

LONGY

School of Music of Bard College

The Multiplicity of Eve

Lea Peterson, mezzo-soprano

Scott Koljonen, piano

Featuring: Rachel Edwards,
Kendra Comstock, & Angie Tyler

April 10, 2021 at 8:00 PM

Longy School of Music

Pickman Hall

Program

Please hold applause until after each set.

The Siren

O Sailor

from *Here be Sirens* (2014)

Die Lorelei (1843)

Kate Soper (b. 1981)

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

The Witch

Lullaby for the Witching Hour (2004)

Ah, Ruggiero crudel...Ombre pallide
from the opera *Alcina* (1735)

Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)

George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

The Trouble Maker

fire

from *Savior* (2017)

unshakeable

from a song cycle in progress (2021-)

Amy Beth Kirsten (b. 1972)

Joi Harper (b. 1998)

The Woman Gone Wrong

Parfois, je suis triste

from *Clairières dans le ciel* (1914)

Eve Song (1999)

i. My Name

iv. Listen

v. Snake

vi. Woe to Man

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

Jake Heggie (b. 1961)

Translations & Texts

O Sailor

O Sailor, come: your anchor's line is spun.
O Sailor, hear: my beacon calls you near.
O Sailor mine, leave pitch and yaw behind.
O sailor's soul, this lee shore's your last goal.
O white meridian, bring fire to blind these men.
O tide and wind and wave, Be calm thee as their grave.

(Sirenes sunt monstra maris resonantia magnis vocibus et modo naufragium modo dant mortale periculum...quae faciunt sonitum nimia dulcitudine vocum.)

[Greek transliteration]: (*Oogar potees tiedeh parahlasay meli gahrun apo stomaton*)

O Nereids (*Nesso, Psamathe, Dexamine, Melita...*), come now:
Lash keel and mast and prow! O Aechelous, god:
Receive this sailor's blood!

*English text by Kate Soper; Latin text by
Theobaldus of Cambridge; Greek text by Homer*

[Sirens are sea-monsters resounding with great voices who by bringing sailors to wreck bring mortal danger...who make sounds with the astonishing sweetness of their voices.]

[For never did anyone row past in his black ship until he heard our melodious voices]

Translation by Kate Soper

Die Lorelei

Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten,
das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.
Die Luft ist kühl, und es dunkelt,
und ruhig fließt der Rhein;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt
im Abendsonnenschein.
Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet
dort oben wunderbar,
Ihr goldenes Geschmeide blitzet.
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar.
Sie kämmt es mit goldenem Kamme
und singt ein Lied dabei;
Das hat eine wundersame, gewaltige Melodei.
Den Schiffer, im kleinen Schiffe
ergreift es mit wildem Weh;
Er schaut nicht die Felsenriffe;
Er schaut nur hinauf in die Höh.
Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen
am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei getan.

Poem by Heinrich Heine

The Lorelei

I know not what it means
that I feel so sad;
A legend of ancient times
that I cannot keep out of my mind.
The air is cool, and it is getting dark.
The calm Rhine courses its way.
The peak of the mountain dazzles
in the evening's sunlight.
The most beautiful young girl sits
up there, wonderful.
Her golden jewels are shining,
She's combing her golden hair.
She combs with a golden comb,
and sings a song
that has a wonderful, powerful melody.
The boatman, in his little boat,
is seized with a wild pain.
He does not look upon the rocky ledge;
He looks up to the sky.
I think that the waves will devour
the boatman and his boat in the end.
And that, with her singing,
the Lorelei has done.

Translation by Lea Peterson

Lullaby for the Witching Hour

Lulla, Lulla, Lulla. It's the hour, witching hour.
We come to glide on the night.
It's the time: dream feast time.
We wait until the light is a lie.
We are your dreams, your night paintings.
Lullalaby, lullalaby, lullalaby, lullalaby.

Text by Kerry Andrew

Ah, Ruggiero crudel... Ombre pallide

Ah! Ruggiero crudel, tu non mi amasti!
Ah! che fingesti ancor, e me ingannasti!
E pur ti adora ancor fido mio core.
Ah! Ruggiero crudel, sei traditore!
Del pallido Acheronte spiriti abitatori,
e della notte ministri di vendetta.
Cieche figlie crudeli, a me venite!
Secondate i miei voti, perchè Ruggiero amato
non fugga da me ingrato.

Ma, ohimè! Misera! E quale insolita tardanza?
Eh! Non m'udite?
Vi cerco, e vi ascondete?
Vi comando, e tacete?
Evi inganno? Evi frode?
La mia verga fatal non ha possanza?
Vinta, delusa Alcina, e che ti avanza?

Ombre pallide, lo sò, mi udite;
D'intorno errate, e vi celate
sorde da me; perchè?

Fugge il mio bene; voi lo fermate, deh! per pietate, deh!
Se in questa verga, ch'ora disprezzo,
e voglio frangere forza non è.

fire

J'ai voulu ce matin te rapporter des roses
Mais j'en avais tant pris dans mes ceintures closes
Que les noeuds trop serrés n'ont pu les contenir.

Les noeuds ont éclaté. Les roses envolées
Dans le vent, à la mer s'en sont toutes allées.
Elles ont suivi l'eau pour ne plus revenir ;

La vague en a paru rouge et comme enflammée.
Ce soir, ma robe encore en est tout embaumée...
Respires-en sur moi l'odorant souvenir.

Poem by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore

Ah, Cruel Ruggiero. . .Pale Shadows

Ah, cruel Ruggiero! You have never loved me!
You feigned love and deceived me!
And yet my faithful heart still adores you.
Ah, cruel Ruggiero, you are a traitor!
Come, you spirits of the shores of Acheron, and you
nighttime ministers of vengeance.
Cruel, blind, daughters, come to me!
Second my vow, so that my beloved Ruggiero
will not fly from me and forswear me.

But alas! I am wretched! What is this unusual delay?
Ah, do you not hear me?
I seek you, and you hide yourselves?
I command you, and you are silent?
Have I been deceived? Have I been tricked?
Has my fateful wand lost its power?
Defeated, deluded Alcina, what is left for you?

Pale shadows, I know you hear me;
You hover around me and conceal yourselves,
deaf to my words; why?

My lover flees from me; stop him for pity's sake!
If this wand, which now I despise
and would break, has lost its power.

Translation by Harriet Mason

I wanted to bring you roses this morning,
but, having taken so many, I closed my belt,
and the knots were too tight to contain them.

The knots burst. The roses flew.
In the wind, they all flew to the sea.
They followed the water, never to return.

The waves turned red, as though they were on fire.
Tonight, my dress is still drenched in their scent...
Come and inhale their fragrant memory.

Translation by Lea Peterson

unshakeable

The body, brain, and soul of a woman who has managed to scratch up through the slime and concrete ... of life in order to resurrect herself.

Text by Lidia Yuknavitch

Parfois, je suis triste

Parfois, je suis triste. Et soudain, je pense à elle.
Alors, je suis joyeux. Mais je redeviens triste
de ce que je ne sais pas combien elle m'aime.
Elle est la jeune fille à l'âme toute claire,
et qui, dedans son cœur, garde avec jalousie
l'unique passion que l'on donne à un seul.
Elle est partie avant que s'ouvrent les tilleuls,
et, comme ils ont fleuri depuis qu'elle est partie,
je me suis étonné de voir, ô mes amis,
des branches de tilleuls qui n'avaient pas de fleurs.

Poem by Francis Jammes

Sometimes, I feel sad

Sometimes I feel sad. Then suddenly, I think of her
and I feel joy. But, I return to sadness
because I don't know how much she loves me.
She is the young girl with the clear soul,
who, in her heart, guards with fierce jealousy
the singular passion that she will give to one soul.
She left before the lindens opened,
and, as they flowered since she left,
I was amazed to see, my friends,
the linden branches with no flowers.

Translation by Lea Peterson

Eve Song

i. My Name

Eve, must be the sound I made as I was being made.
Eve. Out I came, made up by a couple of men.
Old man made me out of Adam's rib... Oh, did he?
God made Adam God made Adam God Adam ...
God Damn it!
My children are going to know who their mother is.
Eve. Mad bad Eve the amnesiac,
Eve, Eve the nymphomaniac . . . me!
Was young man Adam completely unconscious
as I was manufactured?
Did he groan and whimper "Eve" as I slipped out?
Did God mutter "Eve" as he slapped me into shape?
Did I scream "Eve" at the inevitable rape?
Or was "Eve" the last breath shaped into a sound
by my mother's mouth as I came out?
I was too little to save her
or remember anything about her... Eve.
What are they trying to tell me with their stories?
I am allowed no clothing. I am allowed no shame.
I have nothing to wear but my beautiful hair,
my body, my face, and my name. Eve.

iv. Listen

Its entire body ripples back and forth, like a sentence ...
fascinating.

"Do you want to be like God?"

How do you mean? Be old and have a penis?

I don't think so.
"Do you want to be like God? You know what I mean."
Yes. I do.
My entire body ripples up and down like a story.
I am listening.

v. Snake

Snake, is it true about the fruit?
My intuition tells me what you say about this fruit is true.
I'd like to find out, snake. I'd love to know.
Go ahead in front of me where I can see you.
I will follow you. Oh!
The snake is in the tree, where I cannot see him.
He is now the color of shadows.
Very few things are as visible as I am when I'm clean.
When a thing is visible, it always means that the thing,
the tree frog, or that fruit, means to be seen.
Visibility's a warning or an invitation,
and it never tells you which.
What's visible will either feed you, mate with you, or kill you.
Either way you gain experience.
Here goes.
Sweet. Sour. Salty. Bitter.
And the taste of air, of rotteness,
earth, and water.
Now I know

vi. Woe to Man

Woe to man, woe to man.
What can a man expect?
Think of all the riches, gifts, woman brings in her train.
Oh, besides her obvious differences:
inside out below the waist,
bigger breasts, smaller brain,
Can you think of any? Anything? Anything?
She is nothing but trouble.
Oh nothing but trouble. Nothing. Nothing.
She is no thing. Ah!
You haven't lived until a man has said that to you.
Woman because she was born of man.
Woe to man because he is born of woman.
La da dee da dum. La da dee da da dum. Ah.

Text by Phillip Littell

Program Notes

Who is the siren? Who is the queen? Who is the femme fatale?
Who is Medusa? Lolita? Mata Hari? Eve? Joan of Arc? Cleopatra?

These names are associated with such a myriad of ideas, ideologies, and idolizations that they each represent something both complex and tantalizingly simple. An allegory. A cautionary tale. A revisionist history. An object. These women are referenced and alluded to so often in the cultural consciousness that they spread thin, so thin as if to become two-dimensional. Over time, as the legion of voices around them grows, so do they grow, eventually becoming so large and expansive that they cease to be people and become, instead, things. They are taken up by writers, composers, painters, and orators as fodder for artistic exploration and imaginary exercise. Our opinion of them comes to be formed and shaped by layers and layers of retellings, reclamations, and reimaginings. And while some of these women are indeed fictional, they all have a set of given circumstances that serves as the facts surrounding their identity. Whether those circumstances were given by history or by artistic authorship, they form the foundation of our understanding of these women. Therefore we can, and we must, dissect these facts and honestly look at them. We must hold the facts up to the opinion and ask ourselves: Who has been interpreting these women, telling us what to see, and forming our understanding of them? Through what lens were they looking, and is it the same one through which we wish to look? Was Eve a troublesome temptress who caused the fall of society or a naturally curious human woman trapped in a garden she didn't ask for? Is the damsel in distress a helpless victim lucky and thrilled to be saved or is she an allegory for a world that strips women of their agency? Was Lolita a young but willing participant who lived a life informed by her childhood or an emblem of the faults of a society that infantilizes and sexualizes women and young girls?

The legend of the siren goes back as far as Greek mythology, where the *celestial*, *generative*, and *purificatory* sirens were governed by Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades respectively. The origin of the word itself is debated: some saying it has pre-Greek origin and others attributing it to *seirá* (Greek for "rope") and *eíō* (Greek for "fasten") making the siren the "binder" or "entangler." This point of view is bolstered by the famous scene in which Odysseus ties himself to the boat deck in order to survive the siren song. Just as the etymology is debated, the prophetic and oft-depicted sirens have a largely debated physical presentation as well. Throughout history and fiction they are depicted as birdlike, fish, mermaid, beautiful, terrifying, human, and everything in between. Whatever their true nature, one thing is certain: they sing songs and kill men. Whether the songs are sweet, charming, piercing, or painful, no one has ever lived to tell. Whether the sirens fulfil this pastime with a sadistic joy, a cold sense of responsibility, or merely out of an unaware instinct, we do not know.

Kate Soper, a 30-year-old Pulitzer Prize finalist composer and celebrated vocalist who is known for her attention to and careful use of the human voice, composes a 100-minute piece of music and theatre, *Here be Sirens*, in which she fantasizes about what the title sirens do on their island when they are not luring seamen to their death. This opens the door to an oft-ignored question: what does the temptress do when she is not tempting?

As opposed to Soper, Clara Schumann takes us right into the moment itself in her setting of Heinrich Heine's famous poem *Die Lorelei*. The audience sees a beautiful woman up high on a hill combing her golden hair amidst her sparkling jewels. As she sings a beautiful and powerful melody, a boatman, hearing the song in the waters below, is brought to a violent shipwreck on the jagged rocks. Somehow, as the legend goes, the woman who passes her alone time singing on a hill is more responsible for the wreck of a ship than the very man hired and charged to be its captain.

The witch is possibly the female figure most entrenched in debate, rife with patriarchy, and inseparable from Western ideology and history. Consistently a term used to malign healers, poly-theistic worshippers, midwives, indigenous peoples, and women who threatened the status quo, "witch" has so much more than a magical connotation. Witch hunts and condemning of sorcery date back to ancient times, written into the laws of the early Jewish peoples, Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, and many ancient Eastern societies. While the persecution of those allegedly practicing magic is not exclusive to women, as early as 331 BC, 170 women were executed as witches due to their supposed involvement in an epidemic illness that was ravaging the community. The practice continued in Europe and was rampant in the medieval and early modern periods, with a total of 80,000 witch trials and 35,000 executions in Europe between the years of 1450 and 1750. It is worth noting that 80% of those burned at the stake during this time period were women. The practice has

phased out in the Western world and is considered historically ended as of the mid-1800s, but it still exists in parts of modern-day Africa and Asia, and witchcraft still remains an offense punishable by death in Saudi Arabia.

While it is important to understand the historical context of the term, “witch” is not always taken as a death sentence, especially in opera and theatre. Handel’s setting of the famous legend of Alcina the sorceress sets the stage for a dramatic love story filled with magic, mistaken identities, mystery, and power. The presence of magic and Alcina’s identity as a sorceress are the devices by which this story gains its stakes; as in many pieces of drama, the fantastical world allows us as the audience to see the human components of the story through a heightened lens.

Kerry Andrew, in her *Lullaby for the Witching Hour*, takes an extremely different tack. The “witch” is indeed the proverbial female rabble rouser, and the witching hour is her moment. Andrew, a renowned and very celebrated living British composer—as well as novelist and short story author—first wrote the piece *Lullaby for the Witching Hour* for the York Spring Festival. The vocal ensemble Juice, of which she is a member, premiered the piece with their trademark vocal expertise and new age, experimental sound.

Amy Beth Kirsten composes *fire* from the larger work *Savior* using Marceline Desbordes-Valmore’s famous poem as an imagined catalyst for the speech and thoughts of Joan of Arc as she is put to death. Kirsten is an initially self-taught composer who is known for her “compositional theatre” works, which are led and formed by larger compositional concepts. Her piece *fire*, composed for 3 treble voices, uses the setting of a fairly simple French text to create a complex and nuanced scene that explores what it might have felt like in the exact moment of Joan of Arc’s public execution.

Joi Harper is a young composer and fellow graduate student at Longy, who, through a collaboration, has composed “unshakeable” as part of a larger cycle written specifically for my voice. “Unshakeable” explores the first of three (or more) texts which will be expanded and set to music by Harper. This text is a quote from Yuknavitch’s novel *The Chronology of Water*, the powerful memoir of a trouble-making woman who is written off by her father, her husband, and ultimately herself, until she learns to wield her words with such power that they pull her up to her feet and resurrect her.

The “woman gone wrong” has famously been any woman who does not conform, either by rejecting the traditional female role or posing a threat to the existing power structure. It is easy to see how gay women have been labeled this way by those who see their life as a threat to the carefully balanced Jenga tower of the heteropatriarchy. Lili Boulanger, established as one of the world’s most brilliant composers in her short 24-year life, has explored the gay woman in her song cycle *Clairières dans le ciel*. In 9 pieces, each showing a different scene, the audience comes to know a young girl experiencing her first love. The subtext of the cycle is furthered by imagery of flowers, evoking fertility and virginity, and the idea that maybe in this case loss of love has nothing to do with love at all but a striving towards “normalcy.”

Possibly the most famous “woman gone wrong” is the first woman to exist. Eve has been branded as the fall of man, the temptress, the source of all life, the original mother, and many other names. Her eating of the forbidden fruit and Adam’s subsequent eating of the fruit have been portrayed and looked at through many different lenses, a large majority of them severely sexist. In fact, in Heggie’s song cycle *Eve Song* the text explores not only the moment in which Eve eats the fruit, but her whole time in the Garden of Eden, shining a light on the possible sexist and upsetting circumstances surrounding everything from her creation to her nightly existence to her pregnancy. While different religions and individuals within each of those religions may interpret this first book of the Hebrew Bible differently, the large fact is that Eve was formed for a man by a man. And in Heggie’s cycle, this particular Eve is not happy about that.

*While some modern interpretations within the Judeo-Christian tradition may portray God as a woman or a genderless individual, the preponderance of pronouns and descriptors for God in the Bible itself are masculine.

desirability



POWER

Special Thanks To:

Pamela Dellal for exquisite and never-failing guidance, artistic and otherwise.

Scott Koljonen for his invaluable musical collaboration.

Rachel Edwards, Kendra Comstock, and Angie Tyler who took time to dedicate themselves to difficult music for the sake of my vision.

Billy Jewel, Jessica Bloch, and the administrative staff for their flexibility, accommodation, and technical expertise.

Longy School of Music for the beautiful space and the ability to make live music.

My Lim for talking with me about female archetypes, text setting, program order, dress selection, and so many other things for the past year.

My Mom for her unending support and artistic inspiration.