

with a gift for burning

for mezzo-soprano, viola, and piano

JESSICA MEYER

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10'

PROGRAM NOTE:

When I first read these poems by Adrienne Rich a few years ago, I was immediately struck by the vivid imagery she creates, however there were some things I didn't quite understand yet. This sometimes happens with poetry I set, where the meaning of the text and how it relates to my own life only becomes illuminated at the time I start writing the piece. In this case, all started to make sense after I found out about Rich's history (and legacy) as a woman who was married to a man for a great stretch of her life, emerged from mid-century housewife oppression while coming out as gay, then lived the rest of her life unapologetically as a person and as an artist.

The first song is a section of a much longer poem, which I felt needed a heavy dose of drama. Her thoughts on how randomly love can happen, all while negotiating the forces that may be "ranging" within ourselves and against ourselves via societal expectations, resonated with me very much. The second poem, "Song", is a beautiful set of vignettes capturing moments that may seem lonely at the outset, until one realizes that the independence shown here might actually be desired - and deeply needed.

These songs are some of my favorite compositions to date, and I deeply thank the Brooklyn Art Song Society, Michael Brofman, and Sarah Nelson Craft for this opportunity.

Adrienne Rich, "Song" and "21 Love Poems" from Collected Poems: 1950-2012, published by W.W. Norton.

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I. *within us and against us* (text: poem 17 from "21 Love Poems")

No one's fated or doomed to love anyone.
 The accidents happen, we're not heroines,
 they happen in our lives like car crashes,
 books that change us, neighborhoods
 we move into and come to love.
Tristan und Isolde is scarcely the story,
 women at least should know the difference
 between love and death. No poison cup,
 no penance. Merely a notion that the tape-recorder
 should have caught some ghost of us: that the tape-recorder
 not merely played but should have listened to us,
 and could instruct those after us:
 this we were, this is how we tried to love,
 and these are the forces they had ranged against us,
 and these are the forces we had ranged within us,
 within us and against us, against us and within us.

II. *if* (text: "Song")

You're wondering if I'm lonely:
 OK then, yes, I'm lonely
 as a plane rides lonely and level
 on its radio beam, aiming
 across the Rockies
 for the blue-strung aisles
 of an airfield on the ocean

You want to ask, am I lonely?
 Well, of course, lonely
 as a woman driving across country
 day after day, leaving behind
 mile after mile
 little towns she might have stopped
 and lived and died in, lonely

If I'm lonely
 it must be the loneliness
 of waking first, of breathing
 dawn's first cold breath on the city
 of being the one awake
 in a house wrapped in sleep

If I'm lonely
 it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore
 in the last red light of the year
 that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
 ice nor mud nor winter light
 but wood, with a gift for burning

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with a gift for burning

Commissioned by the Brooklyn Art Song Society
with gracious support by Jerry van Koolbergen and Philip Johnson
Dedicated To Jim van Koolbergen

ADRIENNE RICH

JESSICA MEYER

I. within us and against us

♩ = 130 **Fervent**

Mezzo-soprano

Viola

Piano

glissandi always for full note value

non. vib

gliss.

vib.

slow to fast from above

mf *p* *mf* *f*

9

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

mf *f* *mf*

f *mf*

14

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

19 *Cadenza-like...take your time* *a tempo* *mp*

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

ff *gliss.* *fp* *mp*

No one's fa-ted or

25

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

doomed to love an-y one The ac ci-dents hap-pen we're not her-o-ines

gliss. *fp* *fp* *tr* *mp* *f* *mp*

32 *f mp f mp f*

M-S. they happen in our lives like car cra-shes books that change us

Vla. *fp* *fp* *mf* *fp* *mf*

Pno. *f* *p* *mf* *mf*

sul pont *ord* *gliss.* *gliss.*

$\bullet = 90$

37 *mp f*

M-S. neigh - bor - hoods we move in - to and come to

Vla. *mp* *f*

Pno. *p* *f*

suddenly slower...rit...

43 $\bullet = 130$ *mp f*

M-S. love Trist - an und Is-ol

Vla. *mp* *fp*

Pno. *p* *f*

secco

48 *mp*

M-S. — de is scarce - ly the stor-y is scarce - ly the

Vla. *mp*

Pno.

53 *ff*

M-S. stor - y

Vla. *f*

Pno. *f*

58 *p*

M-S. wo-men at least should know the dif - ference be -

Vla. *p*

Pno. *p*

63

M-S. *gliss.* *ff*
 tween lah - ove and dea - th No poi

Vla.

Pno. *ff*

68

M-S. *ff*
 son cup No pen - ance

Vla.

Pno.

73

M-S.

Vla. *non. vib.* *gliss.* *vib.* *non. vib.* *gliss.*
mf *mp* *p*

Pno. *mf* *mp*

Nostalgic

82

M-S.

harmonics until m. 110

Vla.

Pno.

85

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

88

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

91 *p*

M-S. Mere - ly a no - tion that the

Vla. *6*

Pno.

94

M-S. tape re - cord er

Vla. *6*

Pno.

97

M-S. should have caught some ghost

Vla. *6*

Pno.

109

M-S. to us and

Vla. *ord* pointy accents

Pno.

112

M-S. could in - - struct

Vla.

Pno. *p*

115

M-S. those af - - ter us *f*

Vla. *f*

Pno. *f*

Passionate

118 *mp*

M-S. *gliss.*
this we were

Vla. *gliss.*
mf

Pno. *secco*
mp

122

M-S. this is how we tried to love

Vla.

Pno.

126 *ff*

M-S. and these were the forces they had ranged against us and

Vla. *ff mp <> ff mp <> ff mp <> ff*

Pno. *ff*
ff

sva-

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 118-121) features a mezzo-soprano line with lyrics 'this we were', a viola line with a glissando and mezzo-forte dynamic, and a piano accompaniment with a 'secco' marking and mezzo-piano dynamic. The second system (measures 122-125) continues the mezzo-soprano line with lyrics 'this is how we tried to love', with the viola and piano accompaniment providing harmonic support. The third system (measures 126-129) features a mezzo-soprano line with lyrics 'and these were the forces they had ranged against us and', a viola line with dynamic markings of fortissimo and mezzo-piano alternating with accents, and a piano accompaniment with fortissimo dynamics and a 'sva-' marking.

131

M-S. *these were the for - ces*

Vla. dampen *mf* *gliss.*

Pno. *mf*

138

M-S. *mp* *and these are the for-ces we had ranged*

Vla. bring out note changes *p*

Pno. *pp*

147

M-S. *with - in us with*

Vla.

Pno.

154

M-S.

in us and a - gainst us a - gainst us and with -

Vla.

Pno.

p

160

M-S.

in us

Vla.

Pno.

stop suddenly

II. *if*

♩ = 42 Quietly assured

167

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

p

173

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

mp

you're won-dering if I'm lone-ly O K then yes__ I'm lone-ly

177

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

mp

as a plane rides lone-ly and le-vel on its ra-d - io beam aim__ ing a-cross the Rock-ies

The musical score is arranged in three systems. Each system contains staves for M-S. (Melody), Vla. (Violin), and Pno. (Piano). The first system (measures 167-172) features a piano (*p*) accompaniment with a melody in the M-S. staff. The second system (measures 173-176) includes vocal lyrics and a mezzo-piano (*mp*) accompaniment. The third system (measures 177-182) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, also marked *mp*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

180

M-S. *gliss.*

for the blue strung aisles of an air field on the oc - ean

Vla.

Pno.

183

M-S.

You want to ask am I lone-ly Well of course lone - ly

Vla. *pizz* *mp*

arrow: notes in a falling forward motion

Pno.

185

M-S. *mf*

as a wo-man dri-ving a-cross coun-try day af ter day lea-ving be-hind mile af-ter mile

Vla. *arco* *gliss.* *ppp* *mf*

Pno. *mp*

188 *p*

M-S. *lit-tle towns she might have stop-ped and lived and died in lo ne-ly*

Vla.

Pno. *p*

191 ♩ = 50 **Insistent**

M-S.

Vla. *mf* *gliss.*

Pno. *mf*

194

M-S.

Vla. *p*

Pno. *pp*

accel......

206 *mf*

M-S. a - wake in a house wrapped in sleep

Vla. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

209 ♩ = 65 **Ranging** *ff*

M-S. If I'm lone ly

Vla. *ff*

Pno. *f*

212 *accel*.....

M-S. If I'm lone - ly

Vla.

Pno.

accel

215

M-S. *p*

Vla. *ppp*

Pno.

If I If...

219 ♩ = 55 **At Peace**

M-S.

Vla.

Pno. *p*

I'm lone ly it's with a row boat ice fast on the shore

223

M-S.

Vla.

Pno.

in the last red light of the year that

227 *mp*

M-S. *>* *3* *gliss.*
knows what it is that knows it's neith - er

Vla.

Pno. *mp*

231 *p*

M-S. *3* *3*
ice nor mud nor win - ter night

Vla.

Pno. *pp*

233

M-S. *3*
but wood with a gift for bur - - ning

Vla.

Pno.