Songs from Liquid Days by Philip Glass: A Performer's Guide

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SONGS FROM LIQUID DAYS BY PHILIP GLASS:
A PERFORMER’S GUIDE

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
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B.M.E., Arkansas Tech University, 2010
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May 2017
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Mr. Glass, without whom the world would not have this masterful piece of music.

To my major professor Robert Grayson and my minor professor John Dickson for their guidance and wisdom throughout these three years.

To my doctoral committee members Lori Bade and Loraine Sims for their tireless efforts in helping me successfully write this document.

To my family, for their support and for their enduring patience with me.

To Christina, for her love that knows no limits.

To God, for without Him I have nothing.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv

CHAPTER

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

2. BIOGRAPHIES
   The Composer ............................................................................................................................. 3
   The Poets ...................................................................................................................................... 5

3. PERFORMING SONGS FROM LIQUID DAYS ........................................................................... 10
   Changing Opinion ..................................................................................................................... 11
   Lightning ..................................................................................................................................... 22
   Freezing ...................................................................................................................................... 30
   Liquid Days (Part One) .............................................................................................................. 35
   Open the Kingdom (Liquid Days, Part Two) ............................................................................. 40
   Forgetting .................................................................................................................................... 46

4. THE AUTHORITATIVE RECORDING: A SCORE COMPARISON ............................................. 52

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................................... 62

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................................. 64

APPENDIX: COMPLETE LIST OF SOLO VOCAL WORKS BY PHILIP GLASS ...................... 65

VITA .................................................................................................................................................. 66
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project is to provide the reader and the prospective performer with a comprehensive view of the song cycle *Songs from Liquid Days* by Philip Glass. Chapter 1 of this document gives a brief compositional history of the cycle. Chapter 2 provides biographical sketches of the composer and the cycle’s four poets: Paul Simon, Suzanne Vega, David Byrne, and Laurie Anderson. Chapter 3 discusses performance practice suggestions for *Songs from Liquid Days*, including commentary on tempo, style, ensemble choices, pacing, and analyses of both text and music. Chapter 4 compares the artistic interpretations of the 1986 authoritative recording with the musical score. Appendices found at the end of this document will include the following: a preface from Mr. Glass where he discusses his perceptions of *Songs from Liquid Days* and a comprehensive list of the composer’s musical oeuvre for solo voice. The methodology used while researching includes the musical score, the composer’s own words regarding the cycle, and the creative interpretations of the artists from the cycle’s original album. It is the hope of this author that, through this research project and presentation, this cycle may be introduced to the classically trained singer and finds its place in the standard song repertoire.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1985, composer Philip Glass began a new musical journey. Already an accomplished composer of opera and instrumental music, never before had he attempted to compose song. As he states in the preface of the musical score of Songs from Liquid Days, he began by asking David Byrne, with whom he had worked once before, to write texts that he could then set to music. Naturally, the project evolved and Glass set out to compose his first (and, to date, his only) song cycle. For Glass the importance of the relationship between words and music was prime. Thus, his priority was to ask popular singer-songwriters of the time to pen the texts for the cycle because he felt they would understand the importance of the relationship between words and music, as he states in his preface to the musical score. After Byrne, Glass chose American singer-songwriters Paul Simon, Suzanne Vega, and Laurie Anderson to supply the rest of the texts.  

Songs from Liquid Days is difficult to categorize as a song cycle in the traditional sense. A formal song cycle would typically incorporate texts from only one poet; it would follow a hierarchy in which a narrator tells a story with a beginning, middle, and end; and it would contain, at least to some degree, recurring thematic elements, musically and/or textually. Songs from Liquid Days displays none of these characteristics. Using four poets, each song tells its own story, incorporating no recurring motifs from one song to the next. There are, however, elements that cohesively tie the work together. Foremost, the texts speak of related concepts of surrealism and ambiguity. These elements make for a fitting opus title. In addition, the smooth key transitions from one movement to the next, creates a work that seems to function as a cycle. In

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his preface to the musical score Glass twice refers to *Songs from Liquid Days* as a cycle. Therefore, it should be the performer’s responsibility to follow in that tradition in his/her preparation of the piece.²

Once *Songs from Liquid Days* was finished in 1986, Glass began the arduous task of casting the ensemble for its premiere album recording (it was the composer’s tradition to release a professional recording upon the completion of each new composition). The long established Philip Glass Ensemble and the famous Kronos Quartet, with whom Glass had collaborated previously, were the most obvious choices for the instrumental ensemble. Glass then chose a diverse group of vocalists to bring the words to life. Rock singers Bernard Fowler, Janice Pendarvis, and Linda Ronstadt; folk trio The Roches; and operatic tenor Douglas Perry; each brought their own unique characterizations and vocal techniques to the recording project.

Glass’s choices in casting his vocal ensemble for the album might give a classically trained singer the notion that this song cycle is intended as pop music. Naturally, a classically trained vocalist may not feel inclined to even listen to this work, much less consider it an option for his/her repertoire. While the recording remains one of the composer’s most popular albums to date, most classically trained singers have since dismissed the cycle. The intention of this document is to analyze the music and the texts in *Songs from Liquid Days*, and in so doing, discover Mr. Glass’s canny ability to compose for the classical singer.

² Ibid.
CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHIES

The Composer

Philip Morris Glass (b. January 31, 1937) was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. His mother and father were Jewish immigrants from Lithuania. His mother Ida worked in a library while his father Benjamin Charles owned a record store, which afforded their son the luxury of being surrounded by classical music from an early age.

Glass attended the preparatory school for the Peabody Institute, where he studied flute. Shortly thereafter, he would study mathematics and philosophy at the University of Chicago. It was there that he discovered a talent for composition. From 1960 to 1962, Glass attended the Juilliard School of Music, where his primary instrument was keyboard. From Juilliard, he received his Master’s degree in composition.

In the fall of 1964, Glass received a Fulbright scholarship and moved to Paris where he studied harmony and counterpoint with Nadia Boulanger, the celebrated French composer and educator who taught Aaron Copland, John Eliot Gardiner, Virgil Thompson, Quincy Jones and others. He studied, with great interest, the works of J.S. Bach, Mozart, and Schubert. The conclusion of his three-year apprenticeship with Boulanger marked the beginning of his musical career as he returned to New York in 1967 and formed the Philip Glass Ensemble, which remains active today.³

While Glass wrote music, he earned a living through a series of day jobs. He drove taxicabs, put up walls with sheet rock, assisted a plumber, and even ran a small moving company until a full-time career in music finally became sustainable. He states in an interview:

…I took day jobs, as everyone did. Poets, painters, playwrights, musicians, actors. We all had a day job, and I made sure it was one I could walk away from at any time. I didn’t even try to make a living in the real world. I took totally marginal jobs that freed me to go on tours when I needed to. I never had a job where there was job security because I wanted job insecurity—so that the only thing I was really secure of was that I wanted to write music and that I wanted to play music…

Glass’s first successful piece to feature voice was his first opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1975). He has stated that he never set out to become an opera composer and that he still uses the term “opera” with reluctance today. As a music student in the 1950s, he studied the standards of operatic repertoire and even attended, for fifty cents a ticket, performances at the Metropolitan Opera House. Glass regarded studying opera as more of a duty to become a well-rounded musician, rather than a great passion. In his thirties, he began composing what has come to be known as his “portrait trilogy” (*Einstein on the Beach, Satyagraha, Akhnaten*). His reverence for the powerful figures of Einstein, Gandhi, and the Pharaoh Akhnaten brought about three operatic compositions and what many consider to be his most popular and widely respected pieces.

For nearly fifty years, Glass has enjoyed a very successful career in composition. In addition to the popular artists with whom he collaborated in *Songs for Liquid Days*, he has worked with musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma, Ravi Shankar, David Bowie, Brian Eno, Patti Smith,

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and Leonard Cohen. His prominence as a composer for film has earned him respect with directors such as Bernard Rose (Candyman), Tod Browning (Dracula), David Koepp (Secret Window), Neil Burger (The Illusionist), Martin Scorsese (Kundun), Woody Allen (Cassandra’s Dream) and others.

Glass’s extensive musical output includes over forty film scores, twenty operas, over twenty works for solo piano or organ, seven string quartets, over twenty chamber works, ten symphonies, many pieces for orchestra, various concertos, dance pieces, and multiple works for chorus, as well as several contributions for solo voice. His achievements range from two Golden Globe Nominations and one Award for Best Original Score (The Truman Show, 1999) to a BAFTA Award for Film Music (The Hours, 2002) to three Academy Award Nominations for Best Original Score and various other awards.

As of 2016, Glass resides between his homes in New York and in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Active as a composer, he continues worldwide performances as a solo artist, collaborative artist, and as leader of the Philip Glass ensemble.

The Poets

Paul Simon

Paul Simon ranks as one of the most successful singer-songwriters in the genre of popular music. He was born of Jewish parents on October 13, 1941 in Newark, New Jersey. Simon’s earliest success occurred in his musical partnership with singer-songwriter Art Garfunkel. The folk-rock duo Simon & Garfunkel was a dominating force in the world of popular music throughout the 1960s. During their creative collaboration it was Simon who wrote nearly all of
their songs. Such tracks as “The Sound of Silence,” “America,” “Mrs. Robinson,” “Bridge over Troubled Water,” and “The Boxer” remain as easily recognizable standards in the world of popular music. At the end of the decade, it was their creative differences which led to the duo’s break-up, though they have performed occasional musical reunions.

After the breakup, Simon enjoyed a successful solo career, consistently releasing new studio albums every few years, with his most recent release being *Stranger to Stranger* (2016). In addition to being a significant force in popular music, Simon has actively engaged in humanitarian causes, such as co-founding the Children’s Health Fund and supporting a wide variety of charities like the American Foundation for AIDS Research, Autism Speaks, the Nature Conservancy, Project A.L.S, and MusiCares, to name a few. He has been honored with twelve Grammy Awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, he has been inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame (1998), twice inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1990 with Simon & Garfunkel and 2001 for his solo career), awarded the Kennedy Center Honors (2002), and been recognized with the first annual Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song (2007).6

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**Suzanne Vega**

Folk-rock singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega may not be the most immediately recognizable name in music, but her contributions to popular music are significant. She was born July 11, 1959 in Santa Monica, California and raised in New York City. She began writing

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poetry and playing guitar at a young age. Her style of writing is best described in her professional biography:

…Suzanne’s songs have always tended to focus on city life, ordinary people and real world subjects. Notably succinct and understated, often cerebral but also streetwise, her lyrics invite multiple interpretations…

The characteristics noted in this description are readily on display in her textual contributions to Songs from Liquid Days. Her most successful songs include “Luka,” a song about the issue of child abuse; and “Tom’s Diner,” the song which Karlheinz Brandenburg, a German computer programmer used as a template with which to perfect the purity of audio compression that he was developing. This technology would become what we now know as the MP3. Vega has since become known as “The Mother of the MP3.”

Suzanne Vega has been honored with such awards as a Grammy Award for Best Recording Package and the Glamour Woman of the Year Award.

David Byrne

David Byrne is probably best known as the visual showman, lead singer, guitarist, and songwriter for the American New Wave band Talking Heads, but the extent of his musical genius stretches much further. He was born May 14, 1952 in Dumbarton, Scotland, and moved to

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8 Ibid.
Ontario, Canada two years later with his parents. Several years later they moved to Arbutus, Maryland.

Byrne formed the Talking Heads in 1975. The group enjoyed commercial success until creative differences led to their breakup in 1991. With an avant-garde sound spearheaded by multi-instrumentalist Byrne, the band explored punk, electronic, funk, and world music. Talking Heads were pioneers in the New Wave Movement (a genre that could be described as agitated punk rock) which was most popular during the 1980s. Their most successful songs include “Once in a Lifetime,” “Psycho Killer,” “Burning Down the House,” and “Take Me to the River.” The band reunited briefly for their Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction in 2002.

After disbanding Talking Heads, Byrne began a very successful solo career. He started to experiment in other musical genres including classical and film music, as well as non-musical mediums such as photography, drawing, directing, acting, and writing. He has collaborated on many occasions with experimental composer, producer, and singer Brian Eno.

During his career, David Byrne has earned an Oscar, Grammy, and Golden Globe Award. In 1990 he began his own record label to aid struggling young artists. An active humanitarian, he is a leader in increasing cycling in the world to reduce automobile usage.9

Laurie Anderson

Laurie Anderson was born June 5, 1947 in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. She is an important figure in avant-garde multimedia art. Her ambitious and varied career has enjoyed success in electronic

and experimental music, performance art, musical theater, spoken word, film directing, acting, and even invention.

Anderson is a talented violinist, and one of her inventions is the tape-bow violin, which uses recorded magnetic tape on the bow, rather than horsehair. She also invented an instrument called the talking stick, which replicates sounds by way of granular synthesis, thus playing them back in unique ways.

Anderson’s most successful song is her first single “O Superman” (1981), which she dedicated to French Romantic composer Jules Massenet. She credits the aria “Ô souverain, ô juge, ô père” (O Sovereign, O Judge, O Father) from his opera Le Cid (1885) as inspiration for its musical conception. Many artists have covered the eight-plus minute track in its entirety, such as late popular singer-songwriter David Bowie (1997).

She has enjoyed collaborations with such diverse figures as novelist William S. Burroughs and musicians John Cage, Peter Gabriel, Adrian Belew, and Lou Reed. Her distinctions include an honorary doctorate from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1980, multiple film festival awards for her film Heart of a Dog (2015), and various award nominations for other film projects.10

CHAPTER 3: PERFORMING SONGS FROM LIQUID DAYS

This chapter discusses, movement by movement, performance considerations for Songs from Liquid Days. Topics to be addressed include phrasing considerations, range and tessitura, ensemble considerations, textual analyses, and harmonic analyses. Supplementary flow charts are provided to enhance the performer’s view of each song on a broad scale.

Because Glass does not specify in the preface or in the musical score, the cycle may be performed by any voice (male or female) that can encompass the diverse ranges and tessituras found in the songs. Throughout the cycle, the texts are gender neutral and are set syllabically (without melismatic passages). Each vocal part is simply labeled “Voice.” Although the cycle is not impossible to perform without the incorporation of additional voices, careful ensemble consideration should be a priority for the singer, as four of the six movements call for additional voices. It is recommended that a soprano be used for the obbligato line, because of its range and ethereal role in the texture.

Songs from Liquid Days demands a singer who is firmly established in his/her vocal technique. The wide vocal range, tessitura, and general stamina required of this 45-minute work can be fatiguing, even for an experienced performer. Pacing is essential for success, as is having access to multiple vocal colors and styles. This cycle is highly challenging and it requires the skills of an advanced singer.

In addition, the preparation and performance of this cycle requires a highly experienced, classically trained collaborative pianist who will not easily fatigue from the fast, repetitive rhythmic figures found in both hands. Because of the technical difficulty for the pianist during
this 40-minute cycle, and because of the numerous pages of music for each song, a page-turner is recommended.

All musical examples and textual passages come from the musical score of Songs from Liquid Days (with the exception of alternate musical passages found in Chapter 4). Full texts from Songs from Liquid Days are available upon purchase of either the musical score or the authoritative recording, both of which are available at http://philipglass.com/.

Song 1: Changing Opinion

Text: Paul Simon

Ensemble: Voice and Piano (optional ossia and brass)

Key: C minor

Range: B₃ – G₄

Tessitura: G₃ – G₄

Duration: 10 minutes

The Text

Paul Simon provides the text for the first song, which are written in free verse over five stanzas. There is no apparent poetic form or rhyme scheme. Simon’s text is a narration, uttered in the first person (using the plural “we” instead of the singular “I”). The arc of the text displays the narrator’s journey to discover a mysterious humming noise.
The first three stanzas are delivered in past tense (Gradually we became aware, We followed it, Sometimes it was a murmur, etc.). The fourth and fifth verses, however, change from a reflective commentary of past events to present tense, in which the narrator begins speculating as to the source of the mysterious noise (Maybe it’s the hum...).

The descriptive title of the song itself reflects and accurately describes the constant fluctuation of direction contained in the text. The narrator describes the differing forms the noise makes (a murmur, a pulse). Then, suddenly in present tense, the narrator states five completely unrelated speculations as to what the noise actually is (a calm refrigerator, their parents’ voices, changing opinion, a foreign language in prayer, and the walls and wiring). Throughout the course of the musical setting, the narrator imitates the curious noise, heard in the “humming motif.” The tragedy of the song is that, after so much labor and debate, the narrator never discovers the source of the noise to which he/she has dedicated so much effort while searching.

The Music:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure no.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>C minor 4/4</td>
<td>Flowing ( J = 120 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Gradually…</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>We followed it...</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td>Sometimes it was...</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat slower, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Tempo I, 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>But then with...</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td>4/4, 3/4, 2/4</td>
<td>Somewhat slower, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>…cloud</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Tempo I, 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Flow Chart of “Changing Opinion,” *Songs from Liquid Days*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>(Maybe it’s the hum...)</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274</td>
<td>(Maybe it’s the hum)</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The opening movement of the cycle is the longest, consisting of 349 measures. If the tempo markings and all repeat signs are observed, this movement should last approximately ten minutes. The singer has a choice to make in the optional lines labeled *brass* and *ossia* (mm. 21-32, mm. 85-120, mm. 269-289, and mm. 306-321). In the authoritative recording, the *ossia* line printed in the piano reduction score is played by a flute. Because this figure is repeated later in the movement, it would not be in poor taste to incorporate such a color in the performance. However, the line marked *brass* occurs only once at the beginning of the movement, and for a mere twelve measures. The programming of a brass ensemble for such an event is likely impractical for the singer.

If all repeats are observed, the introduction is 46 measures in length. A syncopated theme begins the piece and this theme will be reintroduced later in the song. At m. 9, Glass shifts from 4/4 to 3/4 and distorts the sense of pulse by writing a repetitive, uneven sixteenth-note figure in the right hand of the piano. The ambiguous sense of pulse will be a common occurrence throughout the course of the cycle. See Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 9-10](image-url)
From the opening lines, the singer must establish a mood of reflectiveness and nostalgia which will be present throughout the cycle. With the opening word *Gradually*, the singer has an opportunity to paint the text vocally and dramatically. Mirroring the very first word, Glass’s vocal line is long and slow, especially when compared to the activity in the piano accompaniment. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 37-39

The vocal treatment of the word *room* is one of the more obvious moments for vocal text painting, as the singer holds the word for six measures. The treatments of *room*, *hum*, and *mmmmm* are constructed similarly to one another in their long drones. Whenever the “humming motif” recurs, the singer may choose to either observe the notated rests in between each hum or carry through them, breathing only when necessary. To ensure optimal resonance, it is recommended that the singer keep space between the teeth while humming. See Figure 3.
it went mmmmmm
The humming motif occurs five times throughout the song, requiring the singer to make decisions about breaths and then remain consistent with those decisions. The first utterance of the humming motif occurs at m. 69 and lasts twelve measures, as do the subsequent motifs. The singer should note that the humming motif’s descending figure of Eb-C-A-F-D-B is one of the only instances of a recurring motif within a song seen in the entire cycle.

After a ten-measure interlude, the singer-narrator recalls the next stage of events beyond hearing the mysterious hum. By now, the singer has probably realized that Glass has created a pattern of constructing short sentences over long vocal phrases with multiple rests in between every three or four words. It is not likely that every audience member will follow the printed text word-for-word as it is being performed, therefore it is of utmost importance that the singer delivers the story in such a way the audience is able to keep track of the short statements, even though they are spread out over multiple pages of music. The singer must maintain energy through the silence. This does not mean that the singer cannot breathe where necessary, but rather he/she must provide a logical speech-like shape to the long vocal lines, and treat them as the short sentences that they are. Each sentence in this movement varies from three to twelve words in length and spans between five and 15 measures in length. One of the biggest challenges
of this (or any) movement in *Songs from Liquid Days* is ensuring that the textual arc does not become lost on the audience member. Another tactic of keeping the audience engaged is lengthening notated pitches on words which are followed by multiple rests before the sentence is finished. For example, in m. 109, if the singer observes the notated five beats of rest, he/she runs a risk of the audience member already disengaging by the time the vocal phrase is ready to reach fruition two measures later. The singer has the option of holding the word *diag’nals* two to three beats longer for the sake of the musical phrase because Glass notates it as such a few measures later in *put our hands on the floor*. See Figure 4.
At m. 133, the opening theme returns, but this time with octave displacement and dynamic variety not previously notated in the introduction. Because there is nothing abrupt about this movement, there may be a slowing of the rhythmic pulse at m. 149 to ease the narrator into the next section.

The first notated tempo change occurs at m. 149 (“somewhat slower,” $\textstyle \frac{1}{2} = 96$) as the narrator begins to dissect the origin of the mysterious hum. The slow tempo only lasts four measures before quietly returning to Tempo I ($\textstyle \frac{1}{2} = 120$). After twelve measures, the slower tempo returns, lasting only seven measures. In addition to the tempo change, Glass uses the word *cloud* where the humming motif sounds for the third time at m. 168. (It should be noted that the word *cloud* is misprinted in the musical score, as *could*.)

At m. 180, the singer has a 17-measure interlude to rest, assuming that all repeat signs are observed. From m. 191 until the end of the movement, Glass places the lowest pitch in the pianist’s left hand on the upbeats of every pulse, thus creating a new challenge for the singer to not begin phasing with the piano or fall behind completely. See Figure 5.
By m. 191, the song has reached a pinnacle as the singer stretches shorter thoughts over longer spans of time. If the audience is to piece together the information, the syntactic pacing and use of energy through the silence are now more important than ever. Upon finishing the thought, the original twelve-measure humming motif recurs (see Figure 3), this time with the word *light* replacing the hum of the first four measures (the same way that *cloud* was stated earlier).

At m. 248, the singer has the option to embellish the printed vocal line. Glass stretches the word *light* for nearly four measures. Because of the singer’s interpretation heard on the authoritative recording, the idea of embellishing a held pitch to heighten the drama at this particular point in the song would not be in poor taste, so long as it is executed with respect to the music. Figure 6 shows the first of two occurrences of this climatic motif. This idea of embellishing Glass’s original vocal line will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.
Figure 6: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 248-256

Upon the resolution of the humming motif, a final interlude (19 measures in length) is reached. The performer should note that these interludes have gradually lengthened each time. By way of these musical interludes, recurring motifs, and the overall continual building of drama over time, the song has reached epic proportions, and this momentum – at least for the singer – will not be reached again in the cycle. After the interlude, the vocal line returns, repeating the
same melody sung a few pages before (m. 191, *Maybe it’s the hum of a calm refrigerator*...), however, now, for the first time, stating the title of the song (*Maybe it’s the hum of changing opinion*...).

In m. 310, on the word “mantra,” the singer must make a choice in terms of pronunciation. In the authoritative recording, the performer uses an [ɛ] on the dominant syllable; however, it is arguable that the word is more commonly pronounced as [a]. In m. 314, another pronunciation choice must be made with the word *wiring*. Given the way in which the composer sets the word, the singer might consider a schwa on the second syllable. See Figure 7.
Figure 7: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 310-315

The song ends with the second recurrence of the motif heard at m. 248 (Figure 6), followed by a final utterance of the humming motif. At m. 337, the singer may, again, opt to either sing the notated pitches and rhythms or incorporate a similar elaboration as before. As will be the case in most of the movements, there is no indication in the musical score to relax the tempo. Both the singer and pianist should release together on the final sixteenth note of m. 349 and there should be no slowing of the tempo.

Song 2: *Lightning*

Text: Suzanne Vega

Ensemble: Voice and Piano

Key: C minor/C Major

Range: G₃ – Ab

Tessitura: B♭₃ – E₄

Duration: 7 minutes

The Text

“Lightning” features text by Suzanne Vega. Written in six stanzas, the text generally follows a rhyme scheme of ABCB so the second and fourth lines rhyme, or nearly rhyme. In the case of stanzas with an odd number of lines, the final line is always a two-word reflective
commentary (*Blow over, Burned away*) which has no rhyme. The final stanza, with no rhyme, serves as a foreboding warning. The narrator delivers the text in first person and generally in the present tense.

An interesting facet of this narration is in the way in which the point of view shifts, all the while remaining in the present tense. In the first stanza, the narrator reflectively comments on recent events. The second stanza is in the present tense, and the narrator comments on events as they are occurring. The third and fourth stanzas are also in the present tense, but they have shifted to a reflective point of view, commenting on how the events have changed the narrator. The fifth stanza offers, in future tense, a warning of what may come to pass. The final stanza slightly elaborates on the ideas found in the fifth stanza.

There are three instances in which Glass has chosen to not include the entirety of the text. The first instance occurs in the second line of the first stanza. Here, Vega writes *And it’s blazing much too fast*, but Glass chose to omit *And it’s* and begin the vocal line with the word *Blazing*. The second instance of Glass omitting text is easy to miss. The printed text of the third line of the fourth stanza read *With a whip crack and a thunder*. Glass omits the article *a* before the word *thunder*. The third occurrence is even more striking. In the printed text of the last line of the fifth stanza, it reads *And I’m wondering who’ll be left there*. In Glass’s music, however, the composer omits *And I’m wondering*, thus beginning on the downbeat with the word *Who’ll*. It is possible that Glass made these decisions of omitting text in order to set the musical phrases more succinctly, or he may have found the lengthy phrase clumsy. Either way, Glass has taken the same liberty of word choice/text setting that other composers before him have done.

“Lightning” is the only song in the cycle that contains images that could be interpreted as violent. One might interpret the message behind “Lightning” as an apocalyptic vision as it is
happening. Regardless, these texts, when coupled with Glass’s intense pulsations and rapid tempo should inspire a sense of determination within the performer, not seen in any other movement.

The Music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>C minor 4/4</td>
<td>Fast, driving $j = 200$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Lightning struck…</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>(And it’s happening…)</td>
<td>(Voice), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Shaken this has left me…</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>(Now I feel it…)</td>
<td>(Voice), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257</td>
<td>(But there’ll be…)</td>
<td>(Voice), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>295</td>
<td>In the ashes of time</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315</td>
<td>...away</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Flow Chart of “Lightning,” *Songs from Liquid Days*

The second piece of the cycle is scored for one voice (like “Changing Opinion”). The tempo, which Glass notates as “fast” and “driving,” is crucial for the proper effect of this piece. The performer should note that in the authoritative recording version of “Lightning,” the ensemble consists of a synthesizer, brass, and percussion, and the consistent eighth note rhythm throughout the bulk of the piece is articulated as staccato. In a rendition using only piano, however, the performer must consider the instrument’s weighted keys, thus finding it much more realistic (or even possible) to incorporate the pedal for the motif. Glass goes so far as to label the beginning figure *marcato*, so it is not out of the question for the rhythmic theme to have more...
weight and length than the recording’s version. Figure 8 shows the piano line, which is relentlessly repetitive throughout the course of the song.

![Figure 8: Philip Glass, “Lightning,” Songs from Liquid Days, mm. 5-8](image)

After the lengthy introduction (61 measures with repeat signs), the singer must take ownership of the moment as the pianist has the task of executing this very challenging opening. As shown in Figure 8, the syncopated rhythms against the eighth note figures in the bass display Glass’s signature use of rhythmic counterpoint. Each time the pianist plays the accented octave $E_b$ in the right hand, the listener should be able to picture lightning striking in his/her mind’s eye.

As was the case in “Changing Opinion,” Glass paints long legato vocal lines over highly rhythmic articulation in the piano; however, because of the stark contrast in mood to that of “Changing Opinion” the singer should pay great attention to the articulation. The first task is to bring the message to the listener’s ear in a clear fashion. Glass frequently uses tied notes over single words in this movement, and the choices he makes in this regard are with great intent. The words *pass, time, away, light, and there* – each, in their respective contexts are tied, allowing the narrator to express his/her current state of reflection and thoughtfulness. These words are consistently treated with more length than any other words in this movement. See Figure 9.
The first piano interlude and chance for vocal rest is reached at m. 87 and lasts 18 measures. The narrator has an opportunity to set a new mood at the next vocal entrance, m. 105. The tessitura is beginning to rise at this point, so it would be in the singer’s best interest to consider vibrating or “spinning” each note clearly, not only to ensure legato but also to allow the completion of the cycle with minimal fatiguing. See Figure 10.
Once the second strophe is complete, a moment for vocal rest occurs in m. 137, as a short 14-measure interlude is reached. Upon the singer’s next entrance at m. 151, rhythmic integrity must be maintained as the narrator sings above the pianist’s syncopated figures, which last three and a half pages. Using the authoritative recording as a reference point, the singer should find a balance between respecting the notated rhythms while allowing a bit of rhythmic freedom where appropriate. For example, the singer might feel inclined to allow rhythmic freedom on And laughing and undone... (mm. 154-156), while honoring the notated rhythms on And a windy crazy running... (mm. 166-168), if for no other reason than to mirror the text. See Figures 11 and 12.
At m. 195, another short interlude occurs (17 measures total) allowing for vocal rest and preparation for yet another passage of high tessitura. In the upcoming passage, the singer has opportunity for text painting on the words *whip crack, thunder*, and *flash of flooding light*. (mm. 222-229). Again, the singer should take every opportunity to spin each pitch to relieve any vocal fatigue. Immediately after, another short 18-measure interlude follows, allowing a period of rest for the singer.

The piece begins to resolve by m. 263, with an example of Glass’s more angular vocal writing for the text (*But there’ll be a thick and smoky silence in the air...*). Glass places the
words *thick, smoky,* and *silence* on downbeats, skipping further intervals each time. The singer should color the vocal tone in such a way that it is descriptive of the text. See Figure 13.

Figure 13: Philip Glass, “Lightning,” *Songs from Liquid Days,* mm. 264-269

In m. 295, Glass evokes a new mood with a previously unseen, syncopated figure in this movement. A slower, longer line mirrors this musical figure for the narrator. The transition to C Major at m. 315 resembles the original motif at the beginning of the movement. The singer will have released the tone before the last several measures, allowing a clean, sharp release from the piano at the end of the movement and, as was the case with “Changing Opinion,” the ending should be abrupt.
Song 3: *Freezing*

Text: Suzanne Vega

Ensemble: Voice, Piano, and Voice Obbligato

Key: C Major/B♭ Major/F minor

Range: E₃ – F₄ (Solo); F₄ – A₅ (Obbligato)

Tessitura: F₃ – F₄ (Solo); D₅ – G₅ (Obbligato)

Duration: 3 minutes

The Text

The shortest song in the cycle has, fittingly, the smallest amount of text. “Freezing” is comprised of four stanzas. The first two stanzas contain four lines while the last two are only two lines each. Vega uses a near-rhyme scheme, but only in first two stanzas of this song, rhyming *history* with *family* and *grass* with *asked*. The final two stanzas have no rhyme. As was the case with “Changing Opinion” and “Lightning,” this song explores the shifting of past with present tenses.

The overarching textual theme in “Freezing” could be interpreted as one of existentialism, or questioning the aspects of one’s existence. The text begins with four fragmented questions. It is unclear as to whether these questions are rhetorical or literal, and they find no resolution until the second stanza, when a fifth and complete question is asked (halfway through the song). By this point, the listener may realize that there are two characters.
The line, *If it were only you naked on the grass, who would you be then? This is what he asked*, suggests that these two characters are discussing the possibility of a life with no possessions of any kind – no name, no clothes, no family, no past experiences. As the narrator responds with the punchline …*I said I wasn’t really sure, but I would probably be cold*, the listener may be caught off guard by a touch of tongue-in-cheek humor. After this ironic comment and Vega’s cryptic final lines *And now I’m freezing*, *Freezing*, Glass writes rapid sixteenth note figures which form an epilogue of sorts and make for a hauntingly curious ending.

The Music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure no.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>C Major 4/4</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>♩ ( j = 104 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B♭ Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>If you had no name</em>...</td>
<td>Voice, Obbligato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano, Obbligato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td><em>If it were only you</em>...</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano, Obbligato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano, Obbligato</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano, Obbligato</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td><em>And now I’m freezing</em></td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Flow Chart of “Freezing,” *Songs from Liquid Days*

Lasting only three minutes, “Freezing” is originally written for string quartet. The reduction, however, translates for piano even more easily than “Lightning” does. From the beginning of the song, the lines of duple versus compound meter are blurred as Glass repeats the same two pitches over eighth note triplets. See Figure 14.
The introduction in “Freezing” is only nine measures in length. From the vocal entrance at m. 9, Glass uses the piano line to distort the tempo and time signature by incorporating eighth note triplets over quarter note triplets over quarter notes. Once the singer enters at m. 9, he/she must maintain a diligent internal pulse. See Figure 15.

While honoring every pitch duration to its exact degree is not necessarily crucial for the singer, he/she must always arrive at each downbeat with the pianist to ensure proper pulsation and momentum throughout any given movement.
When “casting” the obbligato, the singer should first find a naturally high-sitting voice with whom he/she balances well. A soprano is recommended for the obbligato, regardless of whether the soloist is male or female, as the color for the obbligato should be purely “background” in timbre so as not to interrupt the tonal clarity of the narrator.

“Freezing” is the simplest song in the cycle, in terms of its structure. It demands the least technically from the pianist, the solo vocal line has the narrowest range of the six songs, it contains the smallest amount of text, and it has the simplest rhythmic construction. Because of its simple musical structure, it is suggested that the singer accurately articulate the notated rhythm. This will enable the purest effect and highlight the rhythmic interplay between singer and pianist (see Figure 15). While remaining fully engaged in the arc of the entire cycle, both singer and the pianist might interpret this movement as a resting point in the cycle.

As seen in Figure 15, the narrator sings a straight quarter note pattern over both quarter note triplets and eighth note triplets in the pianist’s left hand. If Glass’s *sempre legato* is observed by all three performers (the third being the soprano obbligato), the effect is one of dreamlike pleasure.

Although breath marks are not indicated among the longer vocal lines, the singer should, in general, feel inclined to breath after whole notes. If an obbligato voice is secured, the pianist should observe the composer’s note that the top voice, which doubles the obbligato, should be *tacet*.

In observing the tempo change at m. 33 (from \( \text{\textit{j}} = 104 \) to 160), the singer should note that, mathematically, the quarter note triplets of the first tempo translate exactly to the quarter notes of the new tempo. The effect is that the piece is now livelier (as indicated) in the new
tempo, but the constant rhythmic pulse creates the illusion that nothing has changed at all. Figure 16 shows the seamless transition that Glass has constructed.

Another 30 measures of piano and obbligato dialogue occur (mm. 71-97) before the final line in which the song’s title is uttered. The performer can interpret such a compositional device a number of ways. Perhaps the patient listener, after having to piece together the message of the text, is given “the long wait” before the final “punchline.” Perhaps the singer must use the silence to ponder what he/she might say next, however confusing. In whichever case, the singer must make a choice, commit to it, and sustain that choice.
Song 4: *Liquid Days (Part One)*

Text: David Byrne

Ensemble: Three Voices if Available, Piano (optional *ossia*)

Key: F minor/E♭ Major/F minor

Range: B♭₃ – A⁴ (low voice); E♭₄ – C⁵ (middle voice); G⁴ – F⁵ (high voice)

Tessitura: D⁴ – G⁴ (low voice); F⁴ – A♭⁴ (middle voice); B♭⁴ – D⁵ (high voice)

Duration: 5 minutes

The Text

David Byrne supplies the text for the title pair of songs in the cycle. The first, “Liquid Days (Part One),” is written in free verse, in the present tense, from an observational reflective first person point-of-view, and with no rhyme scheme. Although the text appears disheveled on the page, there is a sense of symmetrical structure. The song begins and ends with a four-line stanza. The middle portion consists of two whimsical narratives of love, each followed by a short, dreamlike responsorial fragment. In the song, these stanzas function as a verse-chorus entity, the kind often seen in popular music. The two bookend prayers function as a prelude and postlude in their symmetry and content. Byrne’s texts are undoubtedly the most ambiguous of any in this already nebulous cycle.
**The Music**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Measure no.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Oh Round Desire</em></td>
<td>Trio, Piano</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>Slow, flowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td><em>j = 72</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Spent</em></td>
<td>Trio, Piano</td>
<td>Eb major</td>
<td>Fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td><em>j = 176</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>(Oo)</em></td>
<td>(Trio), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td><em>(Love likes me)</em></td>
<td>(Trio), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td><em>(...Sleep)</em></td>
<td>(Trio), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td><em>(We are old friends...)</em></td>
<td>(Trio), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td><em>(Drink me...)</em></td>
<td>(Trio), Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td><em>Oo</em></td>
<td>Trio, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191</td>
<td><em>In Liquid Days...</em></td>
<td>Trio, Piano</td>
<td>F minor</td>
<td>Slow, flowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td><em>j = 72</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Flow Chart of “Liquid Days (Part One),” *Songs from Liquid Days*

“Liquid Days (Part One)” is unique in its composition for three voices. It is noteworthy that the piano reduction score states, “If only one voice is available, the upper line may be sung alone.”\(^{11}\) It is highly recommended that the soloist use three voices, especially when performing the full cycle, to fully honor the composer’s intent.

There are multiple options regarding the composition of the ensemble in this movement. If the solo performer is a male performing with two females, it would be the most sensible for him to sing the lowest line in the trio using a head voice or reinforced falsetto, in an effort to blend with the ensemble. If the solo voice is a female, she should sing whichever line with which she is most comfortable. Blend and balance among voices should be the soloist’s first priority in this movement. Because the middle (second) voice normally qualifies any given chord in this movement, the performer should secure a singer with accurate/clear intonation. The performer

also has the option to incorporate the recurring *ossia* line, which is indicated as a possibility for over half of the movement. On the authoritative recording, a flute is heard in this section, but a second piano may be used instead.

The movement begins with a prayer-like twelve-measure prelude before the song proper begins. Because of the homophonic texture between singers and pianist, the notated rhythms should be honored and the entrances, releases, and diction should be clear. For instance, the vocal trio should make certain that they are each pronouncing the unstressed syllable(s) of *Desire* in the same fashion. See Figure 17.

![Figure 17](image-url)

Figure 17: Philip Glass, “Liquid Days (Part One),” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 1-3

After the prelude, Glass indicates a new tempo at m. 13 (“Fast,” $\mathbf{\dot{\mathbf{j}}}$ = 176) and from here the song should have a “one to a bar” momentum. As the song takes greater shape at m. 21, the singers incorporate syncopation as previously seen only in the piano part. This syncopation, coupled with the minimalist harmonic development produces a dreamlike effect so frequently seen in this cycle. See Figure 18.
The sixteenth note figures in this movement, such as the ones seen in mm. 33-36, represent a few of the cycle’s most challenging passages for the pianist. Considering the markings above the musical phrases of the keyboard part, these recurring figures must be executed with liquidity. See Figure 19.

When interpreting the text, this movement operates in a verse-chorus-verse-chorus function. Because of the simple melodic and harmonic structures, rhythmic integrity and articulation are particularly important. There should be attention to the text that allows a quasi-Baroque demarcation between most words, as well as a slight accent to each syllable, in order to highlight the whimsy of the style and the text. In other words, legato is not the priority in this
movement. This is in part because of the trio of voices and the active accompaniment, but also the general compositional nature. As in the other movements, Glass tends to pull the direction of the lines toward the downbeat, giving them a speech-like quality. See Figure 20.

Figure 20: Philip Glass, “Liquid Days (Part One),” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 41-44

It is important that the voices observe the notated rests in lines such as *Being in Air*, *Turning to speak*, *Losing our Way* (and later in the second verse), in staying consistent with the quasi-Baroque style of the piece.

The movement ends as it began, and all of the “rules” stated earlier apply to the treatment of this postlude. When performing the cycle in its entirety, the soloist should take a moment to “reset” before the next challenging movement. The transition between these two movements will be the greatest in the cycle, in terms of dynamic shift, ensemble, and sheer drama.
Song 5: *Open the Kingdom (Liquid Days, Part Two)*

Text: David Byrne

Ensemble: Voice 1, Voice 2, Piano (optional *ossia*)

Key: D minor/F Major

Range: G₃ – A₄ (Voice 1); A₃ – A₄ (Voice 2)

Tessitura: D₄ – A₄ (Voice 1); A₃ – A₄ (Voice 2)

Duration: 7 minutes

The Text

Byrne’s second lyrical contribution is the second title movement “Open the Kingdom” or “Liquid Days, Part Two.” With uneven stanzaic lengths, the five-verse poem and fragmented text is free verse with no rhyme scheme. It is in the present tense and the narrator speaks from a first person point-of-view. Although the text is written in fragmented thoughts, it conveys images of a narrator questioning the afterlife. All nouns and verbs of the text are capitalized, as though they are sacred, which could be construed to suggest the text is discussing aspects of religion, as well as love. Also noteworthy, is the line *Turning to Speak*, which recurs from the previous song “Liquid Days (Part One).” This is the only instance of repeated text within the entire cycle. This could be a complete coincidence, but given that both texts are written by Byrne, he could easily be quoting the previous movement.
The Music

<table>
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<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Days of Fishes</em></td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td>D minor 4/4</td>
<td>Slow, majestic ♩ = 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Open the Kingdom</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>D minor 3/4</td>
<td>Flowing ♩ = 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>In my way</em></td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td><em>Still for better</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td><em>In my way</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td><em>Still for better</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td><em>Open the Kingdom</em></td>
<td>Voice 1, (Voice 2), Piano</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>Slow, majestic ♩ = 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>D minor 3/4</td>
<td>Lively ♩ = 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td><em>Returning Love</em></td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano, ossia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Flow Chart of “Open the Kingdom (Liquid Days, Part Two),” *Songs from Liquid Days*

Clearly the most vocally demanding of all the songs, “Open the Kingdom” requires great pacing and stamina for both the singer and the pianist. As was the case in “Changing Opinion” and “Lightning,” the singer has the particularly difficult task of singing long legato lines over a highly rhythmic accompaniment, but this time the tessitura presents a greater challenge. The vocal line consistently rests between D4 and A4, usually with minimal resting until the interludes. The piece opens in D minor, with a broad, declamatory statement embellished by a homophonic texture between the narrator and the pianist. By m. 9, the key shifts to F Major for the main “Open the Kingdom” theme. See Figure 21.
The song shifts back to D minor at m. 17, and there is a moment for brief vocal rest during the first keyboard interlude (mm. 17-22). The new theme at m. 23 (reflected in Figure 23) is quick in tempo, feeling almost one to a bar.

When the meter changes between 3/4 and 4/4, the eighth-note should remain exactly the same, changing only when labeled specifically to do so. The pianist should observe the staccato articulation in the right hand when notated. Over the course of the next 72 measures (mm. 23 to 95), the narrator sings in sentence fragments. During this passage, the tessitura tends to exist from D₄ to A₄. If vocal fatigue becomes an issue, it is acceptable to release pitches slightly earlier than notated, in order to preserve the voice. In addition, to prevent or reduce fatigue, the singer should consider approaching this movement the way he/she might approach an operatic
aria, making legato a priority and vibrating or “spinning” each pitch. Figure 22 shows one brief example of the tessitura seen throughout this movement.

Figure 22: Philip Glass, “Open the Kingdom,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 51-54

By m. 87, Glass incorporates the use of a second voice, but only for eight measures (mm. 91-94/95, with repeats). The concept of adding a second voice at all might seem strange, but it produces a pleasing effect in the context of the movement. The first singer, labeled *Voice 1*, repeats the F Major “Open the Kingdom” theme uttered near the beginning of the song and is joined four measures later by *Voice 2*. Although the second voice only sings for four measures with a repeat, he/she will span an octave, from A₃ to A₄, gradually ascending throughout. The only notated difference in the two utterances is a triplet figure in the bass line of the piano.

Upon completion of the lengthy and stratospheric passage for the voice, an interval of vocal rest is reached as the pianist segues into a rhythmic and challenging interlude for 54
measures. A simple optional *ossia* bass line begins about halfway through the interlude at m. 110 and remains until the interlude is complete. A piano is recommended for this *ossia* line. From mm. 127-158 (*Returning Love*), Glass constructs a vocal variation from the melody heard in mm. 55-70 (*In my way*), in which he constructs the same basic melodic and rhythmic lines, but with alternate pitches to reflect a contrast in mood. See Figures 23 and 24.

![Figure 23: Philip Glass, “Open the Kingdom,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 23-28](image-url)
There exists a level of reflection from Figure 24 to Figure 23, in terms of the harmonic layout. Figure 23 displays harmonic motion from D minor to C major to B♭ major to E diminished, with each chord elaborated over one measure, before moving to the next harmony. In Figure 24, the same tonality is shown, but is stretched to two measures per chord, each with its rhythmic complexity being broken down significantly.

The movement ends with several unique traits. It is intriguing that the narrator’s final pitch (m. 158) is a leading tone before the pianist assumes control for an extensive postlude, which lasts 48 measures. The ossia returns for the entirety of the postlude in a slightly more complex manner. An additional piano is suggested for these lines, to enhance this striking texture of the postlude. The rhythmic counterpoint and length make it one of the most powerful moments of the entire cycle. The final 16 measures of the postlude are jarring in their sudden
transition to 6/8, in which the sixteenth note pulse remains the same. Although the meter has been distorted many times so far, the final ten measures of *Open the Kingdom* (mm. 191-200) is the only instance in the entire cycle in which the meter is notated as compound. See Figure 25.

![Figure 25](image-url)

Figure 25: Philip Glass, “Open the Kingdom,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 191-192

The sixteenth note activity has remained vibrant so far, so the transition to a new meter is effective – especially considering the bass line of the piano does not play for the first four measures. Just as in the other movements, the ending should be abrupt with no slowing of tempo, and the effect should be one that leaves the audience breathless before the final movement.

**Song 6: Forgetting**

**Text:** Laurie Anderson

**Ensemble:** Voice, Piano, 3 Voices, Obbligato Voice (optional *ossia*)

**Key:** A minor/Ab Major

**Range:** A₃ – F₄ (Solo); G♯₄ – B₄ (Low); A₄ – E♭₅ (Mid); D₅ – G₅ (High); B♭₄ – A♭₅ (Obb.)

**Tessitura:** A₃ – F₄ (Solo); G♯₄ – B♭₄ (Low); A♭₄ – E♭₅ (Mid); D₅ – G₅ (High); B♭₄ – A♭₅ (Obb.)

**Duration:** 8 minutes
The Text

Laurie Anderson provides her lone contribution with the final song of the cycle. The text is in the present tense over four stanzas with no apparent rhyme scheme. Although Glass uses two “characters” (the solo voice and the trio) to narrate this text, arguably the same person utters them. The text observes, in the third person, a man waking from a dream about the many different lovers who have passed through his room. The man, unable to sleep again, repeats a series of positive words to himself, possibly in an effort to get back to sleep, or possibly hoping that he will better himself by treating others with the respect he desires.

The Music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure no.</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Ensemble</th>
<th>Key/Time</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>A minor 4/4</td>
<td>Moderate, gentle $J = 96$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A man wakes up...</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>(They brush....)</td>
<td>Trio, Piano</td>
<td>Ab major</td>
<td>Lively $J = 132$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>(The man is awake now...)</td>
<td>Voice, Piano</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Moderate, gentle $J = 96$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Bravery...</td>
<td>Trio, Piano, Obbligato</td>
<td>Ab major</td>
<td>Lively $J = 132$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Ah</td>
<td>Trio, Piano, ossia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Ah</td>
<td>Full ensemble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Flow Chart of “Forgetting,” Songs from Liquid Days

“Forgetting” will require the largest ensemble of any movement in the cycle. The most logical suggestion is that when the trio enters, the soloist sings whichever position he/she sang in “Liquid Days (Part One)” and the Voice Obbligato line is sung by whoever sang the same part in “Freezing.” Obviously, the soloist should also sing the main solo voice line as well.
Fortunately, the tessitura is quite agreeable, with the only considerable challenge for the soloist being flexibility in his/her vocal registration for the proper effect. This means allowing a full chest registration in the solo portions and a lighter, mixed tone when singing with the trio. The final movement of the cycle satisfyingly incorporates all of the vocal elements heard throughout the cycle (the solo singer, the trio, and the obbligato), creating a closing movement of epic proportions.

As was the case in “Freezing,” Glass employs specific rhythmic devices to distort the pulse. By m. 5, he writes quarter notes against the quarter note triplets against the eighth note triplets to obscuring the lines between duple and compound meter. See Figure 26.

![Figure 26: Philip Glass, “Forgetting,” Songs from Liquid Days, mm. 4-6](image)

The vocal line, though fully supported, should have a reflective, understated quality to allow for a stark contrast when the trio enters. The contrast should be one of the most abrupt in the cycle by highlighting the change in tempo, mood, articulation, and ensemble; and it is interesting to note that this is the only contrast in a single movement in the cycle in which no pulse remains constant. See Figure 27.
Once the ensemble arrives at the new section (m. 33), the treatment of the text should be just as it was in the fourth movement “Liquid Days,” with clean entrances and releases, slight accents on each syllable for clarity of diction, quasi-Baroque separation of syllables, rhythmic integrity in the syncopated figures, and careful observation of notated rests. Again, the middle voice generally qualifies each chord. Because of its constant syncopation, this recurring section runs the risk of being rushed by the ensemble, so constant attention to pulse is essential. When the *ah* figure is introduced at m. 46, the singers should note rhythmic precision, never moving ahead or falling behind the pulse. See Figure 28.
The section from mm. 54 through 71 should be treated the same as mm. 1-32, as it is identical in its construction, with only the text changed. Upon the return of the “Lively” section at m. 72, the trio resumes their previous musical roles. The obbligato remains tacet until the second iteration, as it functions as background texture, just as it did in “Freezing.” As the trio repeats the nouns (bravery, clarity, etc.) beginning at m. 72, it is recommended they “read ahead.” As the words displace themselves every eight measures, early entrances will be a temptation for the singers.

M. 121 marks the lone interlude of this movement (40 measures in length), which begins subtly and with increasing intensity. The optional ossia begins at m. 138 and remains throughout the piece, and the result is a layering effect (quite similar to the effect of a Rossini crescendo). To enhance the texture and momentum, an additional pianist is recommended for the ossia for performance.

The ah figure returns at m. 146, alters itself every eight measures, and remains until the end of the movement. Counting is crucial for the vocal trio, as there are many page turns, repeat signs, and risks of false entrances. The obbligato voice joins the ensemble at m. 162, thus creating the densest texture of the entire cycle. See Figure 29.
This final 16 measures repeat three times. Glass notes that the third repeat should include a gradual crescendo to the end. This is the ultimate climax of the cycle. Again, counting is imperative for the ensemble, to ensure no early entrances of the ah figure. This movement should end abruptly, just as all the others did. The result of the increased momentum should be an audience left breathless upon the unified release of the full ensemble.
CHAPTER 4: THE AUTHORITATIVE RECORDING: A SCORE COMPARISON

Glass completed *Songs from Liquid Days* in 1985 and Dunvagen Music Publishers released a professional studio audio recording of the cycle through CBS Records the following year. This 1986 release remains the only available studio recording of the cycle to date.\(^\text{12}\) While a live recording of a choral arrangement of the cycle by Jeremy Marchant does exist (Crouch End Festival Chorus, 2000), it is less relevant to the topic of this document.

Each track on the 1986 album recording of *Songs from Liquid Days* presents the Philip Glass Ensemble under the direction of Michael Riesman, with some tracks also featuring the famous Kronos Quartet. The vocal performers bring their own unique interpretations to the cycle, in certain cases (such as the first two tracks) straying from the notated pitches, rhythms, and even the original texts. Because of the composer’s active involvement in the making of the cycle’s original recording, perhaps the classical singer may gain perspective in making choices in his/her own interpretation. This chapter discusses the unique interpretations of the album’s original vocal performers on their respective songs. Some artists honor the musical score to an exact degree while others detract. The point of this chapter is not to be an exhaustive account of every slight deviation. Rather, it is this author’s intention to highlight the more obvious deviations from the score, as a means of justifying the classical singer’s ability to make deliberate choices in his/her approach to the cycle.


52
Changing Opinion

The vocalist on the first track is Bernard Fowler (b. 1959), an American singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist who specializes in performing the genres of rock, R&B, blues, and gospel. He has enjoyed a career primarily as a backup singer, performing and touring with such acts as the Rolling Stones, Herbie Hancock, and Yoko Ono. In his lone vocal contribution to this cycle, Fowler incorporates a pop/rock vocal approach with an earthy timbre. He takes a number of rhythmic liberties, alters several words, but adds several thoughtful vocal ornamentations.

Fowler’s basic vocal approach to “Changing Opinion” is commercial, most obviously in the way in which he approaches most of the longer tones from below, thus “scooping” to the written pitch, a common vocal technique heard in popular music. The opening vocal phrase closes with ...of a hum in the room. The score indicates a leap from D₄ to G₄ at the room. However, in both musical occurrences, Fowler lingers on the lower pitch on “room” before “popping” to the G, possibly to demonstrate, in his own vocal style, the electric humming. See Figure 30.

Figure 30 a: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” Songs from Liquid Days, mm. 43-45
Fowler’s second notable change comes at m. 74, when he does not observe the notated rest in the middle of the hum, but rather sings through it. All five occurrences of the humming motif are notated differently from one another in the printed score. Some of the variation occurs because the final three motifs use words (cloud, light, and air) to replace the first strain of humming. Fowler approaches each humming motif almost identically, always breathing between the A natural and the F (two thirds of the way through the motif).

At m. 92, Fowler deliberately holds the word it for five beats longer than notated, likely to suspend the legato, as Glass’s notation of only one count might feel a bit abrupt to the listener and performer if observed as written. See Figure 31.

Figure 31 a: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” Songs from Liquid Days, mm. 91-93
By the fourth stanza, the vocal tessitura is set higher and Fowler’s emotional expression of the text is intensified, as he begins adding appoggiaturas to certain words (hum, refrigerator, night, voices), anticipating entrances by half a beat or more, “turning” long tones, and even changing printed words (he changes the second utterance of soft to dim at m. 251).

From mm. 252-255, Fowler brings a new level of interest to the song by adding his first vocal ornamentation. See Figure 32.

Figure 32 a: Philip Glass, “Changing Opinion,” Songs from Liquid Days, mm. 251-256
The song begins to climax at m. 277, and Fowler adjusts the vocal line by raising the pitches on *maybe it’s the hum* and adding another appoggiatura. See Figure 33.

Later in m. 32, Fowler omits the G on the downbeat and, instead, begins the hum instead on beat two, likely because of the tiring effect of the long tones held to that point. On the second utterance of “in soft air” (mm. 337-342), Fowler adds a vocal flourish identical to that seen in
Figure 32. After the flourish, he adjusts his pacing of the final humming motif slightly, breathing two measures before he normally has to this point, likely because of the accelerated drama.

Lightning

The vocalist for the second track is Janice Pendarvis, an American singer-songwriter and voiceover artist who has earned a living as primarily a back-up singer. She has toured with such artists as Sting, David Bowie, the Rolling Stones, Steely Dan, and, coincidentally, Laurie Anderson, who wrote the text for the final song in Songs from Liquid Days. Pendarvis’s interpretation of “Lightning” arguably demonstrates more deviations from printed rhythms, pitches, and words than that of any other on the album recording.

When one observes the fast tempo (200 beats per minute) and the notated rhythms of the opening vocal phrase, one might expect the vocalist’s interpretation to be quite marked and strict. Pendarvis’s interpretation is almost alarmingly casual. For instance, the eighth quarter figures are frequent in the first three pages, and she turns many of them into straight quarter notes figures.

By the second stanza, in addition to disregarding notated rhythms, Pendarvis begins changing text. Turning as into and in the line As I feel the flaming time (m. 110), and relieve into release in the phrase to relieve my stormy mind (m. 121 and again at m. 126). Perhaps these instances of the singers changing certain words were completely unintentional at the time. Regardless, the fact that the recording was overseen by Glass and such deviations of text still managed to slip through can certainly give the classical performer a sense of leeway in his/her interpretation.
The third stanza of the song has a more relaxed feeling with the constant eighth note octave figures becoming a casually syncopated rhythm. Pendarvis’s rhythmic interpretation is so calm at this point that nearly every notated vocal rhythm is slightly altered in some manner. Pendarvis adjusts what might have been intended by the composer to be a moment of intense text painting. See Figure 34.

Figure 34 a: Philip Glass, “Lightning,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 151-153

Figure 34 b: Philip Glass, “Lightning,” *Songs from Liquid Days*, mm. 151-153

While Pendarvis adjusts the notated rhythms more than any other artist on the album recording, she also gives the song her own signature. She and Fowler’s interpretations stray from the musical score more than that of any other artist on the album.
Freezing

The third track is performed by American singer Linda Ronstadt (b. 1946), who enjoyed a long career as a solo artist performing genres ranging from rock to country to jazz to operetta. She released over 30 solo studio albums until she retired from the industry in 2011 and was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease the following year. Ronstadt has earned multiple Grammy Awards, an Emmy, and multiple other prestigious awards throughout her long career.

Ronstadt’s interpretation of “Freezing” stays true to the musical score. Only taking an occasional breath in the middle of a lengthy phrase or releasing a long tone a bit early seem to be the extent of the artistic liberties that she takes. Ronstadt’s soothing vocal timbre compliments the “liquid” legato phrases that Glass sets in this short movement, which could serve as inspirational for a classically trained singer’s interpretation to this modest but tranquil song.

Liquid Days (Part One)

The fourth track introduces a vocal trio as narrator. On the album recording, The Roches provide the vocals. The Roches are a trio of Irish-American sisters who have remained active in the music industry since 1973, when they received their break by performing on an album by Paul Simon, coincidentally enough. They are known for their quirky and humorous style of folk rock music, which lends itself perfectly to the style that Glass sets in the tracks in which they appear on Songs from Liquid Days.

Because of the fact that The Roches are an established vocal trio and because of the way in which Glass constantly sets their vocal line in a homophonic texture, The Roches honor the
notated pitches and rhythms more accurately than any other performer on the album. They occasionally release a tone prematurely, but always collectively.

It is recommended that the performer, if employing a vocal trio as written, should imitate The Roches approach to this song to ensure precise rhythmic integrity. Glass notes in the musical score, at the bottom of the first page of this song, that if only one singer is available, the upper line may be sung alone. It is this author’s opinion, however, that the performer should make every effort to build a vocal trio to honor the composer’s music.

*Open the Kingdom (Liquid Days, Part Two)*

Because of the fifth movement’s composition, one might argue that a classically trained voice is needed in order to negotiate the remarkably high tessitura. Enter Douglas Perry, the lone classically trained musician on the album recording of *Songs from Liquid Days*. Perry had already firmly established himself with Glass, in his debuting of the role of Mahatma Gandhi in Glass’s popular opera *Satyagraha* (1980). He would go on to debut another role (Scientist/First Mate) in another Glass opera, *The Voyage*, later in 1992. Perry has enjoyed a long career performing opera in large houses around the United States and Europe and he brings his operatic technique into his interpretation of “Open the Kingdom.” Perry provides the vocals for both voices in this movement.

In the same manner that Ronstadt and The Roches honor the written music and text, so does Perry. He only deviates slightly with premature or late releases from the tone, as Ronstadt and The Roches occasionally do. Perry’s interpretation sets a high standard for how a modern performer might approach “Open the Kingdom,” in his gentle but unwavering vocal tone.
Forgetting

The final movement of the cycle brings back Linda Ronstadt as the solo voice and The Roches reprising their role of the trio. Both Ronstadt and The Roches treat the printed score as seriously as they did in their previous tracks, in terms of their vocal approach and in how they honor the notated pitches, rhythms, and text.

While it should be in the interpreter’s best interest to honor what the composer has written in the musical score to their fullest ability, it is also worth mentioning that the singer not feel too confined in his/her interpretations of this work. Glass personally oversaw the album recording, so it is sensible that the modern interpreter of this cycle should feel inclined to take liberties where appropriate, so long as the words and music are respected.
CONCLUSION

*Songs from Liquid Days* is comprised of six songs that vary in style, ensemble, vocal production, and text. As was discussed in the introduction, some may argue that this work should not even be considered a cycle. There is no beginning, middle, and ending hierarchy, no tangible sense of thematic continuity, and texts from multiple poets. Still, Glass himself considers it a cycle, as he states in his liner notes found in both the album sleeve and in the musical score. This may be justified in a number of ways. Certainly, the smooth key transitions from one movement to the next are typical qualities of a traditional cycle. Furthermore, although the text appears to be starkly different from one another, there may be a loose but prevalent overarching theme about the human experience within them. We begin with searching, coming up empty handed, realizing and facing our fears, questioning our reality, finding love and a higher power, searching for truth in an afterlife, and accepting the idea of doing unto others. These broad themes can create a semblance of cohesiveness within this work.

Regarding my own interpretation of *Songs from Liquid Days*, I found preparing and executing the cycle to be a challenging process in several ways. Upon my decision to imitate the sounds I had come to love in the album recording, casting the ensemble was the first difficult consideration. Finding a cast with whom I could blend was prime. I decided to sing the lowest voice part in the trio and needed to female voices who could blend well. Then, I had to find an obbligato voice who could sustain the tessituras of the third and sixth movements, without overpowering the texture. Fortunately, the pianist with whom I had collaborated in previous recitals was excited for the task of playing the demanding piano part. Knowing how crucial the *ossia* line would be for the fullest effect, I decided a second piano was the best instrument to employ. Scheduling rehearsals for this seven-piece ensemble was indeed challenging.
I had also made it my mission from the beginning to honor both the musical score and the original audio recording, while also allowing my own interpretation to breathe through the cycle. Because my performance was in the form of a lecture recital, the task of finding the most practical performance issues to address proved to be a challenge as well. I can honestly say that, after performing numerous principle roles in many opera and musical theatre productions, as well as singing a number of recitals, presenting Glass’s *Songs from Liquid Days* in its entirety has been the most rewarding performance for me to date.

I believe there is something to be said for this work, in regards to the classical singer. Certainly, the vocalists’ interpretations heard on the album recording have given reason for the public to associate this work with pop music; but throughout the work, Glass constructs beautiful legato lines over highly challenging and artistic instrumental lines, paints artistic texts, and presents a unique musical challenge that any advanced classically trained singer might be eager to explore. Indeed, *Songs from Liquid Days* deserves its place in the catalog of the advanced classical singer.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Glass, Philip. Songs from Liquid Days. CBS. CD. 1990.


64
APPENDIX: COMPLETE LIST OF SOLO VOCAL WORKS BY PHILIP GLASS

1982: “Hebeve song” (8’); Music by Philip Glass (soprano, clarinet, bassoon).

1985: “Songs from Liquid Days” (40’); Music by Philip Glass; Lyrics by Paul Simon, Suzanne Vega, David Byrne, and Laurie Anderson (Changing Opinion: voice, flute, and piano; Lightning: voice, piano (or voice, flute, soprano sax and tenor sax); Freezing: voice and piano (or string quartet); Liquid Days: voice and piano; Open the Kingdom: voice and piano; Forgetting: voice and piano (or string quartet).

1990: “Fifty-Fifty Chance” (2’30); Music and Lyrics by Suzanne Vega; String arrangement by Philip Glass (guitar, voice, violins, viola, cello).

1995: “Ignorant Sky” from the film Jenipapo (3’33); Music by Philip Glass; Lyrics by Antonio Cicero (voice, piccolo, flute, oboe, horn in F, trumpet, triangle, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, castanets, maracas, glockenspiel, harp, piano, celeste, synthesizers, violin, cello, double bass).

1997: “Planctus” (3’); Music by Philip Glass and Natalie Merchant (voice, solo piano).

1997: “Streets of Berlin” aka Bent Greta’s Song (2’35); Music by Philip Glass; Lyrics by Martin Sherman (voice, bass clarinet, horn in F, trumpet, tambourine, snare drum, cymbals, harp, piano, bass synthesizers, 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass).

VITA

Jonathan Ray is a classically trained tenor who hails from Russellville, Arkansas. It was there, in 2010 where he received his bachelor’s degree in K-12 Vocal and Instrumental Music Education from Arkansas Tech University. He continued his studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, earning the Master of Music in Vocal Performance (2014). He plans to graduate from Louisiana State University with a doctorate in Vocal Performance and a minor in Choral Conducting, after which, he will pursue a teaching position at the college level while continuing to perform.