

David Biedenbender

text by Robert Fanning

all we are given
we cannot hold

for soprano, clarinet, and piano

bent space music

Commissioned by the
Barlow Endowment for Music Composition
at Brigham Young University

Dedicated to and written for my friends in the Haven Trio
Lindsay Kesselman, Midori Koga, and Kimberly Luevano

Performance materials available from Bent Space Music (Publisher):
www.davidbiedenbender.com

Contact the Composer:
davidbiedenbender@gmail.com

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INSTRUMENTATION

Soprano
Bb Clarinet
Piano

PERUSAL COPY

Total duration: *ca.* 27:00

Transposed Score

PROGRAM NOTE

All we are given we cannot hold was commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University and is dedicated to and written for my friends in the Haven Trio—Lindsay Kesselman, Midori Koga, and Kimberly Luevano. The songs are settings of poetry by my friend Robert Fanning, selected from three of his incredible collections of work: *Our Sudden Museum*, *The Seed Thieves*, and the forthcoming *All we are given we cannot hold*. All of the poems connect in some way to the idea of the fleeting—the ephemeral—often capturing some small, seemingly ordinary moment, and finding a profundity and beauty within it. These poems remind me of advice once given to me by a friend. We were talking about how my children often snuggle up and cuddle with me, and she was reflecting on how her grown child no longer does that when she said, “cherish those moments. They are so special and beautiful, because you won’t realize until later that it was the last time that they did that seemingly small thing.” There are so many moments in life like this, and my hope with this piece is to reflect on their poignant beauty in an attempt to live in them more fully.

TEXT

1. The Darkness, Literal and Figurative (ca. 4:00) —for Gabriel and Magdalena

Neither should frighten you, but both will.
Tonight it's the literal darkness, figuratively:
your day's stuffed animals now poised
shadows ready to leap and devour you.
Now I'm here with you,
your living father, literally, arms around you,
to say: As your known shapes take misshapen forms,
know: everything you can't fully see
suggests more than it is.

Later, it'll be the figurative dark, literally:
the stuffed shadows of your dazed anima poised
now ready to leap and devour your loves.
Later, I'll be with you here,
your dead father, figuratively, arms around you,
to say: As your unknown misshapen shapes take form,
know: Everything you can't see fully
suggests more than it is.
Neither should frighten you, but both will.

(from *Our Sudden Museum*)

2. One and a Half Miles Away from Dying

(ca. 4:00)

the people in this car, unaware
their sacred closing moments are here,
exhaust their last travel game.
In the back seat the girl hums,

braiding her sister's black hair.
The boy traces his name in breath
on the back window, each slow letter
squeaking the chilled glass, making his mother

shiver. Like a fish trapped in thin pond
ice, gasping, she stares into the car
through the visor vanity mirror.
Her lips glisten under the lipstick wand.

Yawning, the driver's face is caught wide open
in passing headlight amber, his left hand
draped over the wheel at the wrist.
His other hand tries to retrieve the lost

voice of The Late World News reporter,
her words garbled by cloudbursts
shattering over the flat horizon, east.
Shutting the radio off, he tries to lure

his kids to sing one they know by heart.
He turns the rearview mirror until it
holds their three faces. Half in shadow,
placid, they peer at him below,

his cheeks splashed green by dashboard light.
The clock's last digit clicks one more minute.
Beyond the blind curve, a truck's hulk
of silver screeches over the median wall.

An oil tanker, sparks raging, airborne,
careens toward this side of the freeway
—meteor tail of flame, like a missile shot
astray. Back in the car, before the turn,

it is quiet. The people smile
doing last minute things:
one scratching an ankle,
one blinking,
one taking a breath preparing to sing.

(from *The Seed Thieves*)

3. **Watching My Daughter through the One Way Mirror
of a Preschool Observation Room**

(ca. 2:30)

Maggie's finishing a portrait
of our family, gluing googly eyes
onto a stately stick figure

I hope is me. Now she doesn't know
who to play with, as other kids,
posie-pocketed, all

fall down. She wears my face
superimposed. I almost tap
the glass, point her toward

the boy with yellow trucks.
Lost, she stares out the classroom window
toward snow-humped pines

beyond the playground.
When I'm dead, I hope there'll be a thin pane
such as this between us. I'll stand forever

out in the dark to watch my grown children
move through their bright rooms.
Maybe just once they'll cup

their hands against the glass, caught
by some flicker or glint,
a slant of light touching their faces.

(from *Our Sudden Museum*)

4. The Thorn Birds

(ca. 4:00)

—for my mother

“...Then, singing among the savage branches, it impales itself upon the longest, sharpest spine. And, dying, it rises above its own agony to out-carol the lark and the nightingale. One superlative song, existence the price. But the whole world stills to listen, and God in His heaven smiles. For the best is only bought at the cost of great pain.... Or so says the legend.” —(Wikipedia, *Gospel of Thomas*, Ch. 9)

Through the nettles of casual chatter
the question flutters in again.
For the fourth time this week, you ask
what it was—the title of that novel
you’ve read so many times.
The one you loved so much you once
framed its cover and hung it on your wall.
This morning, I open a window of time,
hoping it will help: let’s give it a minute—
let’s see if it comes to you. You glance up,
fingertip to your lips—the way I imagine
you might have as a girl, given a problem
to solve. Everything goes, you’d said
only yesterday of the teeth, the ears,
the eyes, before the white-coated
ophthalmologist swooped in to stick
a needle into both of your irises.
Now you squint into the ink black
vines of yet another thickening dark
toward the sting of what escapes you.
The way you’ve pressed your heart—
your whole life—toward the face of God
and love: readying to sing its missing name.

(from *All We Are Given We Cannot Hold*)

5. Model Nation

(ca. 3:45)

—for Gabriel

As you speak, new worlds rise in your eyes.
A voice within your voice—do you hear it, too?—
could fill a whole sea with whale song. It sings
fathom and league, sings launch and conquer.
It is ocean wide now, this good force of your going.
Yet still, my heart fumbles to fasten some small rope
around the dock—and so love is—wishes for a way
to keep us here. Too late. That little boat you were,
giggling in the tub as I blew bubbles, is oceans away.
Sailboat, tugboat, yacht, steamer, freighter,
I've been watching from the dock and hear already
the growing ache and groan of giant chains clanking
an iron hull, the long horn of adulthood calling you
with its sweeping wall of mist and fog.
When you look back and see me wave, may I be
the ocean's shoulders ever rolling beneath you.
Please—know me not as a country fading
from view, but as one who carried with love
the great world you now carry in you.

(from *All We Are Given We Cannot Hold*)

6. Body of Work

(ca. 4:30)

Because we want it brighter. Because we want our own beauty bared
before us. Because we've lived long enough with the room's
deep forest print, we take to the wall. Faces masked,

we begin the task of peeling off the torn, dog-eared green, opening
the story of our house. Years bleed up from beneath the heat
of steam: solids, stripes, prints and florals unfurling

as we score and scrape—decades of blues and deep reds, of pastels
and pale yellows, a spectrum of dust-wet flesh sloughed
off, pages falling in strips and flakes at our feet.

It's more than a century of layers with their pentimento stains of breath
and voices before we reach bone, breaking through
plaster holes we patch later, before, at last,

the last wet swaths of our chosen painted shade dry; we finish
in the day's fading gold. This is the work of house
and body. Every decorous self a patchwork

of seams and glue, a mashup of lives to make one. Each accretion
of wound and scab a making and unmaking, the flesh
a roll of film, a wall of swatches in the shifting

fashions of light. How I've peeled back year into year, hoping to see
the face of the child I was, the one breathing just beyond
this last brittle layer of blue, whose shadow

blossomed into this life, this room.
Who blooms through his million lids of sleep, his chorus
of bruise and roses. Who sings and sings: *Be true, be true.*

(from *All We Are Given We Cannot Hold*)

7. Cuttings

(ca. 4:15)

On the porch at dawn I watch
my childrens' commingled curls
wander toward my feet,

tumbleweeds in a coming storm's
unsettled air. Last evening they each
stood here wearing a black plastic bag,

their heads poked through the ripped
neck hole, as my wife snipped at bangs,
her trimmings making scrunched noses itch.

I should get the broom to whisk these tufts
into a bag—she likes to keep their hair.
But I watch them drift instead, these

little nests of them we left and cannot bear.
The wind will take what we forget
to sweep. And cannot keep.

(from *Our Sudden Museum*)

PERUSAL COPY

all we are given we cannot hold

for soprano, clarinet, and piano

words by Robert Fanning

music by David Biedenbender

1. The Darkness, Literal and Figurative

Gently lilting, a lullaby ♩ = 56

Soprano

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

pp

p semplice

Red.

5

6

p sweetly

Nei - ther should fright - en you, but both will

mp

Red.

8 *mp* *a little playful*

To - night it's the lit - er - al dark - ness, fi - gur - a - tive - ly:—

11 13

your day's stuffed an - i - mals

mp *mf*

cresc. poco a poco

14

now poised sha - dows rea dy to leap and de - vour you.

mp *pp*

mp

(*Red.*)

26 28

see _____ sug - gests more than it is.

mp *p*

29

mf *p*

32 *mp*

La - ter, it' - ll be the fig - ur - a - tive dark, li ter - al - ly, the stuffed

p

34

sha - dows of your dazed an - i - ma poised_____ now read - y to leap and de - vour your loves.

p *p*

cresc.

And.

37

La - ter I'll be with you here, your dead moth - er, fig - ur - a - tive - ly:_____

p *poco f* *mf* *mp*

mf

40

arms a - round you arms a - round you As your un - known mis - shap - en

mp *mf* *p* *pp* *dim.* *mp*

42

50 *pp*

both will.

p

53 *pp*

ppp

(let ring into silence)

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems. The first system begins at measure 50 and ends at measure 52. The voice part has the lyrics 'both will.' and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piano part has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system begins at measure 53 and ends at measure 56. The voice part has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piano part has a dynamic marking of *ppp*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and accidentals. A large red watermark 'PERUSAHA' is visible across the score.

2. One and a Half Miles Away from Dying

Steady, throbbing $\text{♩} = 60$ *mp* a chant

Soprano

Off stage or into the piano:

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

p like a tolling bell, resonant and full of overtones

Leg. (damp string with finger near bridge)

the peo - ple in this car,

5

p linger

un - a - ware

their sa - cred clo - sing

p *ppp*

Leg.

8

10

mp

mo - ments are here,

ex - haust their last

mp *pp*

Leg.

mp becoming more insistent

11

tra - vel game. In the back seat the girl hums,

p

(Ped.)

15

braid - ing her sis - ter's black hair.

17 *p* a little playful

hm

pp

Multiphonic 1 (M1)

(Ped.)

19

hm hm hm

p

(Ped.)

38

gasp - ing, gasp - ing, she stares in - to the car through the vi - sor van - i - ty mir - ror.

pp

(*2ed.*)

42

her lips glis - ten un - der the lip - stick wand. a sigh

p

(*2ed.*)

45

46 *mp*

Yawn - ing, the dri - ver's face is caught wide

mp *mp*

(*2ed.*) *poco f*

48

o - - - pen in pass - ing head - light am - ber, his left hand

(Ped.)

f

51

53

draped o - ver the wheel at the wrist. His o - ther hand tries to re - trieve the lost voice of the Late

(Ped.)

55

World News re - port - er, her words garb - led by cloud - bursts shat - ter - ing the flat hor-

M1

mf > *p*

(Ped.)

59

- i - zon, east. Shut - ting the ra - dio off, he tries to lure his kids to sing one they

M1

f > *p*

(Ped.)

63

64

mf growing urgent

know by heart. he turns the rear - view mir - ror un - til it holds their three fa - ces.

M1

f

(Ped.)

66

Half in sha - dow, pla - cid, they peer at him be - low,

p *mp*

(Ped.)

78 79

- reens to - ward this side of the free - way — me - te - or tail of flame, like a mis - sile shot a -

M1

ff

(Led.)

81

- stray. Back in the car, be - fore the turn, it is qui - et.

Multiphonic 2 (M2)

M2

ff

(Led.)

85 87

the peo - ple smile do - ing last min - ute things: one scratch - ing an an - kle, one

M1

ff

(Led.)

88

blink - ing, one tak - ing a breath pre - par - ing to sing.

ff

M2

ff

f

f

ff

(Ped.)

93

sing. ah (gasp)!

fff

M2

ffp

ff

ff

cresc.

(Ped.)

97

ff

pp

(Ped.)

100

fff

(*2ed.*)

103

fff

(*2ed.*)

107

molto rit.

p

(*2ed.*)

(let ring into silence)

3. Watching My Daughter Through the One Way Mirror of a Preschool Observation Room

Pulsing, playful ♩ = 76

Score for Soprano, B♭ Clarinet, and Piano.

Soprano: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Rests for the first three measures.

B♭ Clarinet: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Rests for the first three measures.

Piano: Grand staff, 4/4 time.

First System (Measures 1-3):

- Right Hand:** *f* echoes (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).
- Left Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).

Second System (Measures 4-6):

- Right Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).
- Left Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).

Third System (Measures 7-9):

- Right Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).
- Left Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).

Fourth System (Measures 10-12):

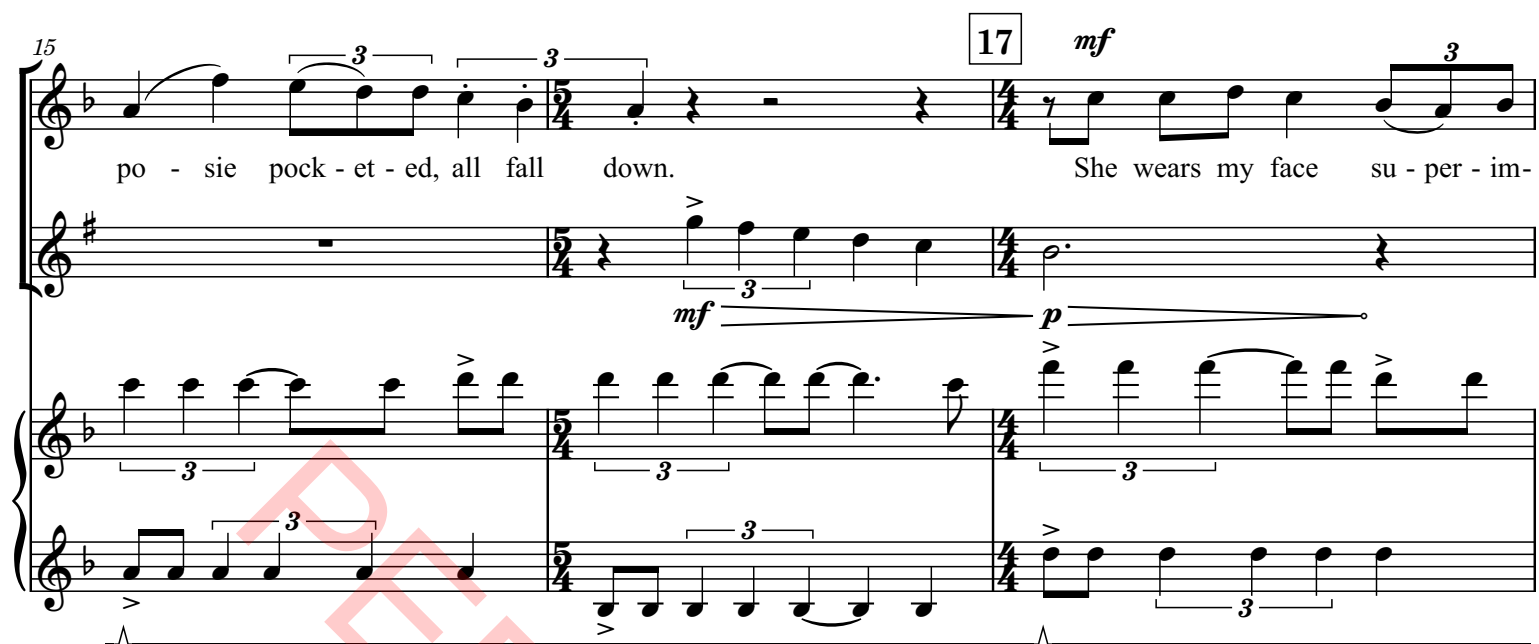
- Right Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).
- Left Hand:** *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note), *f* (triplets of eighth notes), *p* (half note).

Watermark: EMERALD COPY

15 17 *mf*

po - sie pock - et - ed, all fall down. She wears my face su - per - im -

mf *p*

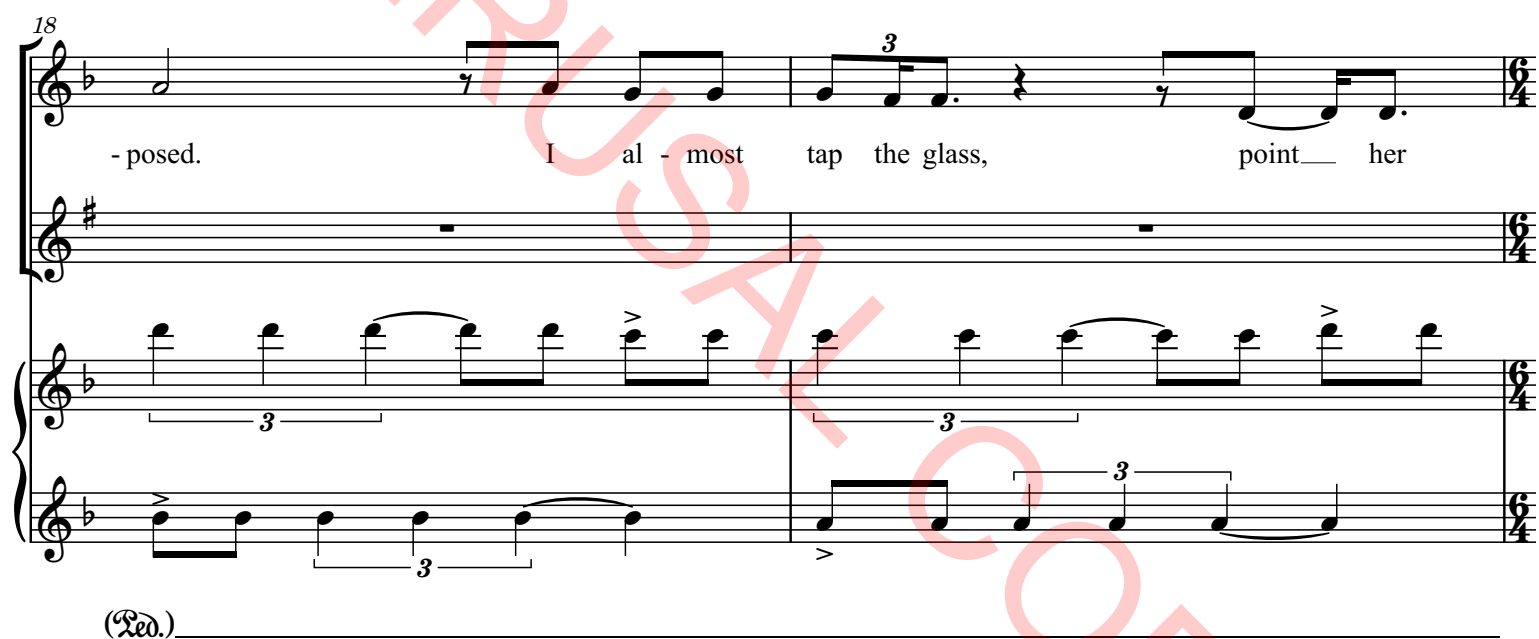


18

- posed. I al - most tap the glass, point her

mf *p*

(Red.)

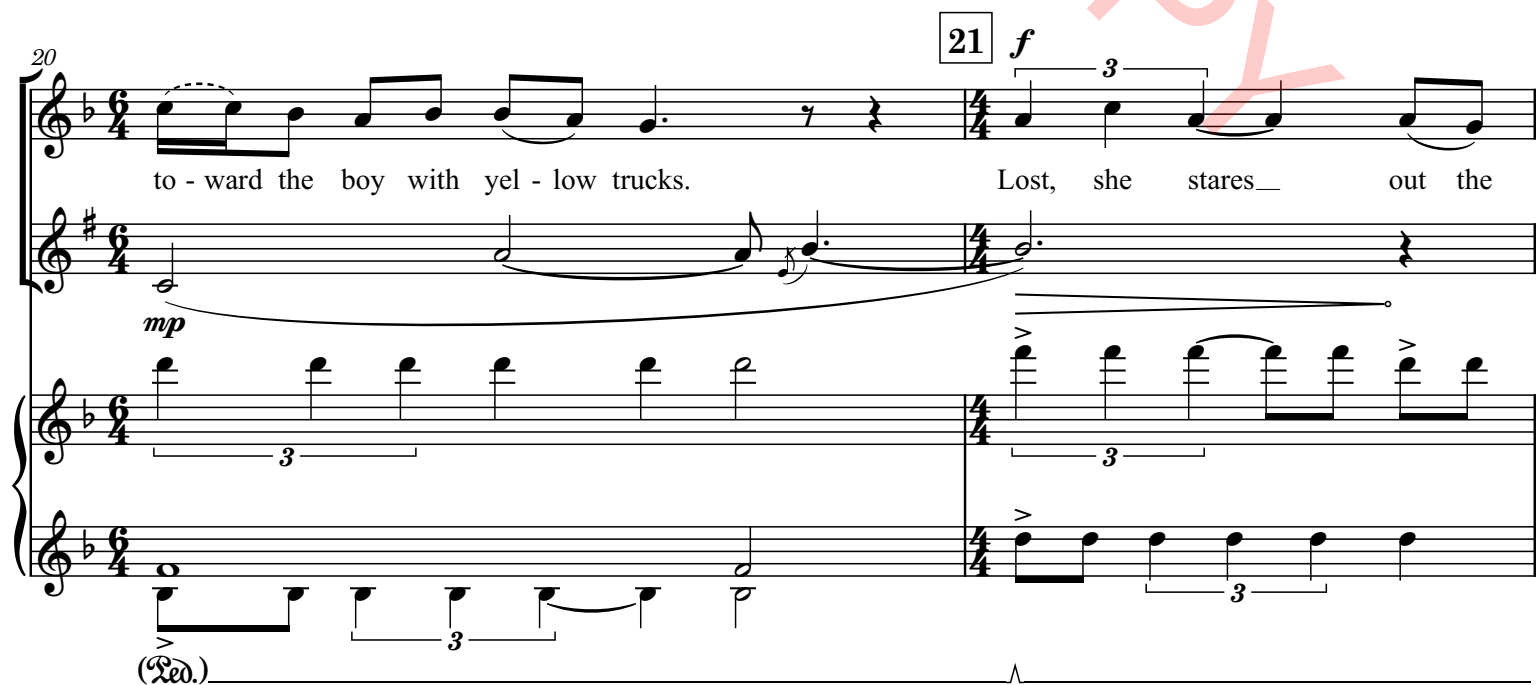


20 21 *f*

to - ward the boy with yel - low trucks. Lost, she stares out the

mp

(Red.)



22

win - dow to - ward snow - humped pines be - yond the play - ground.

mf *mf* *p*

mf *pp*

mf *pp*

25

rit. 26 A little slower ♩ = 66

When I'm dead, I hope there will be a thin pane be - tween us such as

mf *p* *mf warm* *p* *mf* *p*

mf *pp* *mf warm* *pp* *sim.*

mf *pp*

33

f *mf* *mp*

once they'll cup their hands a - gainst the glass, caught by some flick-er or glint, a

p *mp* *p*

aching

dim. poco a poco

37

rit. **Fading** ♩ = 56

p *pp*

slant of light touch-ing their fa-ces.

p *pp*

8va

4. The Thorn Birds

4. The Thorn Birds

Quiet, melancholic ♩ = 56

Quiet, melancholic ♩ = 56

p

Soprano

Through the net - tles

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

pp *p*

4

of cas - u - al chat - ter the ques - tion flut - ters in a - gain.

p

mp

7 accel. 8 With more motion, swirling ♩ = 72 *mp*

For the

mf echoes

poco mf *p* *mf* echoes *pp* *mp* *pp*

9

fourth time this week, you ask what it was—

mf echoes

11

the ti - tle of _____ that no - vel you've read so man - y times. The

mp

13

one _____ you loved so much you _____ once

p *mp*

21

let's see if it comes to you.

p

mf *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mp* *pp*

23

you glance up, fin - ger - tips to your lips—

mf

f *p* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *mf* *p*

25

the way I im - a - gine you might have as a girl, giv - en a prob - lem to

fechoes

(mf) *f* *p* *f* *p* *mf* *p*

27

solve. _____

29

31

Eve - ry - thing goes, you'd said on - ly yes - ter - day_ of the teeth, ears, eyes,

p lush (l.h. emerges and taking over texture) *f*

40 *p*

The way____ you've pressed your heart— your whole life—____

p fragile

(*2ed.*)

43

to-ward the face of God and love:____ rea - dy - ing to sing____

46 *rit.*.....

facing backstage: *distant p*

its miss - ing name.____ hm____

pp

(*2ed.*)

all we are given we cannot hold | 5.

5. Model Nation

Tectonic ♩ = 80

mp somewhat freely

Soprano

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

damp string near peg with finger,
slowly lift finger with *cresc.*

open
resonance

8^{ba}

pp

(*Red.*)

f

5

mf brimming

new

worlds

rise

in your

eyes.

damp (*sim.* until m. 38)

(8)

pp

(*Red.*)

9

10

A

voice

with - in

your

voice

pp

3:2

mp

3:2

(8)

ff

(*Red.*)

pp

13

do you hear it, _____ too?—

pp

(8) *ff* (2ed.) *p*

17

19

could fill a whole sea with whale song. _____

f

(8) *ff* (2ed.) *p* *ff*

21

It _____ sings fath - om and _____

f *wailing* *mp*

(8) *p* (2ed.) *ff* *p* *ff* *p*

34 37

go - ing. Yet still, my heart

sim.

f

p *ff* *p*

(8) *(Led.)*

38

fum - bles to fas - ten some small rope a - round the dock. —

ord. (no damping)

p *mf*

f *p*

(8) *(Led.)*

43 Swirling $\text{♩} = 60$ ($\text{♩} = 120$)

and so love is —

pp

pp graceful *mf*

(8) *(Led.)*

46

wish - es a way to keep us here.

mf

p

(*Red.*)

49

here. here. here.

p *f*

f

(*Red.*)

52

mp

Too late.

p *ff*

p (*Red.*)

55 *mf*

That lit - tle boat_ you were, gig - ling in the bath - tub

f *p* *mf* *p*

p

pp

(*2nd.*)

58

as I blew bub - bles, is o - ceans a - way.

f *p* *f*

ff *p*

61

sail - boat, tug - boat, yacht,

p *mf*

ffp *cresc.*

73

gi - ant chains clank - ing an

cresc.

(*2nd.*)

76

i - ron hull, the long horn of a - dult - hood

mf

8^{ba}
(*2nd.*)

79

cal - ling you with its sweep - ing wall of mist and fog.

f

8^{ba}
(*2nd.*)

82 *ff*

When you look back and see me wave,

f 6

85

may I be the o - cean's shoul - ders

f 8ba

(Led.)

88

e - ver rol - ling be - neath you.

90

Please—

f 8ba

91

know me not as a coun - try fad - ing from

8^{ba}

94

view, but as one who

8^{ba}

97

car - ried with love the great

(Led.)

8^{ba}

100

world you now car - ry in

8ba

103

you.

ff 6

8ba

106

8ba

all we are given we cannot hold | 6.

6. Body of Work

Freely ♩ = 60

Soprano

Be - cause we want it bright - er. Be - cause we want our own bea - ty

B♭ Clarinet

pp *mf* *p*

5 *mp*

7

bared be - fore us. Be - cause we've lived long e - nough with the room's deep

Multiphonic 3 (M3)

mp *p*

p

8

rit.....

for - est print, we take to the wall. Fa - ces masked, we be -

M4

mp

p

Slower ♩ = 52

12

- gin the task of peel - ing peel - ing peel - ing

pp

16 Freely, with motion ♩ = 69

pp \leftarrow mp pp \leftarrow mp pp \leftarrow mp pp \leftarrow mp p \leftarrow mf

5 6 7

3 3 3

Led.

p \leftarrow mf

mp

(Led.)

(Led.)

[23]

(Lento.)

[23]

(Lento.)

Perusal copy only.
Any unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

24 Flowing, finding ♩ = 69

mf p lush, fluid

p

(Lento.)

26 *p*

we be - gin the task of peel - ing off the torn,

(1st time only)

(Led.)

28 *mf*

dog - eared green, op - en - ing the sto - ry of our house.

mp

(Led.)

30 *p* **31** *mf*

Years bleed up from be - neath the heat of steam:

p

(Led.)

32 *mp*

so - lids, stripes, prints and flo - rals un - fur - ling as we score and scrape—

mp

(*Red.*)

34

de - cades of

p

b₂

(*Red.*)

35 *f*

blues and deep reds

mf

mp

39 *mf*

strips and flakes at our feet.

mf

40 *mp*

It's more than a

p

41

cen - tu - ry of lay - ers of their pen - ti - men - to

mp *f*

42 *f* *mp*

stains of breath and voi - - ces

p

43 *mf* 3 3

be - - fore we reach bone, break - ing through

mf *p*

44

plas - - ter holes we patch la - ter,

(Led.)

45

be - - fore, at last, the

mp

46

last wet swaths of our cho - - sen paint - ed shade

mf

47

dry; we fin - ish in the day's fad - ing

p

55

self a patch - work of seams and glue, a

58

mash - up of lives to make one.

f

60

8^{va}

f

61

mp

Each ac - cre - tion of wound and scab a

p

(8)

(2ed.)

64

mak - ing and un - mak - ing, the flesh a roll of film, a

(Led.)

67

69

wall of swatch - es in the shift - ing fash - ions of light How I've

(Led.)

70

peeled back year in - to year, hop - ing to see the face of the

(Led.)

73 *mf* 74

child I was, the one breath - ing just be - yond this last brit - tle

(Ped.)

76 *f*

lay - er of blue, whose sha - dow blos - somed in - to this

8^{va}
cresc.....

(Ped.)

79 80

life, this room. Who blooms through his

(8)

(Ped.)

82

mil - lion lids of sleep, his chor - us of bruise and ros - es.

(8)

(Led.)

85

ff Who sings and sings: (♩ = ♩)

(8)

(Led.)

88 Slower, resting ♩ = 69

mp Be true, *p* be true.

M3 M4

p

damp string with finger to slightly emphasize 5th partial

p

(let ring into silence)

(Led.)

8ba

all we are given we cannot hold | 7.

7. Cuttings

Gently swaying ♩ = 63

Soprano

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

pp hushed

pp delicate

p

Lead.

8 *mp* pensive

On the porch at dawn my

p warm

mp warm

(Lead.)

12

chil - dren's com - min - gled curls wan - - -

17

-der to - ward my feet, tum - ble -

(Led.)

22

**grace notes placed on downbeats; slightly faster than 16ths*

-weeds in a com - ing storm's un - set - tled air.

mp floating

27

(Led.)

47

no - ses itch.

p *mf*

(Ped.)

52

55

I should get the broom to whisk a - way these tufts

p

p brittle *mp pensive*

(Ped.)

58

in - to a bag she likes to keep their hair.

3 3

(Ped.)

64 Flowing (♩ = 63)

63 *mf*

But I watch them drift in - stead, these

66 *(p)*

lit - tle nests of them we can - not bear. The

mp

cresc.

68 *f*

wind will take what we for - get to

p

8va *f shimmering*

84 *rit.*.....

(Led.)

89 Fading ♩ = 50

pp

pp

(let ring into silence)