

That Lonesome Whistle

for high voice and piano

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That Lonesome Whistle for high voice and piano (2010)

The title of this short (twelve minute) song cycle may recall a phrase from a well-known song by Hank Williams, best known from a recording by Johnny Cash. My taste in music does not run that way, but this particular phrase is an almost Proustian exception. I associate it with certain childhood memories of listening, in bed late at night, to train whistles sounding across the Pennsylvania countryside, where my great aunt had a house. The house lay barely a minute's walk from a railroad crossing by a general store, which I haunted by day and which by night became the imaginary listening post for fantasies whose chief value for me today is not their content--I have no idea what they were--but the sense of distance, tinged with both melancholy and discovery, that came along with the lonesome whistles that evoked them. I wrote the texts to this cycle to give the music the substance of this reminiscence.

1. Forty Love

The net seems to jounce a little.
The wind, like a breath on glass,
Blurs the high masses of leaf around
The courts, then lets them clear.

These empty tennis courts run on
For miles, shifting and angling
Like a river that mists above its
Courses and lends the eastern banks

A certain sheen; the western ones, with
The railroad tracks, a certain mystique.
Boats ache at mooring for a hand
On the tiller; across the dark

Without an origin you can hear,
Hear that lonesome whistle blow.
Everywhere I look goes on without me,

Fades along the track of these lonely
Infinite courts in a closed club. Why
Am I here? I don't play tennis.

2. The Iceboats: Rum Running to Detroit, 1925

Some forgot all the money. Lake St. Clair
Turned into Lake Lucerne, say Leman, no,
Lucarno: Lake Neither-Here-Nor-There.

The grimy lights from the two grimy cities
Wheeled, tore loose, silvered; miles away,
A parking couple heard the night's noises,

The long wind's like the other's breath, drawn taut,
The light, the ever-so-light clink
Of the precious cargo. Was it wind chimes?

The rummies on Lake St. Clair became their boats.
They could feel their pullovers puff, then shimmer,
Their wool caps go floating amid the sparkle

Of sky and ice. All that steered
Was sleeve; even the thugs on shore,
Crouching by clumps of pilings, could see that.

Some of the older boatmen got lost for good.
One simply skated away, a streak of breath
Between Detroit and Windsor. And the boats?

"A ring of steel-shod runners, a ghostly flash
Of billowing sail, and they are gone." So wrote
The Detroit police, blinking at Lake Claire de Lune.

3. That Lonesome Whistle

Under the bridge that year, no more shaken
By trains from Omaha, Fresno, or anywhere,
Yet spanning the river breathlessly as ever,
Even the young trees seemed to close their eyes.

Strange, it was November, yet to waken
The grass and leaves seemed easy as to share
The growing warmth of light lust, the delicate sweet fever
That ran from limb to limb, the cries

Of the water in leaf, lost rumble of trains
That used to cry in the night, lost American refrains
Like old blues songs played faintly downstairs

When we were kids. The river heard the cry;
Caught our names; ruffled its leaves; left its voice
In a quick kiss before it got shy and went away.

1. Forty Love

$\text{♩} = 80$

p

Then net _____ seems to jounce a

pp **p**

Reo. * Reo. *

lit-tle. The wind, _____ like a breath on glass, _____ blurs _____. Reo. * Reo. *

the high mas - ses of leaf _____ a - round the courts, _____. Reo. * Reo. *

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5

11 rit. then lets them clear. *a tempo*

11

13 *mp* These

16 emp - ty ten - nis courts run on for miles, shift -

16

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6
18

- - - ing and ang-ling like a ri - ver ____ that mists a - long its course - es____

18

p

21

and lends____ the east - ern banks____ a cer - tain sheen,____

21

23

molto rit. a tempo

the west - ern ones,____ with the rail - road tracks, a cer - tain

23

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7

pp

26

mystique. Boats____ache at

26

pp *< p* *p*

30 *rit.* *=66*

moor-ing for a hand - on the til - ler.

30

R

33

rit. *a tempo*

A - cross the dark,

R

33

R

R

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9

48 *rit.* some whis - tle ____ blow. _____

a tempo

p

48

lococo loco

p

52 *rit.* $\text{J} = 66$ **p** *3*

Ev - ery-where ____ I

52 *f rit.* **ff**

55 *3*

look goes ____ on with - out me. _____

p

* *Red.* * *Red.* *

The musical score consists of five staves of music. Staff 1 (Treble) starts with a melodic line followed by lyrics 'some whis - tle ____ blow. _____'. Staff 2 (Treble) has a rhythmic pattern with 'lococo loco' markings and dynamic 'p'. Staff 3 (Treble) shows a 'rit.' followed by a tempo change to 'J = 66' and dynamic 'p' over three measures. Staff 4 (Treble) features a dynamic 'ff' and a 'Red.' marking. Staff 5 (Treble) concludes with lyrics 'look goes ____ on with - out me. _____'. The score includes various dynamics like **p**, **ff**, and *rit.*, and performance instructions like *a tempo*, *3*, and *Red.*. Measures are numbered 48, 52, and 55.

That Lonesome Whistle

10
58

mf

cresc.

f

Ev - ery - where _____ I look goes____ on with - out me. _____

58

ff

f

p = 80

Fades____ a-long the track____ of those lone -

61

p

p

Reo. * Reo. *

65

f

p

fp

f

- - - ly in____ in - fi in - fi-nite

65

ff Reo. *

Reo. * Reo. * Reo. *

Catch harmonic

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11

70 ***p***

courts in a closed club.

70

72

74

Why am I here? I ____

76

77

don't play ten - nis.

2: The Iceboats: Rum Running to Detroit, 1925

$\text{♩} = 88$

Spoken (freely):

Some for - got all the mo - ney. -

f *mf* *p* *fp*

mf

mf

Lake St. Clair turned _____ in-to Lake Lu-cerne,

fp

f

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13

mp >— 3 — *mf* 3 *p* >— 3 — *mf*

say Le - man, No, ___ Lu - car - no, Lake Nei - ther

p cresc.

f *p*

Here nor there. _____ The

f = *p*

f *mf*

gr - my lights ___ from the two gri-my ci-ties ___ wheeled, tore ___

f *mp*

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mp

— loose, sil - - - vered.

mp

Miles a - way

mf

p

mp *rit.*

a park-ing cou-ple heard ____ the night's noi - ses. ____

mp

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15

a tempo *p*

The long wind _____ like the o-ther's breath _____

p

— drawn taut, the light, _____ e - ver so light

pp *8va*

clink of the precious car-goo. _____ Was it wind _____

leggiere

p *mp*

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chimes? _____

The musical score consists of four staves of music. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The second staff is a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The third staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The bottom staff is a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The music includes various dynamics such as *p*, *mp*, *mf*, and *f*. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 88$. The lyrics are integrated into the music, appearing below the staff lines. The first section of lyrics is: "The rum-mies on Lake St. Clair _____ be-came their boats." The second section of lyrics is: "They could feel _____ their pull-o-vers puff - - - then shim - mer, _____". The score also features several grace notes and slurs.

p *mp* $\text{♩} = 88$ *mf*

accel. *p* *mp* *mf*

They could feel _____ their pull-o-vers puff - - - then shim - mer, _____

mf

their wool caps go float - ing _____

mf

a - mid the shim - mer _____ of

f

sky and ice.

$\text{♩} = 76$

pp

*

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pp

All that steered was sleeve. *rit.* *p* 3

a tempo

thugs on shore, crouch-ing by clumps of pil - ings, could see that.

mp 3 *mf* 3 *p*

Some of the old-er boat - men got lost for

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mp

good. One _____ simply skat-ed a - way, _____

mp

p *pp*

8vb -----

mp >*p* *pp*

a streak ____ of breath be - tween De - troit and Wind - sor.

p *pp*

sfsz *20.* *

$\text{♩} = 88$

mp *p*

And the boats? — "A

p *mp* *p*

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ring of steel - shod run - ners, a ghost - ly flash of bil - low-ing sails. _____

8va

p

pp $\text{♩} = 76$ **p**

and they are gone."

(*8va*)

So wrote the De-troit —

— po - lice, blink-ing at Lake Claire de Lune _____

8vb

3. That Lonesome Whistle

$\text{♩} = 66$

The musical score consists of three staves of music for voice and piano. The top staff is for the voice, the middle staff is for the piano treble clef part, and the bottom staff is for the piano bass clef part. The music is in common time (indicated by '4'). The key signature changes throughout the piece, indicated by various sharps and flats. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 66$. The lyrics are integrated into the music, appearing below the notes. The piano parts include dynamic markings such as p (piano) and pp (ppiano). The vocal line includes several grace notes and slurs. The piano parts feature chords and some melodic lines.

Un-der the bridge that year, no more shak - en

p pp

$\text{♩} = 66$

— by trains from O - ma-ha, Fres - no, or a - ny where.

p $\text{♩} = 66$

a - ny where, yet span - ning the

pp p

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22

mf

ri - - - - ver _____ breath-less- ly _____ as e - ver, —

p

mf *mp* *p*

Reo. * *g.*

3

e - ven the young > trees

p

8vb - - - -

rit.

seemed to shut their eyes. _____

p *mp* >

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23

a tempo

mp

p

cresc.

mf

p

cresc.

mf

p

mf

mf

Strange, it was No-vem - ber, _____ yet to wak -

* * * * *

- - en the grass and leaves seemed ea - sy, -

* * * * *

ea - sy as to share _____ the grow - ing warmth of

* * * * *

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24

> **p** 3 > > < f 3 > **p**

light lust, the de-li-cate sweet fe - ver that ran from limb to limb,

mf *p* *f* *p*

Reo. *

cresc. ***mf***

the cries _____ of the wa - - - - - ter in

p *cresc.* ***mf*** *cresc.*

rit.

f

leaf, _____ lost rum - ble____ of trains____ that

f

p < ***mp*** ***p***

p

< ***mp***

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25

Molto Adagio *pp*

used to cry — in the night, lost A - mer - i - can re - frains

rit. *a tempo*

like old blues songs — played soft - ly — down - stairs —

when we were kids. The ri - ver

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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26

<>

mp *mf* *f*

heard the cry, caught our names, _____ ruf - led its leaves _____

p *mp* *mf* *f*

Reo. * *Reo.* *

p

left its voice > in a quick kiss _____

< > *p*

8vb - - - - -

3

be - fore it got shy and

< > *p*

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27

molto allarg.

went _____ a - way _____

mp p pp

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and the bottom staff is in C major (no sharps or flats). The tempo is marked as *molto allarg.*. The lyrics "went _____ a - way _____" are written below the top staff. The music features various dynamics: *mp*, *p*, and *pp*. The bassoon part in the bottom staff includes slurs and grace notes.