

University of Texas at El Paso

From the Selected Works of Dominic Dousa

October 11, 2007

"Songs of Sea and Life" for tenor/baritone voice
and piano (Grand Forks, ND)

Dominic Dousa, *University of Texas at El Paso*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/dominic_dousa/26/

North Dakota State University
Division of Fine Arts

Vocal Music of
Living American Composers

Faculty Recital
Robert Jones, baritone
Andrew Froelich, piano



Thursday, October 11, 2007
Beckwith Recital Hall
7:30 p.m.

"Vocal Music of Living American Composers"

Songs of Sea and Life.....Dominic Dousa

The winds, as at their hour of birth
Break, Break, Break
Crossing the Bar

Two Blake Songs.....John White

The Lamb
A Cradle Song

Bittersuite.....Stephen Paulus

For a Good Dog
The Middle
Time Marches On
Old Men

Three British Poems.....Roger Keele

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night
Fragment
Titanic!

↻ Intermission ↻

Schwarzgeburt.....Douglas Ovens

Elizabeth Chaussé, flute
Michael Thrasher, clarinet
Thomas Christenson, percussion
Duane Bierman, percussion
Eduardo Orozco, piano
Evan Montgomery, tenor
Michael Knutson, baritone

Men with Small Heads.....Lori Laitman

Men with Small Heads
Refrigerator, 1957

At Midnight.....Mark Dal Porto

Rena Vacha, oboe

Composer and Program Notes

*Indicates notes written by the composer

*Songs of Sea and Life**

The common themes of the three Alfred Tennyson poems that comprise this song cycle are the imagery of the sea and its metaphors for various life experiences. "The winds, as at their hour of birth" reflects the purity of new life and freedom. The shimmering accompaniment and soaring vocal lines underscore the ethereal and blissful atmosphere evoked by the images of winds and streams and of the proclamations, "we are free."

In "Break, Break, Break," the poet almost defiantly goads the sea to continue its churning while a storm rages in his own mind. He then remarks whimsically about those who amid the tumult are seemingly unperturbed ("O well for...") before his attention turns to the troubling awareness that his own sense of comfort and ease is gone ("But O for the touch..."). The setting of the final stanza combines the energetic mood of the breaking waves and the somber realization that what has brought security will not come back. However, the song ends not with a feeling of resignation, but with an invigorating finish that suggests a sense of resolve to forge a new path.

In "Crossing the Bar," the softly pulsating accompaniment and opening melodic motive in the piano evokes a sea that is now calm, gentle, and a place of repose. This tranquil mood give way to moments of introspection and melancholy ("And may there be no moaning...", "And may there be no sadness..."), as one prepares for the final stage in life's journey. The song concludes with a fervent expression of hope and confidence that one will find peace. The end of the last verse, "when I have crossed the bar," brings the first conclusive cadence in the home key, indicating that one will indeed find rest at the end of life's journey.

Two Blake Songs

The poetry of William Blake has attracted numerous composers because of the vivid imagery that is characteristic of his work. John White's response to "The Lamb" is to combine a voice line that suggests both recitative and plainchant with a harmony of extended chords. These elements are embellished with gently descending sixteenth-note figures. The rhythms of the melodic contours in the voice and piano are set in subtle opposition to the mixed meters.

The composer uses a similar harmonic vocabulary of seventh and ninth chords. Three structural rhythmic ideas govern the melodic motion: the

gently rocking figures of the keyboard, the lilting eighth note pattern in both piano and voice and the duple-triple meter dialectic.

*Bittersuite**

The poems by Ogden Nash were selected because they were not in the typical Ogden Nash style. They deal with aging- even though they rhyme, they are very serious. The cycle was written for Hakan Hagegard and commissioned by Nicholas Nash, who was instrumental in the development of Mr. Hagegard's concerts in the U.S. He was a big fan and just wanted to commission a piece for him.

The first and third songs---"For A Good Dog" and "Time Marches On" move very quickly with a persistent vocal line and an always active keyboard accompaniment. My intent was to capture the sometimes frantic and relentless quality of time that the poet speaks of when he says, "Time up, time up!" and "The seconds splattering upon the roof!" In songs two and four I wanted to portray a different perception of time---the one in which the poet pauses to reflect and analyze--- although in a very terse manner. The accompaniment for these last two is both spare and atmospheric.

*Three British Poems**

"Do not Go Gentle Into That Good Night - This song combines new (jazz) and old (baroque) musical idioms even as Dylan Thomas chose to pour his twentieth-century angst into the highly restrictive formula of the antique villanelle. Trills and ornaments emphasize the baroque idea; and, as the piece progresses, the thorough-bass line turns into a walking bass. The lush and self-indulgent harmonies, in sharp contrast to the anger of the text, have been termed "ironic."

"Fragment: I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson" - In setting to music this unfinished poem by one of the major British poets of World War I, I have tried to create the feeling of time standing still as it seems to have done for Wilfred Owen as he observed the death of a fellow soldier in the midst of battle.

"Titanic! (The Convergence Of The Twain: Lines On The Loss Of The Titanic)" - Thomas Hardy conceives of a divine being which he calls the "Spinner of the Years" or the "Immanent Will" (similar to the Fates of Greek Mythology) it is this entity who, contrary to all human intention, is responsible for propelling the great luxury liner and the iceberg toward each other in an inexorable and tragic union. This is reflected in the monotonous and hard-driving rhythm of the bolero, while the singer,

in declamatory mode, alternately speaks and sings this great text over a vigorous piano part.

*Schwarzgeburt**

Schwarzgeburt was commissioned by the Music and Germanic Languages Departments of the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1984 to honor Professor Richard Exner who had just been named the institution's 29th Faculty Research Lecturer. Exner was subsequently invited to Hiroshima where he made the recording of the premiere of Schwarzgeburt the centerpiece of his presentation there. The text deals with the horror of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a fitting subject given the title of his Research Lecture, "On the Limits of Knowing the Holocaust."

*Men With Small Heads**

My daughter Diana introduced me to the work of Thomas Lux, one of her favorite poets. When I first read "Men with Small Heads" I thought the text might be impossible to set to music. However, as I delved further into Mr. Lux's poems I came to appreciate their incredible structure, and my imagination ran wild. Several musical motifs dominate and unify Men with Small Heads. (The piano quotation of *America The Beautiful* at the end is intentional.) Refrigerator, 1957 is a musical fantasy. Reminiscent of French songs, the opening veers into a 3/4 section as the subject, "maraschino cherries," is introduced.

*At Midnight**

"At Midnight" is a setting of a text by the German Romantic poet Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866). A recurring melodic strophe (or melody) is used throughout to unite the five stanzas of text that are framed by the words "At midnight."

The introduction is played by the piano alone and later the oboe enters establishing a dark, melancholy atmosphere. After the introduction, the voice enters and, for the first 4 stanzas of text, the music sustains its heavy, somber tone expressing anxiety too difficult to bear. However, in the 5th and final stanza, a solution is found causing the burden to be lifted which changes the mood of the music entirely as it becomes more animated and triumphant in character. In this final stanza, a repeated rhythmic and melodic ostinato pattern is introduced (a derivative of the main melody) symbolizing the joyous pealing of morning bells soon to come that will eliminate all the grief felt earlier represented by the darkness of night.

Composer Biographies

Dominic Dousa

Dominic Dousa, a native of Rochester, Minnesota, joined the faculty of the University of Texas at El Paso Department of Music in August of 2004. He holds degrees in music from Ball State University (D.A.), Central Michigan University (M.M.), and Harvard University (A.B. summa cum laude) and in statistics from Iowa State University (M.S.). Dr. Dousa's compositions have received performances at recitals, festivals, and conferences in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Peru, China, the Czech Republic, and Finland. Two of Dousa's song cycles, "With a Song in My Heart" and "Six Songs on the Poetry of Langston Hughes," have been recorded by baritone Gerald J. Blanchard (with Dousa at the piano) and released on the CD *With a Song in My Heart* by Blue Griffin Recording. This CD features art songs set to texts of African American poets. In addition to his activities as teacher and composer, Dousa has remained active as an accompanist and chamber musician.

John White

John White is a prolific composer for the human voice and has been setting William Blake poetry for half a century. He is a former Fulbright-University of Vienna Distinguished Chair in Humanities, was born in Rochester, Minnesota in 1931 and received the BA Magna Cum Laude from the University of Minnesota. He also holds the M.A., Ph.D., and Performers Certificate in Cello from the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. His composition teachers were Howard Hanson, Bernard Rogers, Nadia Boulanger, and Ross Lee Finney. Now living in Westminster, Colorado, White's music is frequently performed at concerts of the Society of Composers, Inc., The College Music Society, and over the years by many ensembles including the Cleveland Orchestra, Rochester Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony, Eastman Wind Ensemble, and numerous university and community ensembles. Many of his compositions are published and recorded commercially and his "Two Blake Songs" and his "Flower Songs" will soon be released on a Capstone CD. Currently, White is composing an opera entitled *The Chess Place*. This year marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of William Blake. He was born on November 28, 1757, the same day as John White.

Stephen Paulus

Composer Stephen Paulus has been hailed as "...a bright, fluent inventor with a ready lyric gift." (The New Yorker) His prolific output of more than two hundred works is represented in many genres,

including music for orchestra, chorus, chamber ensembles, solo voice, keyboard and opera. Commissions have been received from the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, with subsequent performances coming from the orchestras of Los Angeles, Philadelphia, St. Louis, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the BBC Radio Orchestra. He has served as composer in residence for the orchestras of Atlanta, Minnesota, Tucson and Annapolis, and his works have been championed by such eminent conductors as Sir Neville Marriner, Kurt Masur, Christoph von Dohanyi, Leonard Slatkin, Yoel Levi, the late Robert Shaw, and numerous others.

Paulus has been commissioned to write works for some of the world's great solo artists, including Thomas Hampson, Håkan Hagegård, Doc Severinsen, William Preucil, Cynthia Phelps, Evelyn Lear, Leo Kottke and Robert McDuffie. Chamber music commissions have resulted in works for The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Friends of Music at the Supreme Court, the Cleveland Quartet and Arizona Friends of Chamber Music. He has been a featured guest composer at the festivals of Aspen, Santa Fe, Tanglewood, and, in the U.K., the Aldeburgh and Edinburgh Festivals.

A recipient of both Guggenheim and NEA Fellowships, Paulus is also a strong advocate for the music of his colleagues. He is co-founder and a current Board Vice President of the highly esteemed American Composers Forum, the largest composer service organization in the world. Paulus serves on the ASCAP Board of Directors as the Concert Music Representative, a post he has held since 1990.

Paulus' music has been described by critics and program annotators as rugged, angular, lyrical, lean, rhythmically aggressive, original, often gorgeous, moving, and uniquely American. He writes in a musical language that has been characterized as "...irresistible in kinetic energy and haunting in lyrical design." (Cleveland Plain Dealer) "Mr. Paulus often finds melodic patterns that are fresh and familiar at the same time....His scoring is invariably expert and exceptionally imaginative in textures and use of instruments" (The New York Times).

Roger Keele

Roger Keele is a versatile musical artist who has earned recognition in several fields of endeavor. He holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in piano performance from the University of North Texas and a second master's degree in vocal coaching and accompanying from the

University of Illinois. In 2005 Keele earned the Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Houston, with a major in choral conducting and a minor in composition. His composition professors there were Carlisle Floyd and David Ashley White.

As a composer, Keele has focused his efforts primarily on writing vocal music over the past 20 years. His "Three British Poems for Baritone and Piano," published by Classical Vocal Reprints in 1999, is being performed by with increasing frequency. Equally challenging for pianist and vocalist, the set seems to be gaining a foothold in the American art song repertoire, appearing in *Art Song in the United States, 1759-1999: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3rd edition. A number of miscellaneous songs exist as well.

Much of Keele's career has been devoted to the world of opera, both as vocal coach and as stage director. He currently teaches the opera workshop at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. He has directed shows for Opera in the Heights, Houston, Ars lyrica Houston, the Houston Chamber Choir, and the St. Cecilia Chamber Music Society. He is a founding board member of the fledgling summer opera company, Lone Star Lyric Theatre Festival where he will serve alternately as pianist, stage director, and composer-in-residence. Keele was the Assistant Director for the Houston Symphony Chorus in its 2002-2003.

Douglas Ovens

An active composer and percussionist, Douglas Ovens has performed his own works for solo percussion at the Akiyoshidai International Arts Village in Yamaguchi, Japan, at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Atlanta Arts Festival, the Black Mountain Festival, the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, the Resolution 2000 Festival, and many others. He recently appeared as the soloist in the premiere performance of his *MalletKat Concerto*, commissioned by the North/South Chamber Orchestra, Max Lifchitz, conductor

Ovens has received commissions from the Allentown Symphony, the Lehigh Valley Chamber Orchestra, the Asheville Symphony, Wall Street DanceWorks and Two to Go Dance Company. In 1996 he completed a work for vibes and wind ensemble that was premiered by Grammy award winning vibist Gary Burton.

International performances of his works have taken place at the International Courses for Percussion in Bydgoszcz, Poland, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland, the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan, and in Berlin and Vancouver, British Columbia.

He spent October, 1998 in Japan as the result of a fellowship from the Atlantic Center for the Arts and the Japan Foundation.

Douglas Ovens is Professor of Music and Head of the Music Department at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Lori Laitman

Lori Laitman is one of America's most prolific and widely performed composers of art song. "It is difficult to think of anyone before the public today who equals her exceptional gifts for embracing a poetic text and giving it new and deeper life through music." (*Journal of Singing*) *Gramophone Magazine* praised Laitman's CD *Becoming a Redwood* as "an extraordinarily impressive achievement" that gives "increasing evidence of a major talent."

Laitman graduated from Yale College and received her M.M. in flute performance from the Yale School of Music. Initially, she focused on composing music for film and theatre, but in 1991 Laitman started composing for voice. To date, she has composed over 170 songs and set the words of 50 different poets.

Albany Records released her debut CD, *Mystery-The Songs of Lori Laitman* in August 2000, *Dreaming* in May 2003 and *Becoming a Redwood* in October 2006. Laitman's songs have been recorded on such other labels as Channel Classics, Gasparo, Capstone and Naxos.

Mark Dal Porto

Dr. Mark Dal Porto is coordinator of composition and music theory at Eastern New Mexico University. Recent performances of his works include "At Midnight" performed by the Vanguard Voices and Brass of Dearborn, Michigan in June 2007, "Galactica" performed by the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine in May, 2007, "Spring, the Sweet Spring" performed by the Prague Radio Opera Chorus in May 2007, "Song of Eternity" by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in July 2006, and "When Your Song Rang Out to Me" by the Kiev Chamber Choir in May 2006. He serves on the board of directors as composition representative for the Rocky Mountain Region of the College Music Society.