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Six Blake Songs

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Graduate Program in Music

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Abstract

*Six Blake Songs* is a song cycle for Soprano and mixed chamber ensemble (Flute, Clarinet, Saxophone, Violin and Viola). The work sets several texts by the English poet William Blake (1757-1827), which all share the central theme of Time. Nearly all of these texts are excerpts from larger works, with the exception of the poem *Ah, Sunflower*, which is presented at the work’s conclusion. Discrete collections of frequencies, which are derived from either the frequency modulation of two notes or from the overtones of a single fundamental, provide the pitch content for the entire piece. In addition, many of the durations of notes, gestures, and phrases, are designed to fluctuate in size systematically.

Keywords

chamber music, vocal music, song cycle, William Blake, Spectralism, frequency modulation, overtones
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Willyn Whiting

SIX BLAKE SONGS
for Soprano and Ensemble

Words by William Blake

(2018)
I - Prologue
‘The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
The grave is burst, the spires shed, the linen wrapped up;
The bones of death, the covering clay, the sinews shrunk & dried.
Reviving shake, aspiring move, breathing, awakening,
(America 1793: Plate 6; lines 37 - 40)

II - Three Proverbs in Canon
The eyes of fire, the nostrils of air, the mouth of water, the beard of earth.
The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands and feet Proportion.
The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.
(‘III - Proverbs of Hell’ from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 1790: Pl.9; ln.48, Pl.10; ln.61, and Pl.8; ln.27)

III - Two Slow Proverbs
Eternity is in love with the productions of Time… but of wisdom, no clock can measure.
(‘III - Proverbs of Hell’ from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell 1790: Pl.7; ln.10 and 12)

IV – Dialogue
Every night and every morn
Some to misery are born;
Every morn and every night
Some are born to sweet delight.
Some are born to sweet delight,
Some are born to endless night.
(‘VIII - Auguries of Innocence’ from ‘The Pickering Manuscript’ 1803: ln.119 - 124)
‘Does spring hide its joy
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower
Sow by night,
Or the ploughman in darkness plough?
(‘II - Earth’s Answer’ from Songs of Experience 1794: l.16 - 20)

V - The Caverns of the Grave I’ve Seen
Re-engraved time after time,
Ever in their youthful prime,
My designs unchanged remain;
Time may rage but rage in vain.
For above Time’s troubled fountains
On the great Atlantic mountains,
In my golden house on high,
There they shine eternally.
(‘XXXIV’ from Miscellaneous Verses 1809-1812: l.13 - 20)

VI - Ah, Sunflower
Ah, Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that gilden clime
Where the traveller’s journey is done;
Where the youth pined away with desire
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow
Arise from their graves and aspire
Where my sunflower wishes to go.
(‘XX - Ah, Sunflower’ from Songs of Experience 1794: l.1 - 8)
Instrumentation

Flute (also Piccolo)
Clarinet in Bb (also Bass Clarinet)
Alto Saxophone (also Tenor Sax)
Soprano
Violin
Viola*

* String IV is tuned, down a semitone, to B2. Scordatura is notated at sounding pitch in this score.

Duration: c. 21 minutes

Program Note

Six Blake Songs is a setting of various poems, excerpts and proverbs written by William Blake throughout his lifetime. A general open-endedness and an overt mysticism surround these texts and associations can easily be drawn between them. The concept of time is common to all the texts I have chosen to set.

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet; painter and printmaker closely associated with the Romantic art movements of the 19th century. He made his living as a commercial engraver in London and also produced illuminated manuscripts of his own poetry. He strove to create a mythology that could encode his own spiritual and political ideals into a prophetic message.

Performance Note

♯ = ¼ tones sharp  ♭ = ¼ tone sharp  ♮ = slightly raised
♭ ♮ ♯ = slightly lowered  ♩ = ¼ tone flat  ♮ ♦ = ¾ tones flat
The morning comes, the night

(sing the upper voice)
their stations, their stations;
The grave is burst, the spires shed, the linen
wrapped up

(Blend with soprano)
II - Three Proverbs in Canon

Giacoso ($\frac{\dot{\text{e}}}{\text{e}} = 60$)

The eyes of fire the nostrils of air

The mouth of water the beard of earth
the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eyes of man.
III - Two Slow Proverbs

Cantabile ($\textstyle \frac{\text{d}}{\text{s}} = 60$) (grace notes occur on the beat)

A. Sx.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ppp} & \quad \text{n.} \\
\text{pp} & \quad \text{n.}
\end{align*}
\]

S

\[
\begin{align*}
94 & \quad \text{ord.} \\
\text{pp} & \quad \text{n.} \\
\text{p} & \quad \text{n.}
\end{align*}
\]

Vln.

\[
\begin{align*}
94 & \quad \text{ppp} \\
\text{mf} & \quad \text{pp} \\
\text{pp} & \quad \text{p}
\end{align*}
\]

Vla.

\[
\begin{align*}
94 & \quad \text{ord.} \\
\text{pp} & \quad \text{n.}
\end{align*}
\]
when buds and blossoms grow?

some are born to sweet delight

every morn and every night
Fl. 194

B. Cl. 194

T. Sx. 194

S 194

Does the sower?

Vln. 194

Vla. 194

Some are born to sow by
night?
sweet delight

or the
some are born to ploughman
V - The Caverns of the Grave I've Seen

Espressivo ($d = 60$)

Re-engraved time after time ever in their
Fl.

B. Cl.

T. Sx.

Vln.

Vla.

\textit{con brio}

\textit{non vib}

\textit{molto vib}

\textit{ord.}

\textit{ad lib...}
For above time’s troubled fountains

on the great Atlantic moun
VI - Ah, Sunflower

Risolutò (\( \text{\textit{j} = 60} \))
279

Picc.

B♭ Cl.

A. Sx.

S

...est the steps of the sun...

Vln.

Vla.

283

Picc.

B♭ Cl.

A. Sx.

Vln.

Vla.
Where the youth pined a way

with desire and the pale vir
to Bass

325

Fl.
B. Cl.
A. Sx.
Vln.
Vla.
# Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Willyn Whiting  
**Post-Secondary Education and Degrees:**  
University of Western Ontario  
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2016-2018 M.Mus. (Music Composition)  
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