hearing and reading the song over and over again and studying it…I just...every time I feel like there was something else captured that only a parent understands. Like the decorum. In the restaurant trying to go back to that decorum that you had before the incident occurred. You really captured that. I was like, wow. As a mother, I’m going to have fun singing that song.

And the third one…when you look at your kid, and you see something that reminds you of a parent or a grandparent. You see time moving through your child. I think that’s a very special moment, and then the last one is about, well you have to set them down now, and when you come back the nightmare will be over, and we’re going to go out walking together.

I love it.

Well, I’m so glad. It’s a very emotional set of songs. Yeah. This summer I did them in Santa Fe with a wonderful soprano named Heidi Stober who has a baby named Henry who is just over a year old, and she just started weeping by then end.
Yeah. Three and four bring me to tears. The poem of the third song. Even without the music it probably would have brought me to tears, but the music—it gives you so much of the soul.

That’s something that I’ve learned along the way. You know, when I was in my twenties in school, I was lucky enough to be contacted by the center of performing arts in LA to be the page turner for a lot of concerts that were happening, which was amazing! I got to be on the stage turning pages for recitals with Leontyne Price, Kiri Te Kanawa like three times, Renata Scotto, Caballe, Tatiana Troyanos, Itsak Perlman, Isaac Stern. I was onstage with these people turning pages and watching them from behinds. Price was the most amazing to watch on the stage. First of all, she was universally adored and admired. Sitting behind her when she sang, it was like suddenly this pillar was planted on the stage, solid. Nothing moved. Everything was coming out like this. It was the essence of learning. You know one pianist that I played for…his name was Roger Vignoles, and I had a lot of art songs at that time, so I sent him a tape of my art songs. So he wrote back and said, “You have a lot of facility, and you’re obviously a gifted song writer, but you’re not doing anything with these poems. You’re giving a hint of a nice tune every now and then, but you’re just setting these poems. If you’re really going to make music, you’ve got to mess with the poetry. You’ve got to mess with it all. Read a poem that a great composer has set. Read the poem, and then listen to what they did with that and what isn’t found in there when you read it. They’re messing with the poem. Because someone else would have set it completely different, but look what they did. And it feels so right. They weren’t just setting words. They were writing music, which is what I’ve told you before. And I hear this all the time now. It’s my biggest complaint with a lot of new operas that I hear. Or new songs. You’ve set the words, but you haven’t written a note of music. What is the music giving to us that if I didn’t understand the language, I would still know what was going on. That’s what I want. And that’s what I learned, not only from Roger Vignoles, but from that five year break when I didn’t write music and was just listening to every kind of music, and when I went to the opera. Listening to operas where I didn’t understand the language at all. It was Russian, it was German, it was Italian. I didn’t understand it, but I knew what was going on just from the music. So when I started writing music again I said, “That’s what I need to aspire to.” It’s that you know what’s going on, even if you don’t understand a word of English. And so that’s always the goal for me, whether it’s a song or an opera. And that’s what I feel like I did. I was successful in The Book of Nightmares. You would understand the anxiety, or the funny joy or the sorrow, the wistfulness. You would get that, even if you didn’t understand a word of English.

I think so too, and I want to talk to you about each song specifically, but I don’t want to keep you too long. We’ve been at this a while now, and I

Well, let’s take a little break, and I’m going to turn the heat up because I’m freezing.

(Break)

So did you write the pieces, and then you gave them to Lisa Delan?

They were written specifically for her. She has been a really generous friend and supporter for years and someone I love spending time with, and I owe her a lot for the help that she’s offered.
She had always wanted a set of songs, and so I was finally able to do it, and she found the poetry. She found the poetry, and she knew that I was going to love them and she was right.

*So she picked the four?*

No. She told me about it, and I was in residence at UNT in North Texas, and I went to their used bookstore, and they happened to have this volume of Galway Kinnell poems. I was in shock. So, I got them and I read them and they were fantastic. So then it was a matter of deciding which ones and which parts of which ones because I only set portions of a couple of them, but actually they revealed themselves very quickly once I got that opening motif. That sort of relentless (he hums the main motive), and then that served as the foundation for everything in each song.

*I love the way you use it differently in each song too.*

So, do you want to go over them?

*Definitely.*

I’m sorry I don’t have my book with me, and I can’t do the cello part.

*OK. I’m still going through the process of finding a cellist for my lecture recital.*

Yeah, you really need a great cellist. They’re really hard.

*Especially that first one because it’s so virtuosic.*

Not just that, but this prelude to the last one is really hard. And all of this before the piano comes in is just you and the cello. And this is really hard because it’s a lot of left-handed pizz. So while they’re bowing, it’s with these fingers. It’s just very demanding. So which ones do you want to do?

*Can we do 2 and 3?*

Sure! So, this is just precious and elegant, and you can sort of hear teaspoons hitting on a plate. (They perform “In a Restaurant.”)

Great. Good. Really fun. Watch, how you say the word *lap*. You’re saying (mocks British accent) *lop.*

*Oh, Good Lord.*

You’re also saying “ond each spoonful” instead of “and.” So it’s that American “ah”. The style is really, really good. This just needs to be…go baroque. That way, it should sound completely different. This is the child, and the child is really determining what is going to happen. “Toward all the mouthfuls” Suddenly the child has emerged as in control of everything because they’re going to take the room for a moment.

*OK*

While you’re trying to maintain decorum, suddenly this is a description of what the child is doing.
OK

Your one word. And then on “Caca” I would really try to keep it straight tone. (He mimics operatic vibrato) I wouldn’t do that. Just make it “caca.” Don’t do them too short, so people really get them. There is a difference. And then really take your time on the last one so that each one of them is a little different. Take some dramatic liberty there, ok (He demonstrates with a dramatic pause before the last “caca”)? And then it’s getting the decorum back, right?

Right.

But this is a total break of decorum, right?

Yes, definitely.

Beautiful voice, by the way. Beautiful singing.

Thank you!

Let’s do it again. (They perform the song, until Heggie stops the author at “rising toward all the mouths).

Can you make it a totally different texture here (At “to all the mouthfuls”)? It’s like the messenger announcing the arrival of the God Jupiter, in a Baroque sense, ok? It’s just great fun, ok?

Ok (they start again and stop at “Caca” because the author sings “caca” with vibrato again).

But, see how if we do this, we get three distinctly different styles and sounds all in a row. It’s so surprising to the listener, and it’s really great. I love that.

You like the surprise?

Yes, and I like a range of styles coming at you to tell the story but that also is surprising. The thing that any composer is looking for is something that feels inevitable but still has surprises along the way.

Alright, let’s do “caca” again (They try again).

That last one vibrated. That’s why I don’t do baroque music!

Then just cut it a little short. Just don’t do them too fast, or it doesn’t resonate as well. But if you take your time like a confident kid saying, “I have a word—caca!!” Alright, let’s do it one more time. I would start the word “steam” a little earlier, so that we get the “t” of “steam” on the downbeat of the measure. Good, and you can even start it a little sooner (on the 4th beat of the measure). And make sure that you are singing the words the way you would say them (Heggie makes fun and imitates a British accent).

And then it’s up to you what you want to do at the end when the instruments are playing. That can just be a fun little divertissement. Anyone who has been with a kid at a restaurant knows…especially our kid. When he was really little he had so much energy, and he was just
antsy. He couldn’t sit still. There was not a meal where we didn’t like say, “Do you need to run around?” Then we would get up and we’d go outside and run around. We’d go back in and eat a little more, and then go run around. You could just see the body language, like, “It’s time.” So restaurants were not fun for a long time. And some kids are just great with it. But some just can’t.

*My son can sit still, but he just can’t stop talking. EVER. It never stops.*

He has a lot to say, huh?

*So he gets his energy out verbally, which is great for me.*

Yeah, right? Are you comfortable standing?

*I’m good.*

(They perform “My Father’s Eyes.”)


*Thanks. I have a question. “The angel of all mortal things,” why is that rest there?*

Um, first of all it would be unsustainable without the rest.

*I was just curious what was in that rest? Is there an emotion in the rest?*

It’s a chance for you… I still want the phrase….the phrase is this, but there are very few people who are going to be able to do that successfully and really carry it through. ‘Cause it’s also in that horrible place right there. The evil B-natural, which I know is always such a scary place anyway. It also gives you a place…because it would be hard to pronounce the word correctly. “All mortal…alllmimmortal” It needs a break so you can actually pronounce the word.

*Ok. I thought maybe it had a poetic meaning or something.*

(He laughs) Sure. Well, it has a practical meaning…to help you to be able to successfully convey the phrase. The most important thing, as you know, is that it has this very placid feel…that there is no hurry at all to get through the song, and yet throughout the song is has to have this inner motion. I wouldn’t go much slower than that, so that the cello can do (he plays). So that we get the sense that this is sort of connected to the whole timeline of the piece. Also, this is also representative that the nightmare is still going on. The nightmare for the grown-up is that this all ends at some point. I’m so grateful for this moment, but I’m living the truth, the reality that this is all finite. And that’s why that sort of theme is ever-present.

*Mortality? A mortality theme.*

Yes, it’s the knowledge of it. It’s the knowing. And it’s kind of that knowing that’s always in the back of our minds, but we can usually just forget about it, but when you see a kid that’s so important to you and that you want to be there to protect but you realize your own mortality. It’s a scary thing.
I thought you negotiated this very well, and this is deliberate, not only because the phrase is so long, but also because “the hand that waved…once” it’s deliberately separated. This is really powerful if you have the air to do this all the way through there on one breath (He demonstrates, “once in my father’s eyes” all in one breath). That breath is there not only to make that “once” very special, but also to give you a chance to let you do that phrase, because I LOVE the carry over. And then this has just a tiny little different spirit to it, ‘cause that’s such a charming image, you know? What do you think that means? “A tiny kite wobbling far off in the twilight of his last look.”

_I know what I think it means. Kind of the soul…_

But why a kite?

_You’re grounded with a kite. It’s easy to be…_

But I also think it’s a childhood image. Kites are for kids. They really are. That’s the magic of it. You’re looking in your kid’s eyes and see this kite that reminds you not only of them and their childhood, but of your own, and the experience that you had with your own father, if you were lucky. That is an actual experience that I had with my dad. I remember we used to go out and fly kites. So that line has really special meaning for me. We were so evil to him. One time he had all four of us out with kites, and we all got tired of it, so we left him with all the kites and ran home, so he had four kites. So he was like, “What am I gonna do with all these kites?” And then reeling them in. We were so evil.

So for me it represents a couple of things…sort of the fragile, but also that it’s a really childish thing. It’s almost unreachable. It’s like it’s floating out there in space. It’s like we feel maybe someone that we loved who is gone…maybe their soul is up there. But it’s also, you’re looking in your kid’s eye the same way you used to look in your father’s eye and seeing the connection and the continuity of time and life. That’s just a really profound image.

San Francisco, CA

November 18, 2013

_Well, this is the first appearance of the theme, right?_

There it is, right from the top. And remember this piece, um, I wrote this piece…how long after Moby Dick? A year and a half. And everything was being influenced by the musical language of that opera, and that opera—the main chord progression is (he plays the chord progression) and that goes all the way through, but it’s sort of (he plays the chord progression in the context of Moby-Dick) and it sort of becomes (he plays the main theme from From ‘The Book of Nightmares’). So they are connected somehow. I know they are. In my brain, those are very connected, but this whole thing was just…I was looking for a motif that sort of was relentless, you know? Like the presence of this nightmare, and for the kid we don’t know what they were dreaming, right? But for us the nightmare is being separated or disconnected, or losing control, or knowing that we’re not always going to be around. And the journey from that is from this (he
plays the opening of the piece) to that (he plays the “love” melisma from the last piece) that there is actually great beauty in the fact that it is only temporary because you really have to appreciate every moment. So, that’s the journey of that theme. Anyway, so that is the first appearance right at the top, and the whole cycle is built around that motif.

*That was kind of where I was going with the question. The first appearance is from the nightmare, but it evolves and for each song it is something different.*

But it’s ever present, and that’s the idea. Like my song cycle *The Deepest Desire* the whole song cycle is built around (plays the theme), and it’s just a major third and minor third, and the whole cycle is built around that, and what that represents is sort of this unsteady call because it happens in the flute first, and these are texts by Sister Helen Prejean. It represents a calling—an internal something that is very unstable that is pulling you in some direction, and maybe you aren’t even aware, but when you get to it you’ll know. And then, in the last song of that cycle, which is this very peaceful piece called “Primary Colors,” that theme is sort of inverted. I think it’s (he plays the inverted theme). That’s it. So it goes from (he plays the theme, followed by the inverted version). So, similar things happen with a theme like this, but it’s all based on (He plays the first appearance of the “nightmare theme”). Rhythmically and harmonically it all goes from that—this oscillating thing. And then we get (he plays the last chord of the first movement).

*I think I was telling you yesterday that I am not the best at structural analysis.*

Yeah. I’m not either. I just know it sounds right.

*The theme is so powerful, you know the things that happen around it, obviously I will have to spend more time with and analyze, but I was just wondering if you have a general idea of how it progressed in your mind from beginning to end. In this first piece, I’m having trouble finding any sense of home key. In the very first one, there’s that pull between C and D.*

This is the clearest we get, is this A major in the middle. It’s there. Then it goes. And then it’s back down to. I imagine it’s sort of G-flat but down there with this other thing going on up here….I don’t know.

(Both laugh)

*But it’s pretty.*

It has a sense of mystery to it, and I’m sure a jazz person or someone who can really analyze it would be able to tell you the quality of that chord immediately, but for me I just know that it’s the sound world for this piece.

*The first piece and the last piece, like you said, the theme evolves and it becomes something different in the end. And there’s something beautiful in knowing that we are mortal and then at the end you do something that sounds like the nightmare again. Was that on purpose?*

Oh yes! All of it was on purpose. Because we get to this place that is sort of unsettled (he plays the postlude). And I guess there you go, that’s the key. G-minor. Right? But then it visits here, and it visits here, but in the first piece, G-minor is at the bottom…is at the root of everything.
But, there…why that? Because just as you feel that everything is settled and your child is going to sleep and you’ve convinced them and yourself that it is all okay, there’s still this haunting question behind you. Is it really okay? You know, you say what you need to say to comfort your child, but in the end when you go to sleep, you just don’t know.

It’s like in the movies where you see the person hugging the other person, and all of a sudden they show you his face and something isn’t right.

It’s that feeling inside yourself. There’s a scene in Dead Man Walking where the mother has to say goodbye to her son who is going to be taken away and executed, and she’s saying goodbye to him for the last time. And instead of falling apart in front of him, she says, “Look I’m smiling. I’m okay. You know what I’m remembering? I’m remembering when you were little and splashing and laughing around. That’s what I’m gonna remember.” And the minute he goes, she falls to pieces. But it’s a little bit a similar kind of thing of staying positive and upbeat for yourself to give yourself hope, as well as for your child who needs that sense of peace and comfort. But then there’s that question and that sense of reality in that “I don’t know,” which is your own nightmare. I don’t know. So it leaves the question mark at the end. Because it starts that way too (He plays the beginning of the first movement). I don’t know, but it’s definitely sort of a g-minor tonality all the way through, I guess.

(Laughing) You guess?

Yeah. That seems right to me.

I love it. You just go on your instincts.

And when you listen to it, it sounds right, right?

Oh yeah.

That’s of that world. So, yeah. Does that all make sense?

Yes it does. So, I think I forgot to ask you yesterday about the premiere of the piece.

Well, I wrote these for Lisa Delan in early 2012, like in January, I think. And she recorded them that summer but had never performed them. So really, the premiere was in May of this year at a benefit that we did because they hadn’t been performed yet. I can tell you the exact date.

Is that the one that Flicka was at…where she heard them?

Yeah, exactly. So she was there. I can tell you exactly the date. Let me look.

So she had JUST heard them when I met her this summer. Because the masterclass I think was in May.

She might have…there was also…because Lisa had already recorded them, and that CD had JUST come out…probably a few weeks prior to that premiere. And then we were able to do them at that concert, and since then I did them in Santa Fe in August. I was just so relieved that they were written.
So did she commission them? Or were they a gift to her?

They were a gift to her because she had done so much for me over the years and had been such a great friend. And then she found the poems, and she knew that she was going to record them. So, you know, she’s just been great.

So how did you guys come to be friends? Is that...

We met (he pauses while still trying to find the premiere date in his phone)...

It’s ok. I can’t multitask either.

Yeah I can only do one thing.

Me too. My husband makes fun of me all the time.

Here it is. May 19th was the premiere. What day was your class?

I want to say it was the first week in June.

Oh, ok. So right after. May 19th was the premiere. Umm…No, Lisa and I got to know each other because she is not only a soprano in the area who does a lot of concerts, but she also works very closely with Gordon Getty, who is a composer and also helps to sponsor and support a lot of arts and artists throughout the country and the world, but generously in the Bay area, and he has always been very supportive of my projects. And so she runs the foundation…the Getty Foundation. She chairs it. And, he also…this wasn’t through the foundation, but through the contributions that he made personally. Pretty much any time I have gone to him for help with a project—an opera premiere or a recording, something like that—he has been really generous and very supportive of me as a composer and of my work. And Lisa is always the one who sort of helps to make that happen, and so I was thrilled to be able to write the piece for her as a thank you, and also because I believe in her as a performer. And it was something that she had been wanting and hoping for.

That’s good. Good for both of you.

Yeah.

Gordon Getty came to New Orleans when I was an undergrad and gave a bunch of money to Loyola University, and we sang one of his pieces in the choir. It was really difficult, especially for me because I didn’t even know how to read music at that point, but he was really nice.

He’s so nice. He’s turning 80 in December. And, he’s still going strong. He just is so full of joy. Every time I’m around him he’s just bursting with energy and ideas. You know? He’s amazing. And he helped with my recent recording of Here/After that Joyce is on. And also the telecast of Moby-Dick. And he’s just been amazingly generous, and Lisa has been there every step of the way of all of that too. She’s been really great, so I was happy to be able to write these pieces for her.

They are beautiful.
Well, thank you. She likes them too.

*She must have been happy.*

She was very happy, and the cellist for the recording is Matt Haimowitz, who of course is a very amazing cellist…an international star… so to know that they were going to be performing them, and the pianist was a very wonderful local gal named Kristin Pankonin who plays gorgeously. The recording is very well done.

*Yes. I like it very much.*

Thanks.

*I've been living with it, so I know it very well. What about in the first piece...I'm looking for those glissandi.*

You mean the *portamenti*?

*Yes*

Yeah. They’re in the cello too. I like that. There’s times I really like a clean attack, but I find, like here, the *portamenti*… they’re just so expressive.

*My question is, you know, in....*

This is just like (He sings and plays the *portamenti* on “stars”). It’s kind of a loving caress and sigh.

*Do you want them with vibrato, or do you want them straight?*

Definitely with vibrato.

*Because sometimes when the lines are straight like that—maybe I have misunderstood this concept—but it’s kind of like a straighter portamento, rather than in Puccini where the portamenti lines are curved. Like (she demonstrates). My teacher was telling me that I was doing it wrong, so I wanted to be sure I was doing what you intended.*

Well, we’ll listen. I’ll let you know.

*Ok, and does it matter to you where it [the portamento] starts? Like in those long measures where it happens on a whole note?*

Usually I would want it to happen towards the end of the measure. I just don’t want it…I don’t mean for it to go (he demonstrate a slow and gradual *portamento* from the beginning to the end of the measure) through the whole measure. I don’t want it to be (he demonstrates a fast *portamento*). I want it to be towards the end.

Good. That’s what I was doing. Maybe as we go through the pieces I’ll have more questions for you.

*Sounds good.*
Heggie comments:

There is a little bit of a desperation in the last bit of it. “Even as my broken arms heal themselves around you,” and that’s when you, all of a sudden you’re holding as tight as you possibly can. Which is why it gets more and more intense, like that thing that you see in the movie, right? To your child you’re trying to be strong, but the minute their head is turned there is a sense of desperation. You’re clinging to them as hard as they are to you.

Yeah. It’s like when they fall down and hurt themselves and they’re bleeding everywhere, you need to be like, “Oh you’re ok honey.”

But you’re really like “Oh my God!” It’s true. You have to be strong. Even when you’re shaking inside. That’s part of the (he plays an excerpt from the movement again). The 16th notes is sort of that nervous energy too, which the cello gets too. This was really good. Remember to keep this in the slower tempo “you scream waking from a nightmare.” And then here you get back into the tempo primo from the beginning. “When I sleep walk.” Okay?

So this place is like after “you scream waking from a nightmare.” (He sighs) Then you need to breathe. You wake up hearing the screaming, and you’re like, “Oh my God, what’s wrong?” And it’s like, “Ok, it’s just a nightmare.” So when I sleepwalk into your room and pick you up and hold you up….I always recommend to singers that they do the text as a monologue...as a dramatic monologue. And do it as many different ways and in front of people. See what they’re getting from it...from you. Because if you can do it successfully as a monologue, think what you can bring to it when you have the music too. It’s not a matter of not trusting what’s on the page. You totally trust what’s on the page, which is great. But it’s just having another layer of perspective. You know? Of what you’re bringing to it. So that you’re not just doing it because that’s the way I wrote it, but you understand my choices and you’re making it your own. (He sings “when I sleepwalk into your room and pick you up, and hold you up”) Nice breath (“into the moonlight”).

There is a little bit of a sense of magic happening when you say the word, “moon.” You know, it has to conjure just that magical feeling.

The Rusalka moment. I love it.

Yeah.

Do you feel that throughout these pieces that the cello plays a different role? Or is it always the same? Is it a voice? Is it...

It’s a combination of what’s going on in your head and your heart, and also a sense of what’s going on timelessly around you.

I’m trying to remember which one it was in where it felt like it was almost a duet between the voice and the cello.

Yeah, towards the end.
To me it seemed like the cello almost took on a different role.

But there’s great harmony suddenly, instead of this fight. You know? I don’t know. I want to leave that open to interpretation, but to me it’s a little bit of what’s going on in your head and your heart as a soloist. So it’s another version of you and your observation of the world. Maybe while you’re saying one thing, it’s doing another. Because very often we are saying one thing while we’re feeling and thinking another. It’s that whole idea of like, “Honey, it’s ok, it’s okay, it’s ok.” When we’re really like “Oh my God!!!”

Definitely.

The little voice inside of us that’s always a little tinge of that doubt about what’s actually happening. ‘Cause sometimes it echoes exactly what you’re doing. You say, “I think you think I will never die.” And it goes (he plays the cello echo).

That’s the turmoil underneath.

Right, but this middle section has to have a totally different color altogether—this A-major. I think it’s good. What you’re doing is totally lovely, and you sound great singing it.

Thank you.

Do you want to do it again?

We can do the last movement, and if we have time we can go back.

Alright, now tell your cellist that this just has to be really free and easy, this last song…this prelude. This is really demanding of a cellist. And to try to make it smooth and beautiful and meaningful, and when I say slightly playful and a little lazy, it’s just the idea of like, you’ve finally calmed everybody down and it’s time to put him back in the crib, and he’s just a little bit in that partly sleepy zone, and it’s just really sweet, you know? So I’ll play it, and just to give you an idea of what I had in mind.

(they run the piece)

Good. Beautiful. But the only thing I would say at the beginning is watch that A. That “Back” you go into your crib. You’re modifying it a little too much (he mocks a British accent—the composer prefers an American accent on all of his songs). But I love it, and it’s still just a little playful, and it’s lovely. Yeah, I think this is all just really lovely, and then this is almost like your prayer. You know? Do you listen to K.D. Lang ever? There is a song that she does on her cd called “Hymns From The 49th Parallel.” And it’s called “The Valley.” It’s a song by a Canadian composer Jane Siveri, and it was kind of the inspiration for this.

Okay

So, if you want to give it a listen, it’s a really powerful, beautiful song. And the way she sings it, it’s just like, “That is so amazing.” It makes me cry every time. I mean, they’re very different, but that was sort of the idea. And then this is really good, but as much difference as you can get from this, where you still think maybe they can hear you. But this, you know they’re asleep. So
this is a prayer, not only for them, but for you. You know? And, what do you mean by “when I come back, we will go out together”?

*I don’t know. I want to…What makes good poetry is that it is open to interpretation, but then when you add music to it you’re giving your interpretation.*

But I wanted to leave it open to interpretation too.

*I don’t know what “ten thousand things” means. That’s what stumped me the most. Does she mean ten thousand other souls? Or ten thousand everythings?*

Yeah. Everything. Yeah, there’s thousands and thousands of things. But I don’t know. I don’t know what he exactly meant.

*But, when I come back? I don’t know. It could be when I come back from the afterlife, or it could mean when I come back in the morning.*

Exactly. It’s all okay. When I come back we’re gonna go out and play, and we’re gonna go out and look at all these wonderful things together. And yet each one…. “the wages of dying is love.” It’s an interesting line.

And “each scratched too late”—what does that really mean?

Each of the ten thousand things etched. That’s what I got out of it. That we learn too late the knowledge…

*That is etched in all of us when we’re dying…*

Right, when we’re done.

*We’ve got all these scratches and things that we’ve learned.*

I just think it’s a beautiful poem.

*Yeah.*

And the set actually winded up being…I thought the set was going to be around ten minutes, total. But it’s about 14 and a half. So it a little bigger than I anticipated. I thought it was just going to be a little wee thing, but it’s a little bit bigger than a wee thing, but it just felt right. It’s the right size. The songs feel to me like they’re in the right order.

*So would you call it a cycle?*

Yes. Definitely.

*Because of the emotional journey?*

Not only the emotional journey, but the fact that material returns.

*Thematic material?*
Yes, and emotional material in the poems and the music. I think it’s an interesting journey to go from “you scream waking from a nightmare” to “the wages of dying is love.” That’s a big journey, and it’s kind of amazing to get there. And we even get to laugh once in the middle of the journey, and that’s important. It’s so important to laugh.

Great.

So do you have any other questions about the songs? If you look this is really the first time that we have those parallel harmonies moving so obviously together, you know? That was deliberate too.

Yes, and the cello too. It’s almost as if the cello is with her now.

We’re all in, and we’re all together. This is like the first time that we can all agree. That no matter when it is, when I come back we’re going out together. Whereas, there is uncertainty through other things, or there’s vagueness, or there’s something not quite settled. But, on that, suddenly there is this realization, like “yeah.” And in that way, it is okay.

I love the color change here.

It’s also very different than what has come before. To suddenly go to that color, it’s so warm all of a sudden.

My uncertainty is with the tonality. I am not going to do an in-depth structural analysis as part of my paper, but I do want to have an idea about the structure, so I am going to sit down with a theorist and discuss the possibilities.

Now looking at it, I can see connections between the movements in terms of like, this G-minor, A-major, and the F sharp-major. Also G-flat, and then this disconnect between these different tonalities. I like polytonal things, and sometimes it just is. It’s two different harmonies working against each other there, and they’re not necessarily connected, and that’s deliberate. But yeah, and that would make sense, here we are in that (he plays the last chord in movement I) to G major (he plays the first chord in movement II). Then we go up and back down, and then we’re in (He plays the chord) whatever that is….Oh, this is Moby Dick.

You were writing this when Moby Dick was done and was being premiered?

No, I wrote this…

Oh, no. You wrote this in 2012 and Moby Dick was in 2010, right?

2010, but Lisa give me the idea for it in the spring of 2011, and I got around to writing the pieces in late 2011/early 2012. I was writing another song cycle at the same time—the Camille Claudel cycle that I wrote for Joyce [DiDonato]. I basically wrote these at the same time. Or, maybe I wrote these just after I finished the Camille Claudel cycle. They were very close in time, but they are very different song cycles. They are so different, but they’re different responses to different characters and different poetry,
That’s what I was about to say. You always stress how important the poetry is first. The story is first.

And the subject.

And if they’re two different stories, of course they are going to be two different...

Sound worlds. Yeah, it’s so weird to me how that happens ‘cause it’s just working on figuring it out, until I think that’s the sound world for that piece. That makes sense.

Yeah. In Moby-Dick that storm and the uncertainty and all that, it just makes sense also to be on a similar sound world.

When I found this, I mean, this is very Phillip Glass, but it made sense to me. Because while this is pulling up on the top (he play the theme) the bottom is going down and back up. So, it’s constantly undulating, and I really had never worked with that sort of texture before, and that dictated the entire opera basically. It’s based on these four chords, and so to find different permutations of that in the harmony and melody was really cool, but it’s almost crept into everything that I’ve written since then. The same way, after Dead Man Walking a lot of those themes crept in, and then I wrote a song cycle, The Deepest Desire, and that crept into almost everything I wrote for about seven years, until I started writing Moby, and then suddenly the Moby theme is in everything. But, I love…. It’s a progress from that world. But I love trying to maximize from the smallest bit. You know? In a way, it’s what bel canto writing is about, which is allowing a person to meditate on a single moment in time or a single feeling, and really explore a vocal line that gives voice and gives expression to that feeling or that moment, and time really having the sense of stopping and maximizing every bit of emotional capacity in that moment without completely stopping the story, and that’s what I like to explore too.
February 7, 2014

I’ve found some conflicting information about the age you were when you began piano study. Were you 5 or 6?

My mom says I was older than that even – she thinks I was 7 or 8, which I guess is possible. I seem to remember being about 6 when I started.

We didn’t talk at all about your mother and father and their influence on your work or life. I read a New York Times article about your life in reference to your opera “Last Acts” with a brief sentence about the tragic death of your father and having to revisit that experience as you composed a piece that ends with a tragic suicide. Since this piece is about the relationship between parent and child, I was wondering if your relationship with your parents…or the death of your father….had an influence on your choice of these particular poems from Galway Kinnell’s larger piece, and if so, what in particular attracted you to these poems.?

Hm. I think I am who I am – and I’m drawn to stories of parents & children, but mostly I’m drawn to transformative stories where something is revealed that wasn’t seen before. My father’s death and my mother’s struggle definitely made a huge imprint on me as a person and therefore as an artist. The Kinnell poems touch me deeply because they are about that joyful connection parents and children can share, especially in a troubled time – but the realization that no matter how hard we hold onto each other, the world insists on a gradual (sometimes sudden) letting go – that nobody is around forever, no matter how hard we wish it in the moment.

Your life is a wonderful story, and I am impressed at your grace and disposition, especially having been through so much. You have risen above so many struggles--your father’s death, the struggle with your sexual identity, your unlikely marriage to your mentor. So many would be bitter. Your music is full of insight into the human experience, and I am so happy to have met you and to have gotten to know a little bit of the soul behind the music.

Thank you!

If any of this is too personal, I completely understand, but when a reader reads about something so tragic, she is left with lots of questions. Were you close with your dad?

I think we were close – I have very few solid memories of him. I don’t remember the sound of his voice. But I remember him being very funny and loving – and I remember him taking time for his kids.

He was an Army doctor, correct?

He served as a doctor in the Korean War. After that he was in a practice as an M.D… later as a psychologist. (By the way, that New York Times article was incorrect – my dad didn’t serve in WW2, when he’d have been 12 years old! He served in Japan during the Korean War.)
Did your family ever find out why he disappeared so suddenly? Or why he killed himself?

He was a very sick man, alas. He suffered from terrible depression and had told my mom many times that he wanted to kill himself throughout their years of marriage. He was with a therapist, but back then they didn’t have the medications we have today – so there was nothing to help his suffering. It just got worse and worse. So, one day he just took off and killed himself where nobody could stop him or interfere. He needed to stop the suffering and felt the world would be better off without him.

And your mother was a nurse?

Yes. She was 39 when my dad died – and she went back to work, and back to school in order to get a Master’s Degree so she could get a better job. Eventually she landed at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital and worked her way up from emergency room nurse, to administration and education. She got her Ph.D. in her mid-60s and then retired at 67. She lives in San Francisco now and is a vital, active 81-year old.

You and your sister were very young when this happened. I cannot imagine going through such a horrific experience.

My sisters were ages 14 and 12 … I was 10, my brother was 5. We were all really young. My sisters became self-destructive and got into drugs, bad crowd, etc. I buried myself in music and my poor little brother kind of got left on his own in a way. Mom did the best she could under the circumstances. My eldest sister died from an aneurysm 10 years ago at age 45.

March 2, 2014

Composer’s corrections to the first draft of Chapter 1

Hi Kristen - I did look at it last night and here are comments below based on the initial version you sent to me. Thanks for the opportunity to give some responses! I appreciate it very much. All the best! Jake

****

ABSTRACT

Paragraph 1 - I don't think you could say I've been commissioned to write for opera companies across the US. Most all of my opera commissions have come from Texas (for some reason). I'm just lucky that opera companies across America have embraced the pieces once they were premiered.

Paragraph 2 - are you sure you want to refer to the songs in the cycle as 'movements'? That's a word specifically for abstract instrumental works, it seems….

CHAPTER 1

My father wasn't actually an army doctor - he was an M.D. who served in Japan for a year after the Korean War was over. During the time I was growing up, my mom didn't work -- she was trained as a nurse, but she stayed at home to raise four children, so the demands weren't on both
parents' careers, just my dad's. He liked to move a lot because it kept things fresh and exciting for him - and kept his depression demons at bay for a while.

I never performed with the Columbus Symphony -- that was an error in an early interview.

I didn't decide to compose because I was dissatisfied with my piano lit assignments ... I did think about quitting piano after my dad died because I wasn't happy with my teacher at that time, however (My mom talked me into staying with it.) ... I decided to compose because I thought "Hey, I could do that."

It wasn't Pleasant Hill that was culturally deprived -- it was my high school: College Park High School. -- in addition to the marching band and jazz band, they also had a jazz choir and I was the pianist for that group -- made some of the best friends of my life.

The poster I saw for the American College was in my high school French class.

I won the Schirmer contest in 1995 with the song "If you were coming in the fall" -- but Frederica von Stade did NOT record that one. She recorded two folk-song arrangements I sent in on the same tape. The winning song was recorded by my friend, soprano Kristin Clayton.

I was surprised about the singers who approached me because the song literature is already so vast - but they were looking for pieces that they connected with on an immediate, personal and very American level.


When mentioning Moby-Dick (and note the hyphen in the title), please mention libretto by Gene Scheer. There were five companies in the original consortium. San Francisco's production was in 2012 -- it was that production that was filmed and then released in 2013.

Feb of 2015 it is the Berkeley Symphony that will perform the orchestral version of Camille Claudel. The Pittsburgh Symphony is doing a completely different piece in May 2015.

Curt isn't my partner - he's my husband.

STYLISTIC OVERVIEW

Second sentence -- "lyricism and a long vocal line that is IN service to the drama."
APPENDIX D
TRANSCRIPT OF E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH LISA DELAN

February 19, 2014

Could you provide me with a professional bio? Also, what is your current professional position/s. Jake mentioned that you work closely with Gordon Getty or on a board?

Please see lisadelan.com for bio (there are links for reviews of "The Hours Begin to Sing" on the site as well). In addition to performing/recording song literature, since 1990 (the year after I graduated from SF Conservatory of Music) I have been the director of Gordon Getty's music company (Rork Music) and have been the Director of the Ann & Gordon Getty Foundation since 1996.

How did you and Jake meet, and could you describe your relationship--professionally and as a friend?

That is a good question! In fact I can no longer remember the specifics of my first meeting Jake, but we share a close circle of friends and it was inevitable that we would connect. We became close a decade ago through my performances (and later recording, on "And if the Song Be Worth a Smile" for PentaTone Classics) of the folk songs he originally wrote for Flicka, which Kristin Pankonin and I prepared with him. Our friendship deepened over time, sharing many joys (the birth of "Moby Dick") and tragedies (the death of our beloved friend Zheng Cao), and when I came to him about songs for the new recording he had already been planning to write a cycle for me.

Jake says you chose the poetry of Galway Kinnel. What was it that brought you to his poetry in particular?

Originally I sent Jake some poems that did not strike a chord for him, and he mentioned a couple of poets that did not resonate with me, but we knew that the right poems would make themselves known. One afternoon I was sitting on the floor of Bay Books in Half Moon Bay (CA) with my shoes kicked off, perusing volume after volume of poetry and I happened to open the Kinnell volume _The Book of Nightmares_ to "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight". I was immediately struck. Aside from the profundity of the narrative voice and the exquisite beauty of the language Kinnell uses in these poems, I was deeply moved as a mother as I knew Jake would be as a father. I purchased the book and went home and typed a word document containing the seven poems of "Little Sleep's-Head" and sent them off to Jake. I received an exuberant e-mail back from Jake that night - he loved the poems and proposed setting four of them to create the new cycle, and I loved his choices; Jake reached out directly to Kinnell for permissions to set the poems. (Sometime shortly after I e-mailed the poems, Jake and I were both attending a lung cancer gala in honor of Zheng and I presented him with the published volume).

I want to take a moment here to talk about art song. When I went to Oberlin and later to SFCM I assumed I would pursue a career in opera; at that time there were relatively few singers one could point to who were primarily devoted to art song, and opportunities to work in the field
were presumed to be in opera. This was also before the movement of "entrepreneurship" in the arts and the idea that we could actively create our own niche and opportunities. I have always gravitated towards the written word, and have been passionate about reading (and writing) poetry since adolescence. As much as I enjoyed singing opera (and still love to attend performances) it was always the song literature that sparked my keenest interest - whereas opera cuts wide swaths on large canvas, art song allows for infinite shadings with fine bristled brushes. Singing these texts is, for me, the highest intersection of music and literature. I feel deeply fortunate that my varied work in the world of music has afforded me the freedom to carve out this particular niche, to be a part of bringing new songs into the world. I hope that increasing numbers of young singers will have (and embrace) the opportunity to collaborate with poets, composers and instrumentalists and to be an integral part of the creative process.

*How did the composition of these pieces transpire? I know they were a gift to you, but can you elaborate?*

Jake had told me that he wanted to write a cycle for me, which was deeply meaningful. I love him dearly as a friend and as a composer and just knowing he was thinking about it was a tremendous gift. When I began to develop the ideas that would become "The Hours" I told Jake about the planned recording, and we began to think about poets (as detailed in question above). Once PentaTone had set a date for the recording Jake made sure that the songs would be ready in time (including time for me, Kristin and Matt to prepare them with Jake), and that he could be at the recording session at Skywalker Sound.

*What was your reaction when you first heard them?*

Goosebumps, tears. It was as if the music must have been in the words all along, the experience was so organic. And I was completely overwhelmed that Jake had written such heartbreakingly beautiful music for me to sing.

*Did you perform the premiere of the pieces? When/where/with whom at the piano/cello?*

I performed the premiere of the cycle with Jake at the piano and Emil Miland on cello in a program with Noe Valley Chamber Music last May.

*How did the public react? Were there any reviews of the live premiere?*

My perception was that the audience was very much drawn in, there was a feeling of suspension, a kind of "held breath" atmosphere; as far as I am aware the concert was not reviewed.

*Do you know if there is a review of these pieces? I have found reviews of your album but none that even mention the cycle.*

Following this e-mail I will send reviews that mention the Heggie songs (some as text, some as links).

*Flicka von Stade adored the pieces and recommended to a group at Harrower Summer Opera Workshop that we all listen to them on your album, which is where I fell in love with the pieces. I adore them and your interpretation. Would you mind talking about your interpretation of the*
pieces, or at least a summary of what each piece means to you--poetically, and how it was set musically?

1. “You Scream”

Jake’s scoring for cello in this song is ingenious - he is well familiar with Matt's extraordinary range as a cellist, and used this to great effect in the opening as the cello "tosses and turns" and becomes increasingly feverish until it screams into the "nightmare waking" of the vocal line. In many ways this is the hardest of the four songs; you are establishing the relationship between the parent and child but entering through the lens of the child's visceral experience. Whereas the other songs evoke humor or tenderness, there is a great tension and passion contained in this song, and a balance must be struck... the tremendous vulnerability of a parent is held here; the dichotomy of omnipotence and impotence, the profound duality of responsibility and surrender.

2. “In a Restaurant”

I can't tell you how much fun I had with this song! I love that even as the parent recounts, with palpable laughter, the antics of the young child, the music itself speaks the child's language - the fidgeting between the 5/8 and 6/8 meters, the sudden sweeps of motion, the toddling push and pull of tempo. And I find the end quite moving, as the memory trails away like the vapor of the steam.

3. “My Father’s Eyes”

Wow. Every time I sing this I am close to tears coming into the line "in my father's eyes" - I cannot imagine a more poignant setting, nor one with more quiet power to break your heart. The beginning holds a steady but distant gaze, moving from the moonlight ("memory") into the immediate intimacy of looking deeply into the eyes of your child- as the connection is made of the parent once the child to his/her own father, we return to the wavering distance of memory as it is released, like the string of the kite, into the vastness of the night sky. In the receding cello pattern that closes the song you can feel the loft of the kite, gently disappearing into the sky as the arpeggiated pattern in the piano - the ceaseless rhythm of time pass and life moving on - continues without interruption. As a mother of two children and a daughter whose father is almost 80, this song moves me beyond words.

4. “Back You Go”

If the first song is the hardest to sing, this one sets an incredible task for the cello! The moment that the cello solo segues into the cello/voice duet is so exquisite. Whenever I begin this song I feel the fragile weight of a sleeping toddler in my arms (though mine are teenagers now!). Whatever shape this "lullaby" takes it must be always exceedingly gentle; it holds this moment of laying the sleeping child down without waking them, the soft stroke and whispers while they transition back to deep sleep and drift back to dreams. And that last line slays me - "the wages of dying is love" - Jake's setting perfectly underscores the swelling of this sentiment - from the quiet moment in the deep of night, from this space out of time, emerges the powerful revelation that in the face of mortality and loss we are given the great recompense of love.
Do you feel, having read the poetry first, that Jake captured the essence of the poetry? What about his setting strikes you?

Absolutely - and I hope that Galway Kinnell feels the same.
March 14, 2014

Dear Mr. Heggie,

I am writing to request permission to use excerpts from your song cycle in my dissertation for Louisiana State University titled, *A Performance Guide to Jake Heggie’s From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’*

With gratitude,

Kristen Marchiafava

March 18, 2014

It is my pleasure to give KRISTEN MARCHIAFAVA permission to use samples and quotes from my composition *From the Book of Nightmares* for her DMA dissertation at Louisiana State University.
March 21, 2014

Dear Mr. Kinnell,

I am writing to request permission to quote your poetry from *The Book of Nightmares* in my Louisiana State University dissertation titled, *A Performance Guide to Jake Heggie’s From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’*

Thank you,

Kristen Marchiafava

Galway Kinnell 1218 Town Highway 16 Sheffield, Vermont 05866

March 24, 2014

I, Galway Kinnell, give Kristen Marchiafava permission to use my poems from *The Book of Nightmares* in her Louisiana State University Dissertation titled *A Performance Guide to Jake Heggie’s From ‘The Book of Nightmares.’*

In the event that the dissertation is published, you will have to contact the Permissions Department at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Yours sincerely,

Galway Kinnell
VITA

Kristen Marchiafava is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Loyola University, New Orleans, studying under Ellen Phillips Frohnmayer. Kristen earned her Master of Music degree from Mannes College, The New School for Music, where she studied with Ruth Falcon. Recent performances include Vanessa in Samuel Barber’s Vanessa with the Nevada Opera, 2nd Lady in Mozart’s The Magic Flute and Gertrude from Humperdinck’s Hansel and Gretel with Opéra Louisiane, Donna Anna in Don Giovanni with Festival South Opera, Anna Maurrant in Weill’s Street Scene with the Harrower Summer Opera Workshop, and Mimì in La Bohème with La Musica Lirica at the 2012 Montefeltro Festival in Novafeltria, Italy. Kristen has also appeared as soprano soloist in Mozart’s Mass in C Minor with the St. Louis Cathedral Choir and as a featured soloist with the Louisiana Sinfonietta. Other opera credits include Brod in the world premiere of The Fruits of Folia by Noam Sivan, Governess in Benjamin Britten’s The Turn of the Screw, La Contessa in Le Nozze di Figaro, Elettra in Idomeneo, Pamina in The Magic Flute, Fiordiligi in Così Fan Tutte, Rosalinde in Die Fledermaus, and Mother in Amahl and the Night Visitors.