

Doug McConnell
Selected List of Vocal Works

Teasdale Songs (2019-2024)

This is an ongoing project, a series of songs for soprano and piano, based on the poetry of Sara Teasdale. The songs are written for my good friend and colleague, Carol Dusdieker, who is a particular fan of Ms. Teasdale's work. Carol is a wonderful performer and storyteller; I have selected texts that I think will showcase her considerable abilities as a vocal artist.

Alone: A dark, intimate song of love and loss. Is it possible to move on or does one envy the dead?

At Night: a floating, dream-like piece; Love and sleep gently combine to invite the listener to a different world.

A Ballad of Two Knights: a whimsical tale about two gentlemen who seem to know what they are looking for in a woman. The final results do not turn out as planned....

Broadway: a bluesy, romantic salute to Broadway during that quiet time when the curtain has gone up inside the theater, The streets outside the theaters take on a special quality of their own.

Christmas Carol: The traditional Christmas story with a few twists of its own. Listen for snippets of well-loved Christmas carols that are woven into the texture of this song.

Faces, Version 1: We see people on the street and pass them by; what do we really know about them? Do we care?.....There are two McConnell settings of this powerful text; I couldn't decide which road to travel on, so I completed both versions. This setting is rather dramatic and dissonant at times, in service of the Teasdale text.

Faces, Version 2: An alternate setting to the song described just above. The middle sections of both songs have much in common in terms of their basic approach. The outer A sections in this song are considerably different, employing a style that is more objective and less emotional at times.

Fault: A determined woman laughs at the people who insist that her lover has faults. Short but intense.

Gifts of Love: a warm, romantic love song that incorporates motives from the traditional *Riddle Song*.

In a Cuban Garden: This is a dance-like setting of one of Teasdale's more colorful love poems. Passion and rhythm work together to set the tone!

The Kiss: Not all romances work out as we once dreamed.....

Let it Be Forgotten: This is a song about letting go....the Teasdale poem urges us to do this very thing, however regretfully. But is the music willing to go along?

A Minuet of Mozart's: A salute to Mozart and his graceful style. Listen for quotes taken from the *Minuet and Trio* from *Symphony No. 40*; they appear in both the voice and the piano.

Morning Song: Morning breaks with promise, but a woman's despair fails to go away.

Peace Flows Into Me: A gentle experience; Sara Teasdale speaks of the warmth of inner peace on a variety of levels. Traditional tonalities and phrase structures underline this mood as the song progresses.

Pierrot: Columbine dreams of her lover, Pierrot, in this short love poem.....the spirit of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* permeates this song, combined with my own harmonic language.

Redbirds: the calls of birds bring back memories of a May day at Saxton Hill.

The Rose: an unofficial "sequel" to the Pierrot song listed above.....once again, a Schoenberg-like harmonic language is suggested, as Columbine reflects on her lover's musical abilities with his lute. A beautiful flower is also discussed, whose origin places Columbine's love for Pierrot on shakier ground?!.....

Stars: Rolled chords in the upper register of the piano, along with ostinato rhythms color the wonder of looking at the stars in the sky.

Wisdom: a short but telling tale, a celebration of wisdom gained throughout life, but at a tremendous price.....

Simple Songs (2016 - 2024)

This is an ongoing collaboration between William Reyer, retired poet-in-residence at Heidelberg University and myself. All of the songs described below are based on texts by Bill for which I have supplied the music.

Haiku: Become one with B flat.....the challenge of this song was to allow this pitch to play constantly while other figures and harmonies surround it. Bill's poem evokes the presence of a soft breeze, sweet bird song, the growing lichen, as the everyday self is left behind.....

"I Can't Breathe.....": You know the story if you live in this country. On May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer ended the life of George Floyd during an arrest that may have had something to do with a counterfeit bill. The officer in question knelt on Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes, cutting off his air supply and killing him. Three other officers were on the scene and did not interfere with this act; Floyd was already handcuffed and lying on the ground begging for his life.

Bill wrote a very emotional text to reflect his own frustration at what had happened to George Floyd and others like him before this. He posted this latest poem on his Facebook site as he often does. I saw it there and could not rest

without providing a musical setting. Usually I ask for Bill's permission first, but I wanted to be sure that I could bring justice to this important poem before contacting my friend. Fortunately, he was fine with my efforts; the song now exists in versions for baritone and tenor.

If you are in need of a song of this nature for a concert or performance. I will be happy to provide a copy to you and your collaborative pianist, free of charge. Black lives matter!.....In a concert set of Simple Songs, *I Can't Breathe* works as an alternative to *A Prayer for the Day*. The two songs have very similar themes, so I would not suggest programming them together. Select the one that has the most meaning for your situation.

A Moment to Remember: the text describes a particular memory from the day of the writer. Roasting beets, paying bills, listening to Maher's First Symphony. When does a recollection become a true memory? With quotes from Mahler's memorable symphony as subtext.

A Prayer for the Day: Bill's poem evokes the memory of Nat Turner, to reflect on our own troubled racial landscape, circa 2017. The final line, "Grant us, O Lord, peace in our day," is repeated as a mantra in the second half of the song. Bill singer intones this line over and over again, while the piano presents its own repetitive melody, a sorrowful setting of the spiritual, "I'm Troubled in Mind." The song ends with an unsettling, dissonant chord.

Still the Same: good chums can discuss anything at their favorite watering hole.....Bill's lively text of fun and merriment needs an equally spirited setting, which I have tried to provide. Expect to hear snippets of tunes that you already know, including "*There's a Tavern in the Town*" and a couple of classic Ray Charles tunes, among other delights....

A Summer Lizard: the text is a children's poem, according to Bill, one that I believe has great charm. Meet one of God's creatures, pleased and proud to present himself, of course! Our reptilian protagonist has elected to perform this brief number in a Neo-Baroque style with a touch of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Wise Mother Fox: A short ditty of a piece. The furious pace of the piano suggests the busy young mother as she goes about her child-rearing duties. The original key is based on E; a lower version in D is also available.

Your Lullaby: Words to a Newborn: Words to a Newborn: Gentle ostinato figures from the piano welcome a newborn soul to this world. Motives and accompaniment figures from the famous lullaby by Brahms appear throughout the song. The key statement/refrain for *Your Lullaby* is stated in Latin: "*Amor vincit Omnia*" ("Love conquers all").

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When does a recollection become a true memory? With quotes from Mahler's memorable symphony as subtext.

For soprano voice: (Reyer Texts)

A Rose for the Christ Child (2019) – a quiet and reflection meditation on the events of Christmas, suitable for Christmas Eve presentation or a seasonal recital performance.

The Weight (2022): Commissioned by the poet himself, this is a gentle and lyric piece that reflects on the “weight” of the crimson leaf, the wise heart, and faith.

Songs of Celebration (1986; Expanded instrumentation: 2023)

Resurrection Day (4' 20")
The Paschal Presence (4')
Song to the Holy Spirit (4')

Soprano solo, SATB chamber orchestra, organ. Commissioned by Steven Hauser for the choir of St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Old Lyme, Connecticut. Premiered June, 1986. This three-movement work features a prominent soprano solo for the first two movements, with less participation in the final movement. The choir appears in the outer movements only. All three movements are based on the poetry of Elizabeth Randall-Mills, an accomplished poet and a member of the St. Anne's congregation. Available in two instrumental formats: chamber orchestra (flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb, Horn in F, bassoon, strings) with organ. Chamber ensemble: string quintet and organ.

Balm (2015)

Balm, a new composition for soprano and organ, was written in memory of the nine members of Mother Emanuel AME Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, who were murdered as they conducted a bible study in their own church building. By extension, the piece is also dedicated to all people who have lost their lives through violence and the families/friends that they have left behind.

The piece is cast in several sections. A mournful introduction quotes a passage from the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, one that describes the pain of those who grieve over loved ones that have been killed. The longer section of music that follows takes a motive from the spiritual *There is a Balm in Gilead* and turns it into a question: Is there a balm in Gilead?

Fortunately, the famous spiritual also provides the answer that we seek: Yes, there is a balm in Gilead, and it will help us to heal our sin-sick souls. The mood of the composition changes completely. The soprano and the organ take turns expressing the loving phrases of the sacred song; the text fragments that are presented in the vocal line alone appear below. A final coda section quotes a second passage from scripture, one that tells us that God has heard the prayers of his people. Hopefully we have listened as well and will use this moment to bring about positive change in our world.

Some pipe organs feature a stop called the *vox humana*. I am borrowing the term, rather than the stop's distinctive, nasal sound, to represent how the soprano and organ work together in this

piece. Imagine an organ where a stop is pulled by the organist and a real human voice enters the texture. That is what I have tried to do in this composition, especially in the more tormented portions of the work, where mere words fail to express the intensity of the pain. For these passages, the soprano sings her vocal line on a neutral syllable, as if she is an instrumental line in the organ composition. In the second half of the work, the soprano and organ share the presentation of the spiritual, as we come together to heal and to hope.

Oh, that my head were a spring of water,
And my eyes a fountain of tears.
I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.
-Jeremiah 9: 1

Sometimes I feel discouraged.....to make the wounded whole.....There is a balm in Gilead...
To heal the sin-sick soul.....Don't ever be discouraged.....You can tell the love of Jesus.....
There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.....to heal the sin-sick soul.....

- *There is a Balm in Gilead*, selected phrases appearing in the soprano line

Now my eyes will be open,
And my ears be attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

-2 Chronicles 7:15

Langston's Lot: Song is a Strong Thing (2015-16)

Dream Variations
Spirituals
Breath of a Rose
Listen Here Blues
Troubled Woman
Alabama Earth
Spring Song

Almost 20 years after *Langston's Lot*, my first song cycle on the poetry of Langston Hughes, my dear friends Gail Levinsky and Jackie Edwards Henry asked me to create a second set. This time, they requested Hughes poems that would reflect a female point of view. Fortunately, Langston provided some fine choices! As before, this cycle provides seven movements involving a broad selection of themes, as provided by Hughes himself. The hope for a better day, despite the reality of everyday reality is apparent throughout this composition. As before, the musical styles are varied and diverse, allowing for a sensitive portrayal of Hughes' ideas. The vocal lines are designed for a mezzo-soprano, although a soprano with a strong lower range should be comfortable.

I Will Lift Up My Eyes (2011)

Soprano, piano. Written for and premiered by Carol Dusdieker, soprano. This is an intimate setting of Psalm 121; it begins with an extended solo for soprano alone, before the piano enters with a gentle, lilting accompaniment that shifts meters. Suitable for concert or church use.
(4' 30")

***Blooming in Eden* (2004)**

Soprano and piano. Commissioned by the Mississippi Music Teachers Association, in honor of their 50th anniversary as an organization. A festive recital piece, based on a text by the German hymn writer Paul Gerhardt, (1607-1676.) (4" 20")

***Langston's Lot* (1996)**

I've Known Rivers
Joy
Conservatory Student Speaks of Higher Instrumentation
Blues at Dawn
Song for Billie Holiday
Oppression
Daybreak in Alabama

Tenor voice, alto saxophone, piano. Commissioned by Gail Levinsky and Jackie Edwards-Henry, *Langston's Lot* is a song-cycle for tenor, alto saxophone and piano which celebrates the work of Langston Hughes. The selected texts reflect the poet's sincere love of life, his people and their African-American cultural heritage. Lyric beauty and simplicity dominate the overall style of the poems, a quality which is reflected by the accessible nature of the musical settings. As a poet, Langston Hughes was very influenced by music, especially, jazz, blues and gospel. All of these popular music styles are reflected in the song cycle, combined with traditional classical musical forms and procedures. The composer would like to dedicate this work to the memory of a close friend, Kirk Bollinger, whose eclectic tastes in music and other forms of artistic expression would resonate with those of Hughes himself. (24')

Recorded on the CD release, *Saxophone and Other Voices*.

***Songs of the Beloved* (1992-93)**

Kiss Me!
Dream Images (Upon my Bed by Night)
My Beloved, My Friend
Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart
My Garden, My Vineyard

Soprano, flute, (C flute, alto flute, piccolo), piano, chamber women's chorus. Commissioned by the Mississippi Music Teachers Association (MMTA.) Winner, 1993 Composition Prize, Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters. This extended song cycle draws its texts from the love poetry of the *Song of Songs*, in the Old Testament. The scenario presents a young maid from Shulem, who is waiting for her lover to arrive. In the five movements, the maid explores her many emotions, as the cycle explores the many aspects of the gift of love. The piece is dedicated with love, to my wife Joan.

Three Baptism Songs:

***Cradling Children in His Arms* (1992)**

Tenor, flute and organ. A lively, active setting of *Gaudeamus Pariter*, with a text by Nikolai F.S. Grundwig (1783-1972.) Written to commemorate the baptism of my daughter Susan Alaina McConnell, born on January 6, 1992. (3")

***The Good Shepherd* (1989)**

Soprano duet, choir, organ. The name Rachel means lamb, or ewe. Our daughter Rachel Joan McConnell was born on February 27, 1989, and baptized on Good Shepherd Sunday. This short piece brings all of these themes together. The choir's appearance is a brief one; a simple, unison passage, using the St. Columbia tune, often used with the hymn text, *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*. (4')

***Baptized into Your Name Most Holy* (1986)**

Medium voice, organ. 1988, Chantry Press, Springfield, Ohio. This piece uses the hymn tune *Wernur den lieben Gott last walten* by George Neumark (1621-1681) as a setting for a text by George Rambach (1693 – 1735). The text describes the covenant that we have with God through baptism, reminding us of God's continual presence and love, no matter what we may have to experience in life. This setting was composed to celebrate the baptism of my son Alan, who was born with congenital heart disease. Alan's brief life brought joy to his parents, family and friends. Born on June 30, 1976, he died on August 19, 1987, following open heart surgery. Alan's baptism song was also used at his memorial service. Published by Chantry Press; now out of print. Please contact the composer for music. (4')

***Set Me as a Seal upon Your Heart* (1987)**

Soprano, flute. 1987. This brief duet, based on a famous text from the *Song of Songs* was first composed for the wedding of my brother Wayne, and his wife, Kay Steigerwalt. Another version of this piece appears in my song cycle, *Songs of the Beloved*. A more recent version for choir and flute is also available. The original duet was published by Chantry Press but is now out of print. Please contact the composer for music. (3')

***Psalms from Prison* (1985)**

Blessed are the People Oppressed
How Long Will These Walls Stand?
Harken to the Cries
Chains and Leg Irons/Where Do We Go From Here?
Thou art my Cosigner; Thou art my Shepherd
I am Compelled to Protest
We Are Marching

Bass-baritone, piano. On October 18, 1972, Benjamin f. Chavis, Jr., along with nine of his co-workers affiliated with the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, were sentenced to a combined total of 282 years in prison. The charges against the group, later to be known as the "Wilmington Ten," included "unlawful burning" and "conspiracy to assault" during the race riots in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1971. Over the next ten years, Chavis spent many months in five different penal institutions in North Carolina and considerable sums of money in legal battles, before the conviction was finally overturned. For more information: <http://www.ucc.org/ucc-celebrates-pardons-of>

While in prison, Dr. Chavis wrote a series of 150 psalms, corresponding to the number found in the Bible. This modern set of psalms are not intended to paraphrase the original poetry, but does advance the Biblical theme of vindication through faith in God, while also addressing the social issues related to the struggle for civil rights and social justice.

The song cycle attempts selects nine of these psalms and spreads them out over the course of seven songs. The harmonic language is strongly dissonant at times, in keeping with the intense struggles that the poems describe. But local tonal centers also emerge, used to represent the hope for redemption and forgiveness. (approx. 25 minutes)

Four Wedding Songs (1977 – 1980)

A Wedding Blessing
Psalm 100
Hear Us Now Our god and Father
I Will Sing the Story

Medium/high voice, organ; piano accompaniment is also possible. The collected songs above were composed as wedding gifts written for friends, and in one case, my wife Joan for our wedding (*I Will Sing the Story*). While each song was written for a wedding service, they can also be used for other occasions. The published version of these songs is currently out-of-print; please contact the composer for copies of the music. Length of each song: between 3-4 minutes.