Six Blake Songs

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree 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 systemically.

Keywords

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

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Lastly, I would like to thank the performers that made the premiere of this work possible: Susan Dworkin, Monique Aubé, Jossée MacInnis, Pascal Bard, Francisco Barradas, Sarah DeNiverville, and conductor Baptiste Boiron.
Table of Contents

Abstract.............................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements..........................................................................................................iii
Table of Contents...............................................................................................................iv
Title Page............................................................................................................................v
Text......................................................................................................................................vi
Instrumentation...................................................................................................................viii
Program Note......................................................................................................................viii
Performance Note...............................................................................................................viii
Score...................................................................................................................................1
   I – Prologue.....................................................................................................................1
   II – Three Proverbs in Canon..........................................................................................9
   III – Two Slow Proverbs...............................................................................................13
   IV – Dialogue..................................................................................................................17
   V – The Caverns of the Grave I’ve Seen.........................................................................21
   VI – Ah, Sunflower .........................................................................................................26
Curriculum Vitae..................................................................................................................37
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: ln.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: ln.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: ln.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

\# = \(\frac{3}{4}\) tones sharp  
\(\frac{1}{4}\) = \(\frac{1}{4}\) tone sharp  
\(\frac{1}{4}\) = slightly raised  
\(\frac{1}{4}\) = slightly lowered  
\(\frac{1}{4}\) = \(\frac{1}{4}\) tone flat  
\(\frac{3}{4}\) = \(\frac{3}{4}\) tones flat
Six Blake Songs

I - Prologue
Grave $\dot{\frac{\text{d}}{\text{b}}}= 60$

Flute

Bass Clarinet

Tenor Sax

Soprano

Violin

Viola

(Scordatura IV = B)

©2018
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)

Brilliante (molto S.P.)
The bones of death
The covering clay the sinews shrunk and dry'd
II - Three Proverbs in Canon

Giacoso (\( \dot{\frac{1}{4}} = 60 \))

The eyes of fire

The nostrils of air

The mouth of water

The beard of earth
the roaring of lions

the howling of

wolves

the raging of the storm

non vib
the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eyes of man
III - Two Slow Proverbs

Cantabile (♩ = 60)

(grace notes occur on the beat)

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ord.

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IV - Dialogue

Misterioso (d = 60)

\begin{align*}
\text{S} & \quad \text{pizz.} \\
\text{Vln.} & \quad \text{ord.} \\
\text{Vla.} & \quad \text{pizz.}
\end{align*}
Every morn and every night

When buds and blossoms grow?

Some are born to sweet delight
Does the sow er?

Some are born to sow by
night?
sweet delight

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

Espressivo (\( \frac{3}{4} \) = 60)

Re-engraved time after time ever in their

pp

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

senza sord.

\( \frac{3}{4} \)
youthful prime my designs un-changed remain time

can’t

may rage but rage in vain

non vib.
For above time’s troubled fountains

On the great Atlantic moun—

On the great Atlantic moun—

263  

S  

tains  In  my  

Vln.  Vla.

267  

Fl.  B. Cl.  T. Sx.

to Bb  to Alto  

S  

gold  en  house  on  

Vln.  Vla.
VI - Ah, Sunflower

*Risoluto (d = 60)*

Ah! Sunflower, heavy laden with the weight of time, who counts?
Where the youth pined a way

with desire and the pale

* harmonic gliss
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Willyn Whiting

Post-Secondary Education and Degrees:

University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2018 M.Mus. (Music Composition)

University of Toronto
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