

Songs and Silences to Poems by Wallace Stevens

For baritone and piano

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Songs and Silences to Poems by Wallace Stevens

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

--“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”

Six Significant Landscapes no. 1

An old man sits
In the shadow of a pine tree
In China.
He sees larkspur,
Blue and white,
At the edge of the shadow,
Move in the wind.
His beard moves in the wind.
The pine tree moves in the wind.
Thus water flows
Over weeds.

Tattoo

The light is like a spider.
It crawls over the water.
It crawls over the edges of the snow.
It crawls under your eyelids
And spreads its webs there--
Its two webs.

The webs of your eyes
Are fastened
To the flesh and bones of you
As to rafters of grass.

There are filaments of your eyes
On the surface of the water
And in the edges of the snow.

The Place of the Solitaires

Let the place of the solitaires
Be a place of perpetual undulation.

Whether it be in mid-sea
On the dark, green water-wheel,
Or on the beaches,
There must be no cessation
Of motion, or of the noise of motion,
The renewal of noise
And manifold continuation;

And, most, of the motion of thought
And its restless iteration,

In the place of the solitaires,
Which is to be a place of perpetual undulation.

The Valley Candle

My candle burned alone in an immense valley.
Beams of the huge night converged upon it,
Until the wind blew.
The beams of the huge night
Converged upon its image,
Until the wind blew.

Fabliau of Florida

Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

Move outward into heaven,
Into the alabasters
And night blues.

Foam and cloud are one.
Sultry moon-monsters
Are dissolving.

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf.

Gubbinal

That strange flower, the sun,
Is just what you say.
Have it your way.

The world is ugly,
And the people are sad.

That tuft of jungle feathers,
That animal eye,
Is just what you say.

That savage of fire,
That seed,
Have it your way.

The world is ugly,
And the people are sad.

Primordia no. 5

The birch trees draw up whiteness from the ground.
In the swamps, bushes draw up dark red,
Or yellow.
O boatman,
What are you drawing up from the rain-pointed water?
O boatman,
What are you drawing up from the rain-pointed water?
Are you two boatmen
Different from each other?

The Disillusionment of Ten O' Clock

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

Songs and Silences to Poems by Wallace Stevens was composed in connection with a conference, "Absence, Silence, and Ellipsis in Words and Music," held by the International Association of Word and Music Studies (WMA) in London in 2013. Why Stevens? The poems (chosen partly, I confess, because they are out of copyright) belong to the early phase of the poet's career. The works from this phase typically set up a stark opposition between a banal, mundane reality and a sensuous, exotic, and fanciful imagination. What makes this opposition powerful rather than merely glaring is the constant intimation that the world without imagination is not banal for social or accidental reasons, but banal in essence. The unimagined world is in and of itself a void. Stevens's regular word for its condition is "poverty." Modernity, whose only wealth for Stevens was an abundance of lost illusions, made the knowledge of this poverty inescapable, however much we may wish to hide it from ourselves. And it is this surplus absence that compels the products of imagination to attain the force of surplus presence. The music of *Songs and Silences* seeks to unveil the haunting traces of this underlying emptiness--absence, silence, and ellipsis all in one--in ways that allow the paradoxical fullness of imagined things to find a voice.

Duration: about 18 minutes.

Significant Landscape I

$\text{♩} = 88$

The musical score consists of three systems of music. The first system starts with a bass staff in common time, followed by a treble staff in common time with dynamic *mp*, and a bass staff in common time. The second system begins with a bass staff in common time, followed by a treble staff in common time with a melodic line and lyrics, and a bass staff in common time. The third system begins with a bass staff in common time, followed by a treble staff in common time, and a bass staff in common time.

1

An old man sits in the sha - dow of a pine tree in Chi-na.

4

9

Significant Landscape 1

11

He sees

14

lark - spur, blue and white, move at the edge of the sha-dow

19

— in the wind.

Significant Landscape 1

3

22

His beard moves in the wind. The

22

27

pine trees move in the wind.

27

31

in the wind.

31

Significant Landscape 1

34

Musical score for piano and voice. The piano part consists of three staves. The top staff has a bass clef, the middle staff has a treble clef, and the bottom staff has a bass clef. The vocal line begins with "So wa - ter" followed by a long dash. The piano accompaniment features eighth-note patterns with grace notes and triplets indicated by the number "3". The vocal line continues with "flows" followed by another dash. The piano part ends with a fermata over a note. The vocal line concludes with "without Pedal" and a fermata over a note labeled "Rœ.".

38

Musical score for piano and voice. The piano part consists of three staves. The top staff has a bass clef, the middle staff has a treble clef, and the bottom staff has a bass clef. The vocal line begins with "o - ver" followed by a dash and "weeds.". The piano accompaniment features eighth-note patterns with grace notes and triplets indicated by the number "3". The vocal line concludes with a fermata over a note labeled "Rœ." and an asterisk (*) below it, followed by a double bar line with a repeat sign.

Tattoo

$\text{♩} = 76$

41 **p**

The light is like a spider. It crawls over the wa-ter. It

41 **p**

45

crawls o-ver the ed - ges of the snow. It

45

49

crawls un-der your eye-lids and spreads its webs there: its

49

Tattoo

54 a little softer *f* $\#^{\text{o}}$

two webs: two webs. The webs of your eyes _____ are fast-en ed

54 a little softer *f*

58 $\#^{\text{o}}$ *p*

— to the flesh — and bones $8^{\text{va}} - \text{—}$ of you — as to raft-ers — or grass. —

58 *sf* *sf* *p* $8^{\text{va}} - \text{—} \#^{\text{o}}$

62 $\#^{\text{o}}$

— There are fil-a-ments — of your eyes — on the sur-face of the

62 $(8^{\text{va}}) - \text{—} \#^{\text{o}}$

mf *p*

Tattoo

7

66 *rit.*

3

wa - ter _____ and in the edg - ges _____ of the snow. _____

66

8va-

8vb-

The Place of the Solitaires

70 $\text{♩} = 88$
mp

Let the place of the solitaires _____
 be a place of per-pe-tual

72

un-du-la-tion, _____

76

whe-ther it be _____
 in mid-sea _____
 on the dark, green

80

wa-ter wheel, _____ Or _____ on the beach - es,

80

83 there must be _____ no ces - sa - tion _____ of mo - tion _____

83

86

or of the noise of mo - tion _____ the re-

86

mf

p

Solitaires

89 *f* *mf*

new-al of noise, and ma-ni-fold con-tin-u - a - tion.

94 *accel.* *a tempo*

97 *accel.* *a tempo* *p*

But most of the motion of thought,

97 *f*

Reed. *

101

Solitaires

101

— and its rest-less re-i-ter-a-tion, — in the place of the

101

p

104

so - li - taires, which is to be a place — of per-per-tu-al un - du-

104

p *f* *rit.* *p*

107

la - - - - tion. —

107

sfs

The Valley Candle

109 $\text{♩} = 76$
My can - dle burned a - alone — in an im - mense val - ley. — Beams

113 $\text{♩} = 88$
of the huge night con-verged u - pon it long $\text{♩} = 76$ un - til the wind blew, —

117 $\text{♩} = 69$
un - til the wind blew. —

117 8^{va} —
 mp
 pp
Let sound die away.

Valley

13

123

♩ = 88

Then beams of the huge night _____ con-

123

mp

8vb *pp*

Let sound die away.

128

long ♩ = 76

verged u - pon its i - mage _____ un - til the wind

128

131

long ♩ = 66 (a little slower than before)

blew, un - til the wind _____ blew.

8va

mf

131

Fabliau of Florida

$\text{♩.} = 66$

135

Barque of phos - phor on the

139

palm - y beach, move out-ward in-to hea-ven,

144

rit.

a tempo

in-to-the a - la - bas - ters and night blue,

mf

p RH

$\text{G}^{\#}\text{o.}$

$\text{G}^{\#}\text{vib}$

149

Foam _____ and

149 RH

154

cloud ____ are one.

Sul - try moon mon - sters are dis-

154

159

solv - - - ing.

159 RH

164

(♩=♪)

Fill your black hull with

164

LH

170

white moon - light.

There will ne-ver be an

170

p

175

end

There will ne-ver be an

175

Musical score for 'Fabliau' featuring two staves of music. The top staff is in bass clef (F), common time, and has a tempo marking of 180. It consists of six measures. The first measure starts with a bass note followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The second measure has a bass note followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The third measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The fourth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The fifth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The sixth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The lyrics are: "end _____ to this dron - ing of _____ the surf. _____". The bottom staff is in treble clef (G), common time, and has a tempo marking of 180. It consists of six measures. The first measure starts with a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The second measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The third measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The fourth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The fifth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). The sixth measure has a eighth-note休止符 (rest) followed by a eighth-note休止符 (rest). A brace groups the two staves together.

Gubbinal

$\text{♩} = 76$
186

192

Quasi 3/4 - - - - - >

197 - - - - -

201 $\text{♩} = 63$ *accel.* $\text{♩} = 76$ *rit.*

201 The world is ug ly, the world is ug - ly

201 p

205 and the peo-ple are sad. That tuft of jun-gle fea-thers,

205 ff

209 3 3 that a - ni-mal eye,

209 p

Gubbinal

20

♩ = 76

213 3
is just what you say. 3
is just what you say. _____

213

8vb ---

ff sempre

216 ♩ = 88 3
That sa-vage, 3
that sa-vage of fire, _____

216

ff

8va -----

220 3
that seed. 3
Have it your way.

220

mp

225

Bass clef. Measure 225 starts with a rest followed by three eighth notes. A dynamic 'p' is indicated.

Have it your way.

225

229

$\text{♩} = 63$

accel.

Bass clef. Measure 229 starts with a rest followed by eighth notes. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 63$ and *accel.* is indicated.

The world, the world is ug

229

$\text{♩} = 76$

rit.

$\text{♩} = 48$

Bass clef. Measures 233-234 show a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The tempo changes from $\text{♩} = 76$ to $\text{♩} = 48$ with a *rit.* The lyrics are: — ly, — the world is ug - ly and the peo-ple are sad. —

233

From "Primordia"

237 $\text{♩} = 116$

Without Pedal

241

245

249

In the swamps bush-es draw up dark red _____ or

249

253

yel - low, _____ or? _____ The

253

257

birch trees draw up white - ness _____ from the ground. _____

257

261

261 (8^{va}) —————— loco

fp *fp* *fp* *f p* < *f*

265

O boat - man,

p < *f*

fp

f

269

O boat man, What are you

fp

f

273

draw-ing up from the rain point - ed wa - ter?

273 8^{va}- - - - - f 8^{va}- - - - -

277

277 fp 8^{va}- - - - - fp fp fp fp

281

O boat - man, _____ O

281 8^{va}- - - - -

285

boat man, _____

What are you draw-ing up ___ from the

285

289

rain point - ed wa - ter? _____

289

293

O, _____

293

*Hold key down to produce overtones until release sign

*

rit. *a tempo*

298 O, _____ O_ boat - men, _____ are you two

298 { *fp* *fp*

* Pronounce with an indefinite vowel
to sound like either "-man" or "-men."

303 * *3* #

boat-men dif - ferent from each o - ther?

303 { *f* *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf* *sf*

* Hold key down to produce overtones until release sign

307

307 *sf* *sf* *p* *fp*

*

311

311

The birch trees draw up white - ness _____ from the

312

From the ground. _____

This block contains two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in treble clef. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. The lyrics "The birch trees draw up white - ness _____ from the" are written above the notes.

315

315

ground. _____ From the ground. _____

316

From the ground. _____

This block contains two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in treble clef. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. The lyrics "ground. _____ From the ground. _____" are written above the notes.

319

319

From the

320

From the

This block contains two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in treble clef. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. The lyrics "From the" are written above the notes.

The Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock

$\text{♩} = 84$

322

Bassoon: - - - - -

Piano: $\text{G} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *p* - - - - -

Bassoon: $\text{Bass Clef} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *Reo.* - - - - -

326

Bassoon: - - - - -

Piano: $\text{G} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *** - - - - -

Bassoon: $\text{Bass Clef} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *Reo.* - - - - - ***

331

Bassoon: - - - - - *** - - - - -

Piano: $\text{G} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *Reo.* - - - - - *** - - - - -

Bassoon: $\text{Bass Clef} \frac{3}{4}$ - - - - - *The hous - es are* - - - - -

331

Bassoon: - - - - - *Reo.* - - - - - *** - - - - -

Piano: $\text{G} \frac{4}{4}$ - - - - - *** - - - - - $\frac{3}{4}$ - - - - -

336

Bassoon part:

haunt-ed by white night-gowns.

342

Bassoon part:

None are green,

346

Bassoon part:

or purple with green rings,

350

or green with yel - low rings, _____ or

p *mf* *p*

Re. * Re. * Re. *

354

yel-low with blue rings.

p *mf* *p*

Re. * Re. *

$\text{♩} = 96$

359

None of them are strange. with socks $\frac{3}{4}$ of lace and

sf *mf*

long

364

bead-ed cein-tures. _____ ah! _____

364

367 rit.

$\text{♩} = 84$

Spoken:

People are not going to dream
(pause)
Of baboons and periwinkles.

367

pp

373

On - ly here and there, an old sai - lor, _____

373

p

mp cresc.

rit.

*

rit.

*

377

drunk, and a-sleep in his boots

377

mf *f* *ff* *ppp*

382

$\text{♩} = 63$

p *pp* *p*

catch es

387

ti - gers in red wea - ther

387

ti - gers in red wea - ther