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The Warm Deeps of the Sky

1. *The Gift*

From Paradise there came, one Maytide morn,
 An Almoner* of love, with gifts divine:
 To some he brought rich draughts of magic wine;
 To some, who laboured in their fields forlorn,
 Sweet showers and sunbeams for the springing corn;
 Then me he called, with gracious word and sign,
 But when I looked what bounty should be mine,
 One fire-bright drop he gave me, as in scorn.

“Angel! to these thou givest present mirth,
 To those, the promise of a golden crop
 In Autumn; was my hope so little worth?”
 Smiling, the Angel answered—“Share and prove
 Their joy, if so thou wilt—in that one drop
 Thou hast the life and quintessence of Love.”

—Constance Naden (1858–1889)

* A chaplain or church officer who was in charge of distributing money to the deserving poor.

2. *Amor mundi*

“Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing
 On the west wind blowing along this valley track?”
 “The downhill path is easy, come with me an it please ye,
 We shall escape the uphill by never turning back.”

So they two went together in glowing August weather,
 The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;
 And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on
 The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

“Oh what is that in heaven where gray cloud-flakes are seven,
 Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?”

“Oh that’s a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,
 An undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt.”

“Oh what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,
 Their scent comes rich and sickly?”—“A scaled and hooded worm.”

“Oh what’s that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?”
 “Oh that’s a thin dead body which waits the eternal term.”

“Turn again, O my sweetest,—turn again, false and fleetest:
 This beaten way thou beatest I fear is hell’s own track.”

“Nay, too steep for hill-mounting; nay, too late for cost-counting:
 This downhill path is easy, but there’s no turning back.”

—Christina G. Rossetti (1830–1894)

3. *Song (We Sail Toward Evening’s Lonely Star)*

We sail toward evening’s lonely star
 That trembles in the tender blue;
 One single cloud, a dusky bar,
 Burnt with dull carmine through and through,
 Slow smouldering in the summer sky,
 Lies low along the fading west.
 How sweet to watch its splendors die,
 Wave-cradled thus and wind-caressed!

The soft breeze freshens, leaps the spray
 To kiss our cheeks, with sudden cheer;
 Upon the dark edge of the bay
 Light-houses kindle, far and near,
 And through the warm deeps of the sky
 Steal faint star-clusters, while we rest
 In deep refreshment, thou and I,
 Wave-cradled thus and wind-caressed.

How like a dream are earth and heaven,
 Star-beam and darkness, sky and sea;
 Thy face, pale in the shadowy even.
 Thy quiet eyes that gaze on me!
 O realize the moment’s charm,
 Thou dearest! we are at life’s best,
 Folded in God’s encircling arm,
 Wave-cradled thus and wind-caressed.

—Celia Thaxter (1835–1894)

Any Woman

I am the pillars of the house;
The keystone of the arch am I.
Take me away, and roof and wall
Would fall to ruin me utterly.

I am the fire upon the hearth,
I am the light of the good sun,
I am the heat that warms the earth,
Which else were colder than a stone.

At me the children warm their hands;
I am their light of love alive.
Without me cold the hearthstone stands,
Nor could the precious children thrive.

I am the twist that holds together
The children in its sacred ring,
Their knot of love, from whose close tether
No lost child goes a-wandering.

I am the house from floor to roof,
I deck the walls, the board I spread;
I spin the curtains, warp and woof,
And shake the down to be their bed.

I am their wall against all danger,
Their door against the wind and snow,
Thou Whom a woman laid in a manger,
Take me not till the children grow!

—Katharine Tynan (1861–1931)

Daisy Time

See, the grass is full of stars,
Fallen in their brightness;
Hearts they have of shining gold,
Rays of shining whiteness.

Buttercups have honeyed hearts,
Bees they love the clover,
But I love the daisies' dance
All the meadow over.

Blow, O blow, you happy winds,
Singing summer's praises,
Up the field and down the field
A-dancing with the daisies.

—Marjorie Pickthall (1883–1922)

Life and Art

Not while the fever of the blood is strong,
The heart throbs loud, the eyes are veiled, no less
With passion than with tears, the Muse shall bless
The poet-sould to help and soothe with song.
Not then she bids his trembling lips express
The aching gladness, the voluptuous pain.
Life is his poem then; flesh, sense, and brain
One full-stringed lyre attuned to happiness.
But when the dream is done, the pulses fail,
The day's illusion, with the day's sunset,
He, lonely in the twilight, sees the pale
Divine Consoler, featured like Regret,
Enter and clasp his hand and kiss his brow.
Then his lips ope to sing—as mine do now.

—Emma Lazarus (1849–1887)

Myriad Flowers of Spring

Myriad flowers of spring,
The autumn and her mystic moon,
Summer graces of dotted zephyrs
Made manifest and wane,
A sacred winter snow,
Peace, perennial peace,
Placid in repose,
Sacrosanct and found in the unencumbered mind:
This is the shining season of them all.

Chan (Mahāyāna Meditation)
by Wumen Huikai (1183–1260)
English interpretive text by John Conahan

Sunset

I saw the day lean o'er the world's sharp edge
And peer into night's chasm, dark and damp;
High in his hand he held a blazing lamp,
Then dropped it and plunged headlong down the ledge.
With lurid splendor that swift paled to gray,
I saw the dim skies suddenly flush bright.
'Twas but the expiring glory of the light
Flung from the hand of the adventurous day.

—Emma Lazarus (1849–1887)

PROGRAM NOTES

There is a special place in my heart and mind for art songs; as a singer, pianist, and composer, I believe art songs are unique expressions that enable us to understand and explore many things simultaneously. Through them, I have come to better know and understand myself, better engage and bond with others, and wholly grow within the canon of great music. The opportunity to connect within the intimate ensemble vocalist and pianist is a sacred and rich learning venue from which I have benefited greatly both academically and emotionally. In this collection, you will find settings of texts that have spoken very genuinely to me and have helped me to express my own thoughts and questions.

In this collection, there is a breadth of inspiration that includes some of the brilliant artists with whom I am able to create music, as well as some profound poetry that resonates deeply with my own experiences. In these particular songs, the empowering freedoms of composition are on display: choosing a particular text for someone and the experiences that you have shared, writing something as intimate as a melody for their voice, and expressing in song why a particular poet's work may mirror my own tragedies and triumphs. Woven into all of these songs—in the sacred solemnity and openness mind of *Sunset* and the driving jubilation and ecstasy of *Amor mundi*—is an immediate snapshot of where I stand, the shining souls with whom I am able to connect, and a humble opportunity to share my language with you.

—John Conahan

John Conahan (b. 1974)

For biographical information visit:
www.johnconahan.com

Written for Jessica Beebe and Mark Livshits on the occasion of their wedding

Songs for Soprano

The Warm Deeps of the Sky

for Soprano and Piano

1. The Gift

Constance Naden (1858–1889)

John Conahan (BMI)

Misterioso ♩ = c. 60

Piano

mf

3

4

A

f

mp sub.

7

mf

a tempo

10

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13 **B** *mf*

From Par - a - dise there came, one May - tide morn,

17

An Al - mo - ner* of love, with gifts di - vine:

21

To some he brought rich draughts of mag - ic wine;

* A chaplain or church officer who was in charge of distributing money to the deserving poor.

25 *f*

To some, who la - boured in their fields for - lorn,

28

Sweet show - ers and sun - beams for the spring - ing corn; _

31

mf

34 *mf*

Then _ me he called, with gra - cious word and sign, _ But when I _ looked what

mp

Written for Jessica Beebe and Mark Livshits on the occasion of their wedding

2. Amor mundi

for Soprano and Piano

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

John Conahan (BMI)

Spritely
♩ = c. 96

Piano

5 *mf* "Oh

10 where are you go - ing with your love - locks flow - ing On the west - wind blow - ing a - long

mf

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13

musical score for measures 13-17. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "this val-ley track?" followed by a line of music. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 6/8. The music includes various rhythmic patterns and rests.

18

musical score for measures 18-21. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "with me an it please ye, We shall es-cape the up-hill by nev-er turn-ing". The piano accompaniment continues with various chords and melodic lines. The key signature remains one flat and the time signature is 6/8.

22

musical score for measures 22-25. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "back." followed by a line of music. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The key signature has one flat and the time signature is 6/8. The music includes various rhythmic patterns and rests.

26 *mf* **A**

So they two went to - geth - er in glow - ing Au - gust weath - er, The

29

hon - ey - breath - ing heath - er lay to their left and right; And

33

dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on The air like soft twin

36

pi - geons too spor - tive to a - light.

f

40

“Oh what is that in heav - en where

B *mp eccitato*

mp

44

gray cloud - flakes are sev - en, Where black - est clouds hang riv - en just at the rain - y

Written for Jessica Beebe and Mark Livshits on the occasion of their wedding

3. Song (We Sail Toward Evening's Lonely Star)

for Soprano and Piano

Celia Thaxter (1835–1894)

John Conahan (BMI)

Tranquillo
♩ = c. 60

Piano *mf*

5

9 *rit.* **A** With gladness ♩ = c. 60
mf dolce

We sail toward eve-ning's lone-ly star

rit. With gladness ♩ = c. 60
mp

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13

That trem - bles in the ten - der blue; One sin - gle cloud, a dusk - y

17

bar, *rit.* Burnt with dull car - mine through and through, *risoluto* Slow

rit. ♩ = c. 60

20

smoul - der - ing in the sum - mer sky,

mf

22

dolce

Lies low _____ a - long the fad - ing west. How sweet to

mp

pp

25

watch its splen - dors die, Wave - cra - dled thus and wind - ca -

ten. ten.

29

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 60$

ressed!

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 60$

mf

Commissioned by Rebecca Siler and Jennifer Tague

Any Woman

for Soprano and Piano

Katharine Tynan (1861–1931)

John Conahan (BMI)

Gentle
♩ = c. 50

Piano *mp*

5

9 *mp*

I am the pil-lars of the house; The key-stone of the arch am

12 *mf*

I. Take me a-way, and roof and wall Would

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A Più mosso
(♩ = c. 66)

15
fall to ru - in me ut - ter - ly. I am the fire up - on the

mp *mf*

18
hearth, I am the light of the good sun,

mp *mf*

21
I am the heat that warms the earth, Which else were cold - er than a

mp *mf*

24

stone.



27 *rit.*

B Tempo I

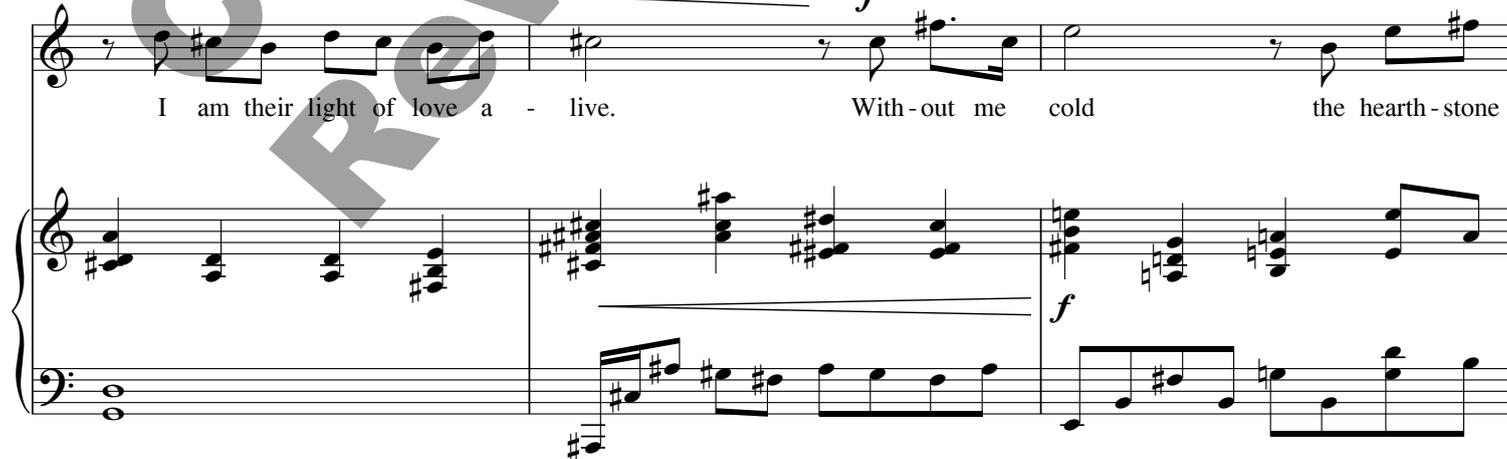
At me the chil-dren warm their hands;

rit. Tempo I



30

I am their light of love a - - live. *f* With-out me cold the hearth-stone



for Rebecca Myers

Daisy Time

for Soprano and Piano

Marjorie Pickthall (1883–1922)

John Conahan (BMI)

Sung with ecstasy, played with constancy ♩ = c. 150
(5+4)

Piano *mf legato*

pedal each measure

4 *mf eccitato* *f*

See, the grass is full of

mp

7 *mp* *mf*

stars, Fall - en

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10 *f*

in their bright - ness; Hearts they have of shin - ing gold, _____

mf

13 *mf*

Rays of shin - ing white - ness, _____

16 *dolce*

white - ness. _____

p *cresc.*

19

f *mp sub.*

22

A

f *mf*

25 *mf* *f*

But - ter - cups _____ have hon - eyed hearts, Bees they love the clo - ver,

28 *mf* *f*

But I love the dai - sies' _____ dance _____

Life and Art

for Soprano and Piano

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887)

John Conahan (BMI)

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 60$ *rit.* *a tempo*

Piano *mf* *p.*

4 *a tempo* *mp* *mf*

Not while the fe - ver — of the blood is strong,

a tempo *p* *mp*

7 *f*

The heart throbs loud, — the eyes, — the eyes, the eyes are veiled, — no

mf *f*

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10 *mf*

less With pas - sion than with tears, the Muse shall bless The

mf mp

13 *f*

po - et - sould to help and soothe with song.

mf

16 *mf*

Not then she bids his trem - bling lips ex -

Commissioned by Michael Trycieckyj

Myriad Flowers of Spring

for Soprano and Piano

Chan (Mahāyāna Meditation)

John Conahan (BMI)

by Wumen Huikai (1183–1260)

English Interpretive Text by John Conahan

Piano

$\text{♩} = c. 170$

mp eccitato

6

mf

10

f *ff* *mp*

14 *mp eccitato* *f* *mp*

Myr - i - ad flow - ers, my - ri - ad flow - ers of spring, myr - i - ad, myr - i - ad,

mp leggiero *mf* *mp*

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18 (3+3+2) *f* *mp* *mf*

myr - i - ad flow - ers of spring, myr - i - ad, myr - i - ad, myr - i - ad,

mf *mp* *mf*

21 *f* *mp* (3+3+2) *f*

myr - i - ad, myr - i - ad, myr - i - ad flow - ers, myr - i - ad flow - ers of spring,

f *mp* *mf*

25 **Meno mosso** ♩ = c. 150
risoluto

The au - tumn and her mys - tic

Meno mosso ♩ = c. 150

f

29 **A** Tempo I ♩ = c.170

moon, _____

Tempo I ♩ = c.170

mp legato

34

au - tumn, _____

close to "m"

39

f *mf* molto legato

41

mf

Sum - mer grac - es of dot - ted

mp

3

Sunset

for Soprano and Piano

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850–1919)

John Conahan (BMI)

Sacred and small ♩ = ca. 60

Piano

p

rit. *a tempo* *rit.*

mp

a tempo *mp*

a tempo

mf

mf

5

9

12

I saw the day lean o'er the world's sharp edge And peer in - to night's cha - sm dark and

damp; High in his hand he held a blaz - ing lamp, Then

Ped.

Words: Public Domain.

15 *molto rit.* *mp*

dropped it and plunged head - long down the ledge.

molto rit. *mp*

17 ♩ = ca. 60

With lu - rid splen - dor that swift paled to gray, I saw the dim skies sud - den - ly flash -

20

With lu - rid splen - dor that swift paled to gray, I saw the dim skies sud - den - ly flash -