

The Singing Guitar

Program

The Song That I Came to Sing

Poem: Listening

Poem: The Guitar

Chorale

Poem: The Gift to Sing

The Long Day Closes

When the Guitar

The Dawn's Early Light (2019)

1. I, Sarah Winnemucca
2. My grandfather jumped up
3. While they were fishing
4. The Paiutes are not fond of going to war
5. The Star-Spangled Banner
6. I Shall Be Beautiful

World Premiere

Craig Hella Johnson (b. 1962)

Amy Lowell (1874-1925)

Federico García Lorca (1898-1936)

Frederic Hand (b. 1947)

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Daniel Elder (b. 1986)

Reena Esmail (b. 1983)

Kile Smith (b. 1956)

Intermission

How Little You Are (2015)

Part One

Part Two

Part Three

Interlude

Part Four

Estelí Gomez, soprano

Part Five

Nico Muhly (b. 1981)

Texts

The Song That I Came to Sing

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart. The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house'.

I live in the hope of meeting; but this meeting is not yet.

- Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Listening

'Tis you that are the music, not your song.

The song is but a door which, opening wide,

Lets forth the pent-up melody inside,

Your spirit's harmony, which clear and strong

Sing but of you. Throughout your whole life long

Your songs, your thoughts, your doings, each divide

This perfect beauty; waves within a tide,

Or single notes amid a glorious throng.

The song of earth has many different chords;

Ocean has many moods and many tones

Yet always ocean. In the damp Spring woods

The painted trillium smiles, while crisp pine cones

Autumn alone can ripen. So is this

One music with a thousand cadences.

- Amy Lowell

The Guitar

The weeping of the guitar
begins.

The goblets of dawn
are smashed.

The weeping of the guitar
begins.

Useless
to silence it.

Impossible
to silence it.

It weeps monotonously
as water weeps
as the wind weeps
over snowfields.

Impossible
to silence it.

It weeps for distant
things.

Hot southern sands

yearning for white camellias.
Weeps arrow without target
evening without morning
and the first dead bird
on the branch.
Oh, guitar!
Heart mortally wounded
by five swords.
- Federico García Lorca

Chorale

The Gift to Sing

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path,
And blackening clouds about me cling;
But, oh, I have a magic way
To turn the gloom to cheerful day—
 I softly sing.
And if the way grows darker still,
Shadowed by Sorrow's somber wing,
With glad defiance in my throat,
I pierce the darkness with a note,
 And sing, and sing.

I brood not over the broken past,
Nor dread whatever time may bring;
No nights are dark, no days are long,
While in my heart there swells a song,
 And I can sing.
- James Weldon Johnson

The Long Day Closes

No star is o'er the lake, Its pale watch keeping,
The moon is half awake, Through gray mist creeping,
The last red leaves fall round the porch of roses,
The clock hath ceased to sound. The long day closes.

Sit by the silent hearth in calm endeavor,
To count the sounds of mirth, now dumb forever.
Heed not how hope believes and fate disposes:
Shadow is round the eaves. The long day closes.

The lighted windows dim are fading slowly.
The fire that was so trim now quivers lowly.
Go to the dreamless bed where grief reposes;
Thy book of toil is read. The long day closes.
- Henry Chorley (1808-1872)

When the Guitar

When
The guitar
Can forgive the past

It starts singing.

When the guitar can stop worrying
About the future

You will become
Such a drunk laughing nuisance

That God
Will then lean down
And start combing you into
His
Hair.

When the guitar can forgive
Every wound caused by
Others

The heart starts
Singing.

- Hafiz, rendered Daniel Ladinsky

The Dawn's Early Light

Texts: *Life Among the Piutes* (1883), Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (c.1844–1891) and “The Star-Spangled Banner” (1814), Francis Scott Key (1779–1843)

1. I, Sarah Winnemucca

I, Sarah Winnemucca, am a shell-flower, such as I wear on my dress.

2. My grandfather jumped up

The first white people came into our country like a lion, like a roaring lion. They were more like owls than anything else. They had hair on their faces, and had white eyes, and looked beautiful.

My grandfather jumped up and clasped his hands together. “My white brothers have come at last! I want to welcome them. As I love all of you, I want to love them.” My grandfather was chief of the Paiute nation.

The people promised. How good of him to try and heal the wound.

3. While they were fishing

My father and grandfather and uncles and many more went down on the Humboldt River. And while they were fishing, their white brothers came upon them and fired on them, and killed one of my uncles, and wounded another. Nine more were wounded. Five died. After all these things, my grandfather still stood up for his white brothers.

My people did not seek to kill them, nor steal their horses. During the winter my people helped them.

My grandfather met Captain Fremont, and they were soon friends. He would sing some of the soldiers' roll-calls, and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Captain Fremont gave my grandfather the name of Captain Truckee. Truckee is an Indian word. It means "very well."

When I think of my past life, and the bitter trials I have endured, I can scarcely believe I live, and yet I do. With the help of Him who notes the sparrow's fall, I mean to fight for my race while life lasts.

4. The Paiutes are not fond of going to war

Major Ormsbey said to my brother, "Will you help us get the Washoe chief to give up the men who killed the two white men?" My brother said they would. So that evening my people had what they call a war-dance. I never saw a war-dance before. The Paiutes are not fond of going to war. When it was over, the Major called his men and said, "We will sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" That was the first time I had heard it sung by white people. It was not like the way my grandfather used to sing it.

5. The Star-Spangled Banner

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

6. I shall be beautiful

I, Sarah Winnemucca, am a shell-flower, such as I wear on my dress. Who will come and dance with me while I am so beautiful? Oh, come and be happy with me! I shall be beautiful while the earth lasts.

Intermission

How Little You Are

Part One

The sun was just gilding the hilltops when we arose. Everything, even the barrenness, was beautiful. We have had frosts, and the quaking aspens were a trembling field of gold as far up the stream as we could see. We were 'way up above them and could look far across the valley. We could see the silvery gold of the willows, the russet and bronze of the currants, and patches of cheerful green showed where the pines were. A background of sober gray-green hills relieved the splendor, but even on them gay streaks and patches of yellow showed where rabbit-brush grew. We washed our faces at the spring,—the grasses that grew around the edge and dipped into the water were loaded with ice,—our rabbit was done to a turn, so I made some delicious coffee, Jerrine got herself a can of water, and we breakfasted.

Part Two

Do you remember I wrote you of a little boy dying? That was my own little Jamie, our first little son. For a long time, my heart was crushed. He was such a sweet, beautiful boy. I wanted him so much. I held him in my arms until the last agony was over. Clyde is a carpenter; so I wanted him to make the little coffin. He did it every bit, and I lined it, padded it, trimmed it, and covered it. ... It was a sad pleasure to do everything for our little first-born ourselves.

Part Three

I can never describe to you the weird beauty of a moonlit night among the pines. When the snow is sparkling and gleaming, the deep silence unbroken by the snapping of a twig. We were about to go back to bed when we heard faintly a long-drawn wail as if all the suffering and sorrow on earth were bound up in that one sound. We couldn't tell where it came from; it seemed to vibrate through the air. ... We went in, made up the fire, and sat in silence. Once or twice, that agonized cry came shivering through the cold moonlight.

Interlude

It was springtime, nature smiled. The beautiful prairie flowers put up their heads beneath leaves of green. The Jessamine covered the lattice. The atmosphere convinced me of the future resurrection of the body after death. All was sublime. I was quite happy in my home with my husband and child, but suddenly doomed to be the reverse.

- Elinore Pruitt Stewart

Part Four

We had plenty of time to be still and know God. He was our nearest neighbor. Although the neighbor's places were beginning to show up in the shimmering mirage of distance, as their trees began to tower above the new homes, we felt the absence of home folk. But when you get among such grandeur you get to feel how little you are, how foolish is human endeavour, except that which unites us with the almighty force called God.

- Mary Alma Blankenship

Part Five

I dozed off to sleep, but I couldn't stay asleep. I don't think I was afraid, but I certainly was nervous. All nature seemed to be mourning something, happened or going to happen. Half a mile away the night herders were riding round the round the herd. One of them was singing— faint but distinct came his song: 'O bury me not on the lone prairie.'—over and over he sang it. After a short silence he began again. This time it was, 'I'm thinking of my dear old mother, ten thousand miles away.'

- *Elinore Pruitt Stewart*

1. O bury me not on the lone prairie,
These words came low and mournfully
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay
On his dying bed at the close of day.

2. O bury me not on the lone prairie
Where the wile coyotes will howl o'er me,
In a narrow grave just six by three,
O bury me not on the lone prairie

3. It matters not, I've oft been told,
Where the body lies when the heart grows cold;
Yes grant, O grant this wish to me,
O bury me not on the lone prairie.

4. Let my death slumber be where my mother's
prayer And a sister's tear will mingle there,
Where my friends can come and weep o'er me;
O bury me not on the lone prairie.

5. O we buried him there on the lone prairie
Where the wild rose blooms and the wind blows
free, O his pale young face nevermore to see,
For we buried him there on the lone prairie.

- *Cowboy Folk song*