

**THE JOY OF UNCREATING** (2013, rev. 2016) [Premiere Recording of mezzo-soprano version]

Poems by Joan Joffe Hall (1940–2013). *Illumination and Joy of Uncreating* © 2004, from *In Angled Light* by Joan Joffe Hall. Poems used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by Dr. Adelaide Whitaker. Premiere: May 22, 2018, Carnegie Recital Hall with Steven LaBrie, baritone and Adam Nielsen, piano.

**1 Illumination**

When the eye re-opened

there was light

then play between  
light and shadow

then bodies — shape and  
color — each with its  
familiar name:

hand, glass.

And it was

like overhearing  
the Greek lesson  
and recognizing

the word “gift”.

**2 The Joy of Uncreating**

This is a vision of the joy  
of uncreating:  
a black hole  
sucking in the light,  
light coining aspen leaves,  
daisies, and the tips of grasses  
as it falls  
back in concentric circles  
into a tunnel or a barn door  
or the velvet space  
between trees.

Everything is clear  
because the light is passing.

This is the music:  
transience,  
silence between the notes.  
We are the instruments.  
We know ourselves  
by the silences  
and because the light is passing.

As the light pulses by  
 fence posts sing.  
 Some grave formality  
 is at hand, some joy  
 moving us toward the end.

### **THE BLOOD JET** (2008, rev. 2010/2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by Sylvia Plath (1932–1963). Reproduced by kind permission of the Sylvia Plath Estate.  
 Commissioned by Dr. Adelaide Whitaker. Premiere: February 1, 2008 at Mississippi State University,  
 Starkville, Mississippi, with soprano Eleanor McClellan Bulathsinghalage and pianist Karen Murphy.

#### **3 Morning Song**

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.  
 The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry  
 Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.  
 In a drafty museum, your nakedness  
 Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother  
 Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow  
 Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath  
 Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:  
 A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral  
 In my Victorian nightgown.  
 Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try  
 Your handful of notes;  
 The clear vowels rise like balloons.

#### **4 The Rival**

If the moon smiled, she would resemble you.  
 You leave the same impression  
 Of something beautiful, but annihilating.  
 Both of you are great light borrowers.  
 Her O-mouth grieves at the world; yours is unaffected.

And your first gift is making stone out of everything.  
 I wake to a mausoleum; you are here,  
 Ticking your fingers on the marble table, looking for cigarettes,  
 Spiteful as a woman, but not so nervous,  
 And dying to say something unanswerable.

The moon, too, abases her subjects,  
 But in the daytime she is ridiculous.  
 Your dissatisfactions, on the other hand,  
 Arrive through the mailslot with loving regularity,  
 White and blank, expansive as carbon monoxide.

No day is safe from news of you,  
 Walking about in Africa maybe, but thinking of me.

### 5 Kindness

Kindness glides about my house.  
 Dame Kindness, she is so nice!  
 The blue and red jewels of her rings smoke  
 In the windows, the mirrors  
 Are filling with smiles.

What is so real as the cry of a child?  
 A rabbit's cry may be wilder  
 But it has no soul.  
 Sugar can cure everything, so Kindness says.  
 Sugar is a necessary fluid,

Its crystals a little poultice.  
 O kindness, kindness  
 Sweetly picking up pieces!  
 My Japanese silks, desperate butterflies,  
 May be pinned any minute, anesthetized.

And here you come, with a cup of tea  
 Wreathed in steam.  
 The blood jet is poetry,  
 There is no stopping it.  
 You hand me two children, two roses.

### 6 Balloons

Since Christmas they have lived with us,  
 Guileless and clear,  
 Oval soul-animals,  
 Taking up half the space,  
 Moving and rubbing on the silk

Invisible air drifts,  
 Giving a shriek and pop  
 When attacked, then scooting to rest, barely trembling.  
 Yellow cathead, blue fish —  
 Such queer moons we live with

Instead of dead furniture!  
 Straw mats, white walls  
 And these traveling  
 Globes of thin air, red, green,  
 Delighting

The heart like wishes or free  
 Peacocks blessing  
 Old ground with a feather  
 Beaten in starry metals.  
 Your small

Brother is making  
 His balloon squeak like a cat.  
 Seeming to see  
 A funny pink world he might eat on the other side of it,  
 He bites,

Then sits  
 Back, fat jug  
 Contemplating a world clear as water.  
 A red  
 Shred in his little fist.

### **SABLE PRIDE** (2013, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by Countee Cullen (1903–1946). Poems used by permission of the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Commissioned by Dr. Darryl Taylor. Premiere: December 13, 2013, Kerrytown Concert House, Ann Arbor, MI, with Darryl Taylor, countertenor and Kathryn Goodson, piano.

#### **7 A Brown Girl Dead**

With two white roses on her breasts,  
 White candles at head and feet,  
 Dark Madonna of the grave she rests;  
 Lord Death has found her sweet.

Her mother pawned her wedding ring  
 To lay her out in white;  
 She'd be so proud she'd dance and sing  
 to see herself tonight.

#### **8 Incident**

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
 Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
 I saw a Baltimorean  
 Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
 And he was no whit bigger,  
 And so I smiled, but he poked out  
 His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore  
 From May until December;  
 Of all the things that happened there  
 That's all that I remember.

**9 Tableau**

Locked arm in arm they cross the way  
 The black boy and the white,  
 The golden splendor of the day  
 The sable pride of night.

From lowered blinds the dark folk stare  
 And here the fair folk talk,  
 Indignant that these two should dare  
 In unison to walk.

Oblivious to look and word  
 They pass, and see no wonder  
 That lightning brilliant as a sword  
 Should blaze the path of thunder.

**10 AND I WILL BRING THEM** (2001, rev. 2003/2009/2017) [Premiere Recording]

Text from Isaiah 56:7. Commissioned by Temple Beth Ami, Rockville, MD. Premiere: September 24, 2006, The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA with soprano Jennifer Check and pianist Laura Ward.

And I will bring them to my holy mountain,  
 and make them joyful in my house of prayer,  
 for my House shall be called  
 a House of Prayer for all people.

V'haviotim el har kodshi  
 v's'machtim b'veyt t'filati,  
 for my House shall be called  
 a House of Prayer for all people.

**TWO WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS SONGS** (1997, rev. 2006/2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), © 1962 by William Carlos Williams. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Company. Premiere: November 5, 2007, Dimensions New Music Series, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN with tenor Thomas King and pianist Vicki King.

**11 Full Moon**

Blessed moon  
 Noon  
 of night

that through the dark  
 bids Love  
 stay—

curious shapes  
 awake  
 to plague me

Is day near  
Shining girl?  
Yes, day!

the warm  
the radiant  
all fulfilling

day.

### 12 Light Hearted William

Light hearted William twirled  
his November moustaches  
and, half dressed, looked  
from the bedroom window  
upon the spring weather.

Heigh-ya! sighed he gaily  
leaning out to see  
up and down the street  
where a heavy sunlight  
lay beyond some blue shadows.

Into the room he drew  
his head again and laughed  
to himself quietly  
twirling his green moustaches.

### LIVING IN THE BODY (2001, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by Joyce Sutphen (1949–). *Burning the Woods of my Childhood*, *Living in the Body* and *Crossroads* by Joyce Sutphen, from *Straight Out of View*, © 2001 Jim Perlman, Holy Cow! Press, Duluth, Minnesota. Used by permission. *Lost at Table* and *Not for Burning* from *Coming Back to the Body* and *Bring On The Rain* © 2000 Joyce Sutphen. Used by permission. Commissioned through a Special Projects Grant from the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Georgia Southern University, for soprano Sandra McLain and saxophonist Carolyn Bryan. Premiere: The Arden Duo (soprano Sandra McClain and saxophonist Carolyn Bryan) at North American Saxophone Alliance Biennial Conference, University of North Texas; March 7, 2002.

### 13 Burning the Woods of My Childhood

I am burning the woods of my childhood, tree by tree,  
I am warming myself by the fire of those days.  
I am remembering the faces I can no longer see.

And the places I loved that are gone from me  
and the roads and the paths and the open ways,  
I am burning the woods of my childhood, tree by tree.

Where the elm trees stood, where the fox ran free,  
and we listened to the owl and the screeching jays,  
I am remembering the faces I can no longer see.

For those who walked under the pines with me,  
who cannot join me at the fire as I sit and gaze,  
I am burning the woods of my childhood, tree by tree.

Thinking old dreams that no longer can be  
Watching them fall into ashes, the reds into grays  
I am remembering the faces I no longer can see.

While the fire goes low and night is around me,  
the memory of that time rises up from the haze.  
I am burning the woods of my childhood, tree by tree,  
I am remembering the faces I no longer can see.

#### **14 Living in the Body**

Body is something you need in order to stay  
on this planet and you only get one.  
And no matter which one you get, it will not  
be satisfactory. It will not be beautiful  
enough, it will not be fast enough, it will  
not keep on for days at a time, but will  
pull you down into a sleepy swamp and  
demand apples and coffee and chocolate cake.

Body is a thing you have to carry  
From one day into the next. Always the  
same eyebrows over the same eyes in the same  
skin when you look in the mirror, and the  
same creaky knee when you get up from the  
floor and the same wrist under the watchband.  
The changes you can make are small and  
costly — better to leave it as it is.

Body is a thing that you have to leave  
eventually. You know that because you have  
seen others do it, others who were once like you,  
living inside their pile of bones and  
flesh, smiling at you, loving you,  
leaning in the doorway, talking to you  
for hours and then one day they  
are gone. No forwarding address.

**15 Not for Burning**

I come across your old letters,  
the words still clinging to the page,  
holding onto their places patiently,  
with no intention of abandoning  
the white spaces. They say  
that you will always love me,  
and reading them again, I almost  
believe it, but I suspect that  
they are heretics, that later,  
in the fire, they will deny it all.

Then I remember something I once  
read (my memory is filled with voices  
of the dead): that it is a heretic which  
makes the fire, and that I am more guilty  
than your words, poor pilgrims who trusted  
the road you sent them down and kept  
severely to the way. I forgive them;  
I let them live to proclaim freely what  
they thought would always be true.

**16 Lost at Table**

The weave in the green tablecloth  
is open. Enter, it says, and I do,  
sinking down into warp and woof,  
snug in a tiny linen homestead, somewhere  
east of candlestick and west of tapestry napkin.

And if my disappearance is noticed,  
they have ways to bring me back again:  
conversation will hover, like heat-detecting  
helicopters over endless acres of cornfields  
and find me sleeping between the rows

or walking aimlessly, singing my song  
to turn a thousand ears from green to gold.

**17 Bring on the Rain**

Bring on the rain and bang the leafy  
drum with sudden sticks of water.  
Pull down the silver-chained curtain  
and fill the window with streams  
of widest water falling through  
the shoreless air.



Let the rainy sky be filled with jazz:  
drizzling saxophones, rivers of  
trumpet, xylophone pools.  
Send down some Billie Holiday  
to write sorrow on our  
dusty hearts.

And long may the rain fall, whispering  
in a green tongue, just a summer's night  
slipping like a silk dress over the  
lovely bones of earth,  
misty in the fields.

### 18 Crossroads

The second half of my life will be black  
to the white rind of the old and fading moon.  
The second half of my life will be water  
over the cracked floor of these desert years.  
I will land on my feet this time,  
knowing at least two languages and who  
my friends are. I will dress for the  
occasion, and my hair shall be  
whatever color I please.  
Everyone will go on celebrating the old  
birthday, counting the years as usual,  
but I will count myself new from this  
inception, this imprint of my own desire.

The second half of my life will be swift,  
past leaning fenceposts, a gravel shoulder,  
asphalt tickets, the beckon of open road.  
The second half of my life will be wide-eyed,  
fingers sifting through fine sands,  
arms loose at my sides, wandering feet.  
There will be new dreams every night,  
and the drapes will never be closed.  
I will toss my string of keys into a deep  
well and old letters into the grate.

[The second half of my life will be ice  
breaking up on the river, rain  
soaking the fields, a hand  
held out, a fire,  
and smoke going  
upward, always up.]

19 **TODESFUGE** (Deathfugue) (2010, rev. 2013) [Premiere Recording]

Poem by Paul Celan (1920–1970). Paul Celan, Mohn and Gedächtnis. Gedichte © 1952. Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Munich, a member of Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH. Used by permission of the publisher. *Deathfugue* from *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* by Paul Celan, translated by John Felstiner. Copyright © 2001 by John Felstiner. Used by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Commissioned by Wolfgang Holzmair. Premiere: February 21, 2012, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, NY with baritone Wolfgang Holzmair and cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton.

BLACK milk of daybreak we drink it at evening  
 we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night  
 we drink and we drink  
 we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped  
 A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes  
 he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair  
 Margareta  
 he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he  
 whistles his hounds to stay close  
 he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground  
 he commands us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
 we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening  
 we drink and we drink  
 A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes  
 he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair  
 Margareta  
 your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air  
 where you won't lie too cramped

He shouts dig this earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and play  
 he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue  
 stick your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
 we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening  
 we drink and we drink  
 a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta  
 your aschenes Haar Sulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from  
 Deutschland  
 he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise up as smoke to the sky  
 you'll then have a grave in the clouds where you won't lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night  
 we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland  
 we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink  
 this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue  
 he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true  
 a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete

he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air  
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod is ein Meister aus  
Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete  
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

**20 'TIS PHILOSOPHY** (2011, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830–1886).

Yesterday is History,  
'Tis so far away –  
Yesterday is Poetry –  
'Tis Philosophy –

Yesterday is mystery –  
Where it is Today  
While we shrewdly speculate  
Flutter both away

**FIVE LOVERS** (2004, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by Jāma Jandroković (1967–), used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by Jāma Jandroković.  
Premiere: May 20, 2005, Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY with soprano Jāma Jandroković and pianist  
Andrew Rosenblum.

**21 On Meeting Again**

Speak softly to me  
(I remember)  
lie peaceful, breathing baby breaths  
sleep full in hand and arm

I have another  
but wake, love  
and speak softly to me

**22 Lovely In His Bones**

Lovely in his bones –  
He walks, not unlike a woman through these streets

The sun smiles,  
people part to watch him pass

and the sky drips  
for holding too much color

**23 This Morning**

*this morning*

*I woke  
a pillow pressing the small of my back*

*brushing my thighs  
for a moment was you*

*Warm, smelling of hours slept  
nape of curls and sighs that mean nothing –*

*but it is only the stolen flight of geese  
stuffed and tightly stitched in a neat package*

**24 Second Date**

We stare at each other from across the table  
I am pleasant, listen to his stories  
wonder if he is bored

*What I want him to say  
is  
come here, take off your dress  
let me see your body in the light*

I order a glass of wine  
decide on the salmon  
he tells another joke

**25 July, 95 Degrees**

I am a fish

the moon glows full  
I am wet, warm  
silvery swimming stealth

the water know my curves  
(better than a lover)

I sense you and swim away  
alone  
knowing that you know

I am a fish

**26 DEAR FUTURE ROOMMATE** (2015, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Letter by Mike Gioia (1993–). Used by permission of the author. Commissioned by Lyric Fest of Philadelphia, PA. Premieres: April 2, 2016 at Haverford College, Haverford, PA and April 3, 2016 at The Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia, PA, with baritone Keith Phares and pianist Laura Ward.

Dear Roommate,

Don't worry about us getting along. I've lived with crazy people all my life. My father is a poet, and his artsy friends—eccentric writers, boisterous musicians, and neurotic painters—could populate a whole season of bad sitcoms. And my good-hearted mother continually invites these people to stay with us. Just last month a visiting Oxford professor was brewing tea on our kitchen stove. "Oh, my!" I heard him say oh-so politely. Turning around, I expected to see spilled Earl Grey and soggy crumpets, I instead found him holding a washcloth in full flame. I hurriedly extinguished it just in time to see the quaint professor calmly walk away unfazed and unscathed. Last summer we had a young singer from Harvard living with us, but it sounded as if we had put up a barbershop quartet. He loved to march around the house—day and night—singing Broadway hits while keeping the beat with steady stomping. My folks hardly noticed. Most of their friends act this way. I won't even mention the first time they took me to Macbeth. It wasn't until the lights dimmed I learned the entire play was in Tlingit, a native Alaskan tongue. What I am trying to say is that I look forward to living with a sane person for a change. No odd habits or quirks of yours will bother me. I will have seen much worse, from academic kitchen arsonists to human jukeboxes. I think we'll get along just fine. Sincerely, Mike Gioia

**27 WHAT YOU WANTED** (2011, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poem by Joyce Sutphen (1949–). *What You Wanted* © Joyce Sutphen, 1995. Published in *Straight Out of View*, Holy Cow! Press, 2001 (first published by Beacon Press, 1995). Poem used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by Cynthia Vaughn, soprano. Premiere: June 15, 2011, National Association of Teachers of Singing 2011 Intern Program new repertoire concert, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI, with soprano Cynthia Vaughn and pianist Lori Cruciani.

And when you finally find what you want,  
they say, please allow six to eight weeks  
for delivery, and then while you are waiting  
you forget what you ordered or decide that  
after all you could have lived without it.

When it comes, you leave it unopened  
in the front hall for months.  
It gathers dust and gets in the way,  
but after a certain amount of time  
it is far too late to send it back.

Reluctantly, you start to open it.  
Somehow you manage to get one of the staples  
stuck deep in your thumb; it draws a tunnel  
of purple-blue blood up to the wound.  
It hurts—a lot. You need a knife

to cut through the tape over the box flaps,  
and as you sink the blade in  
you feel like a hapless magician, hoping  
that those who planned this magic trick  
knew exactly what they were doing.

**1 I AM IN NEED OF MUSIC** (1999, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poem by Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979). From the poem *Sonnet* (1929) from *The Complete Poems 1927–1979* by Elizabeth Bishop. © 1979, 1983 by Alice Helen Methfessel. Used by arrangement with Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC. All rights reserved. Premiere: May 20, 2001, Strathmore Hall, Rockville, MD with soprano Lauren Wagner, baritone Randall Scarlata and pianist Lori Laitman.

I am in need of music that would flow  
 Over my fretful, feeling finger-tips,  
 Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,  
 With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.  
 Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,  
 Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,  
 A song to fall like water on my head,  
 And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:  
 A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool  
 Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep  
 To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,  
 And floats forever in a moon-green pool,  
 Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.

**ON THE GREEN TRAIL** (2007, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

*On The Green Trail, Looking At My Hands and Small Night Song from Oneonta* from *Deerflies* by Jeff Gundy © 2004. Used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by Dr. Michelle Latour. Premiere: Feb 10, 2008, Bluffton University, Bluffton, OH, with Michelle Latour, soprano and Lucia Unrau, piano.

**2 On the Green Trail**

Who needs a cathedral  
 when you've got the flat woods?

Who needs a square when you've got brown pasture  
 and the smell of cows?

Who needs a statue when the broken oak  
 stands pure and monumental as grace abandoned,

the mud shines at the water's edge?  
 Any stray sound could be boys breaking sticks

or clambering up the cables of the bridge.  
 The stray bends dazzle because we know

nothing of what lies around them.  
 What was it that we sang —

a crow in the maple, two in the honey locust?  
 The male cardinal is an excellent father

making many trips with food for the young.  
In this commonplace and priceless sliver

of time and space  
any shiver in the dirty creek

is Old John rising  
to bring us bliss & woe —

*This is something* sing the crows.

### ③ Looking at My Hands

Who thought we'd live this century out? In 1962  
I was too young or too old in my black plastic glasses,  
reading back issues of Mechanics Illustrated

from my grandpa's coffee table while the grownups  
laughed at the kitchen table and the little kids  
screamed outside. There were cars with strange maladies

only Gus could cure, plans for incredible inventions,  
and worst and best of all the doomsday sketches-  
*"Can the Earth Be Blown Right Off Its Axis"?*

It seemed a good question in 1962. Upstairs later  
I said my prayers and dreamed of dirty rain.  
If I should die before I wake. 1962.

But now a crow is complaining and I'm looking  
at my hands, pale sturdy careful hands  
that confess I have accepted too much, fought  
the wrong battles or not at all, gone off into  
the small worlds and let the big one hang. Who was it  
said we must be able to see that things are hopeless

and still fight to make them otherwise? And yet  
the red beams plot our latest invention into what  
was simply sky. Fresh leaves take back the slippery

stream bed. A hawk carries off the day's last catch  
to a nest I'll never see. A door shivers open  
and it's later than I ever dreamed it would be.

### ④ Small Night Song from Oneonta

It's good that the world has more beauty  
than it needs. It's good to walk into  
the smooth Catskill night and discover

that the night has no edges, no sympathy,  
no grievance against me, that any place I step  
will hold me firm, not like a lover,

not like a child. It's good to be a child,  
and then for years to be something else,  
and then something else. It's a hard world

but the rain is persistent, the deer  
are quiet and discreet, and for ages now  
the trees have known how to dream their way up.

A man with a pack on his shoulder  
saunters down the path below me, knowing  
the lights he sees ahead are burning for him.

### 5 JOURNEY (2005, rev. 2014/2017) [Premiere Recording]

Premiere: Feb 10, 2008 at Bluffton University, Bluffton, OH, with saxophonist Adam Schattschneider and pianist Anna Stembler-Smith.

### RIVER OF HORSES (2005, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poems by Charles Baudelaire, James Wright, James Dickey, and a traditional Navajo song.  
Commissioned by Jean Del Santo, soprano.

### 6 My Hand Forever

This song is an adaptation of the last stanza of the poem *La Chevelure* (Her Hair) by Charles Baudelaire. The translation is by Jack Collings Squire from *Poems and Baudelaire Flowers* (London: The New Age Press, Ltd, 1909).

For ever I will scatter in each strand,  
Rubies, pearls, sapphires with a lavish hand. . . .  
Thou art the well-spring in a desert land  
Wherefrom I quaff deep draughts of memory.

### 7 A Blessing

Poem by James Wright (1927–1980). *A Blessing* from *This Branch Will Not Break*, © 1963 by James Wright. Published by Wesleyan University Press. Used by permission.

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
Darken with kindness.  
They have come gladly out of the willows  
To welcome my friend and me.  
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
That we have come.  
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
There is no loneliness like theirs.  
At home once more,  
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.



I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
 For she has walked over to me  
 And nuzzled my left hand.  
 She is black and white,  
 Her mane falls wild on her forehead,  
 And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
 That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
 Suddenly I realize  
 That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
 Into blossom.

### 8 A Birth

Poem by James Dickey (1923–1997). *A Birth* from *The Whole Motion: Collected Poems, 1954–1992*  
 © 1992 by James Dickey. Published by Wesleyan University Press. Used by permission.

Inventing a story with grass,  
 I find a young horse deep inside it.  
 I cannot nail wires around him;  
 My fence posts fail to be solid,

And he is free, strangely, without me.  
 With his head still browsing the greenness,  
 He walks slowly out of the pasture  
 To enter the sun of his story.

My mind freed of its own creature,  
 I find myself deep in my life  
 In a room with my child and my mother,  
 When I feel the sun climbing my shoulder

Change, to include a new horse.

### 9 The War God's Horse Song

Adapted from a traditional Navajo Song

My horse has a hoof of striped agate  
 His fetlock is like fine eagle plume.  
 His legs are like quick lightning.  
 My horse has a tail like a trailing black cloud.  
 His mane is made of short rainbows.  
 My horse's eyes are made of big stars.

### 10 Two Horses Playing in the Orchard

Poem by James Wright (1927–1980). *Two Horses Playing in the Orchard* from *This Branch Will Not Break*.  
 © 1963 by James Wright. Published by Wesleyan University Press. Used by permission.

Too soon, too soon, a man will come  
 To lock the gate, and drive them home.  
 Then, neighing softly through the night,  
 The mare will nurse her shoulder bite.

Now, lightly fair, through lock and mane  
 She gazes over the dusk again,  
 And sees her darkening stallion leap  
 In grass for apples, half asleep.

Lightly, lightly, on slender knees  
 He turns, lost in a dream of trees.  
 Apples are slow to find this day,  
 Someone has stolen the best away.  
 Still, some remain before the snow,  
 A few, trembling on boughs so low  
 A horse can reach them, small and sweet:  
 And some are tumbling to her feet.

Too soon, a man will scatter them,  
 Although I do not know his name,  
 His age, or how he came to own  
 A horse, an apple tree, a stone.  
 I let those horses in to steal  
 On principle, because I feel  
 Like half a horse myself, although  
 Too soon, too soon, already. Now.

### 11 THE ACT (2010, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]

Poem by H.L. Hix (1960–). *The Act* by H.L. Hix © 1996. Used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by The Sorel Organization for SongFest 2010 and New Triad for Collaborative Arts. Premiere: June 19, 2010, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, with soprano Andrea Leyton-Mange, tenor Blaise Claudio Pascal and pianist Andrew Rosenblum.

We have practiced the act since I can remember.  
 His father, also a knife-thrower, began teaching him when he was very young.  
 I became his assistant soon after, for our parents had paired us when I was born.  
 We married at thirteen, and began performing a year later, after his father died in an accident.  
 The Circus called him “The Great Pietro,” though his real name is Dmitri.  
 I used to weep over being forced to marry him.  
 I said I could not love him.  
 But Papa always said love is made of danger, not romance.  
 I believe him now.  
 I fear Dmitri more with each performance.  
 I tell him I trust him, that I only act frightened.  
 But the knives could really kill, and it is because of this fact that I love him.  
 The knives are there always, not only on stage.  
 If they were not there, I’d hate him.

The circus posters say I’ve never missed.  
 But one could say I’ve always missed.  
 The act consists of my throwing the knives as close as I can to the target without hitting it.  
 The appeal of the act is that the target is a beautiful young lady, and someday I might not miss.  
 The audience pays not to see the lady’s death, but to see my ruin.  
 Both views (that I’ve never missed, that I’ve always missed) are based on the same deception.  
 They assume I have a target.

The act depends on this deception, so my assistant dresses in a sequined outfit and acts frightened.  
 But I have no target.  
 For me she does not exist.  
 Ever.  
 If she existed even for a moment, she would exist on stage.  
 For me she is simply never there.  
 If she were there, I'd kill her.

**12 THE SILVER SWAN** (2007) [Premiere Recording of version with flute]

Poem by Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625). Commissioned by Dr. Carol Kimball. Premiere: University of Nevada Las Vegas, Kimball Festschrift Recital, March 29, 2008, Las Vegas, NV with mezzo-soprano Juline Gilmore, flutist Jennifer Grim and pianist Lori Laitman.

The silver swan, who living had no note,  
 When death approach'd, unlock'd her silent throat;  
 Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,  
 Thus sung her first and last, and sung no more.  
 Farewell, all joys; O Death, come close mine eyes.  
 More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.

**13 ON A PHOTOGRAPH** (2004, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording of duet version]

Poem by John Wood (1947–). *On A Photograph I Found of Two Young Factory Workers Standing beside a Piece of Heavy Machinery and Inscribed on the Reverse 'Sacred to the Memory of Friendship'* from *Selected Poems: 1968–1998* by John Wood, © 1999 by John Wood. Used by permission of the poet.

*For Justin Caldwell and Robert Nikirk*

Though they did not stand close to each other,  
 and though they stared from their machine  
 indifferently, distantly, I do not doubt  
 they'd known each other's arms and fears.  
 The mustached one wore a small ring  
 on his little finger, and neither smiled  
 as that instant sacred to the memory  
 was snatched from a factory in Wilson, Kansas,  
 back when my grandparents were children.  
 And I saw that the one who'd inscribed it  
 had pasted on a prescription from F. Zeman, Druggist,  
 made out for the "Worst Kind of Poison."  
 And I could imagine how the other  
 laughed the way friends or wives  
 laugh at such love-clear jokes.  
 And I could see him, who, like his friend,  
 had never read Whitman or Plato or given thought  
 to the theories of passion, take him,  
 and kiss those quiet lips  
 and move his hands over his chest and back and thighs  
 until they both rememorized their love.

And perhaps they rested with a shot of whiskey, a beer,  
 and talked of the foreman or next Sunday's  
 lesson on Deuteronomy and what to do  
 with the extra tomatoes they'd grown,  
 the talk of those who've come to count  
 tomorrow assured. And perhaps one said,  
 "But if we get bad rain this year,  
 we won't have enough tomatoes to put up."  
 And the other said, "Maybe you're right;  
 it'd be a shame not to have enough for winter."  
 And they talked on like this into days and days  
 until finally there was nothing:  
 a house, a cane, an empty bed,  
 a few jars of juice, a photograph waiting.

### THE SOUL FOX (2013, rev. 2017)

Poems by David Mason. *The Man Who Lied* first published in *The Able Muse*, © 2012, David Mason. *Sarong Song* first published in *Angle*, © 2013, David Mason. *Aubade*, © 2012, David Mason. *Night Song* first published in *Angle*, © 2013, David Mason. *The Soul Fox* first published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, © 2013, David Mason. All poems used by permission of the poet. Commissioned by James Zakoura and Reach Out Kansas, Inc. (ROKI). Premieres: The University of Kansas School of Music, 22 September, 2013, and The Eastman School of Music, 2 October, 2013, with soprano Julia Broxholm and pianist Russell Miller.

#### 14 The Man Who Lied

All his life he was touch and run,  
 word man turned by an inner eel  
 that shocked him hourly till he was numb.  
 What is a heart but something to steal?

Scab man, scar man, scolding himself,  
 making love but a troubled lover,  
 forgetting his soul on a kitchen shelf  
 to seek it daily, yearly, forever.

Giver, talker, crazy friend,  
 why all the running? When will it end?

#### 15 Sarong Song

The woman in the blue sarong  
 bade me believe in ships.  
*Come sail with me, the journey's long,*  
 sang her alluring lips

that baited me in a net of words  
 and hauled me to her bed  
 at the top of the world where thieving birds  
 loved me till I bled.

I came from an underworld of snow,

she from a windy dune.  
She dared to look for me below  
the phases of the moon.

*Come walk with me, the journey's joy,  
she sang with her blue eyes.  
Untie the sarong, my bonny boy,  
and bare me to the skies.*

**16 Aubade**

*For Christine Allinson*

Unhoused, I am at home  
and travel to my life  
though it is not my own.

I turn another leaf,  
return to you in love  
under the starry roof

that fades in morning light.  
The little words we say,  
the words we try to write

together and apart,  
re-animate the clay,  
my heart beside your heart.

**17 Night Song**

The breeze around our bed  
cooling the summer night  
is looking, looking for you,  
except it has no sight,

so it must feel my skin  
and probe the sheet for yours  
and wonder where you've gone,  
and wander on its course.

I keep the door ajar  
to let the blindness in,  
and dream in its embrace  
of you, your touch, your skin.

**18 The Soul Fox**

*for Chrissy, 28 October 2011*

My love, the fox is in the yard.  
The snow will bear his print a while,  
then melt and go, but we who saw  
his way of finding out, his night  
of seeking, know what we have seen  
and are the better for it. Write.  
Let the white page bear the mark,  
then melt with joy upon the dark.

**19 LULLABY (2000) [Premiere Recording]**

**SHORT SONGS FOR EDWARD (2017) [Premiere Recording]**

Text by Lori Laitman (1955–)

**20 Avocado and Goat Cheese**

Avocado and goat cheese on toast,  
Avocado and goat cheese on toast,  
Avocado and goat cheese,  
Avocado and goat cheese,  
Avocado and goat cheese on toast  
is delicious. Yum.

**21 When You Have to Make A Poo**

When you have to make a poo  
do you know what to do?  
Sit on the potty and push it out of you.  
(repeat)  
Push, push, push, push, push!

**22 Sometimes You Get A Boo-Boo**

Sometimes you get a boo-boo and it hurts,  
sometimes you get a boo-boo and it hurts,  
and your mommy and your daddy\* give you kisses,  
and it helps,  
and your mommy and your daddy give you kisses,  
and it helps.

*\* mommy and mommy or daddy and daddy or names of any caring relatives  
can be substituted*

**23 Please and Thank You**

Please and thank you,  
 Please and thank you,  
 These are very good words to know.

(Repeat)

If somebody gives you a present,  
 say Thank You! (Thank You!)  
 If somebody says that you're nice,  
 say Thank You! (Thank You!)  
 and if you want to get out of your  
 seat on your feet, when you're  
 done with your eating,  
 say "Please, Mommy, please, Daddy,  
 let me out, let me out, let me out  
 of this high chair,  
 please Mommy, please Daddy,  
 PLEASE!  
 Thank you!

**24 YOU LEAVE ME BENT (2016, rev. 2017) [Premiere Recording]**

Poem by Dana Gioia (1950–). © 2016 by Dana Gioia. Poem used by permission of the poet. Premiere: January 24, 2016, Redline Gallery, Denver, CO, with mezzo-soprano Danielle Lombardi and pianist Lori Laitman.

**Verse**

I met him last summer at the Museum of Art.  
 He was looking at the Goyas, so I knew he was smart.  
 He took me to dinner. We caught a few shows.  
 Last week at the office, he left me a rose.  
 He calls me each evening for an intimate chat.  
 He even remembers the name of my cat.  
 [spoken: "Mr. Peaches"]  
 We're madly in love, but what can I do.  
 Something is missing, and its color is blue.

So tonight I'm gonna tell him....

**Chorus**

You leave me bent  
 And totally spent.  
 I lost my composure  
 The moment you went.  
 Why do you have  
 To be such a gent  
 And drop me off home  
 With zip to repent.

Where did you come from?  
Life was so humdrum  
Until you arrived,  
Impossibly handsome.  
With impeccable taste  
You laid me to waste.  
Without having laid me  
You totally made me  
By being so chaste.

I knew from the first  
That you were a winner.  
You paid for the dinner  
And said I looked thinner  
Than when we first met.  
How much better can it get?  
Well, there's one thing  
You seem to forget.

I'm rather embarrassed,  
But let me be plain.  
I feel like Tarzan,  
So stop being Jane.  
Do I need to find Cheetah  
And have him explain  
What the Laws of the Jungle  
So clearly ordain?

So take off that shirt. You  
Proved you've got virtue.  
You're a regular saint.  
I don't want to hurt you,  
But I'm going to kick your  
Gorgeous behind.  
A good guy like you  
Is annoying to find.

No, I don't want to hurt you,  
But let me alert you  
That a really good man  
Is annoying to find.

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