

CORNELIUS, POLLY BUTLER, D.M.A. A Guide to Performance Practice: *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Libby Larsen. (2011)
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The purpose of this study is to present a performance guide to the interpretation of Libby Larsen's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1991). Singers and pianists can find ways that are sensitive to and expressive of the poetry when performing these songs. Thorough study and preparation of the poetry and music, as well as understanding the compositional style of the composer, contribute to a scholarly and artistic performance of these art songs. The result is a performance that can create a strong emotional impact through expression of the true meaning of the text.

When preparing for a performance of this song cycle, three distinguishing fundamental elements that must be considered are the original singer, text, and language. Arleen Augér (1939-1993), world-renowned soprano, commissioned Larsen to compose *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Larsen set to music the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in collaboration with Augér and conductor, Joel Revzen to compose this song cycle. Initially, Larsen composed eight songs in this cycle. The remaining two songs have been used in other formats. "Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers" is now part of a song cycle for mezzo soprano, and "Because thou hast the powers" is part of Larsen's *String Symphony* movement, "Elegance." Originally orchestrated, the piano reduction is performed most frequently and it is the piano-vocal version that is the focus of this document.

This study provides an examination of the poetry and music. It also explores the composer's methods and compositional process with a focus on the inception of the cycle and its musical expression of the text. Written from the perspective of a performer under the guidance of the composer, this comprehensive study will serve as a resource for singers and accompanists planning future performances of this cycle. It is the task of the singer and pianist to coordinate and bring to fruition Larsen's musical and interpretive demands.

Several methods were used in writing this study: personal interviews with the composer, close readings of the sonnets, and performing the cycle. Information was drawn from published materials, secondary sources relating to the topic, the poetry, the score, a recording, and personal insight as a performer. The study is organized into an Introduction and four chapters including Understanding the Poet, The Composer, Larsen's Compositional Approach and Performance Analysis, and an Insight to *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

A GUIDE TO PERFORMANCE PRACTICE:

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

BY LIBBY LARSEN

by

Polly Butler Cornelius

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Committee Co-Chair

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To my family: Perry, Noelle and Nan Cornelius, and Leonard and Ann Butler. Thank you for your encouragement, support and love which enabled me to achieve my goal of obtaining a Doctor of Musical Arts degree.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) is one of the most prolific American composers of our time. She has created a catalogue of over 400 works spanning genres including intimate vocal and chamber music, massive orchestral works, and operas. During the years 1989 through 1991, Larsen composed a song cycle for soprano and chamber orchestra entitled *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Originally, Larsen composed eight songs in this work and two songs have been used in other formats. “Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Flowers” is now part of a song cycle for mezzo soprano, and “Because thou hast the powers” is part of Larsen’s *String Symphony* movement, “Elegance.” This document focuses on the six songs that remain as this cycle.

The purpose of this study is to present a performance guide to the interpretation of Larsen’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. A specific goal of this project is to bring awareness of these songs to sopranos searching for American art songs to program on recitals. Singers and pianists can find ways that are sensitive to and expressive of the poetry when performing these songs. Thorough study and preparation of the poetry, as well as understanding the compositional style of the composer, contribute to a scholarly and artistic performance of these art songs. The result is a performance that can create a strong emotional impact through expression of the true meaning of the text.

When preparing for a performance of this song cycle, three distinguishing fundamental elements that must be considered are the original singer, text, and language. Arleen Augér (1939-1993), world-renowned soprano, commissioned Larsen to compose *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Larsen set to music the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1871) in collaboration with Augér and conductor, Joel Revzen, to compose this song cycle. Larsen stated “although she had no precompositional or academic process, Arleen Augér had a definitive point of view and wanted to create a song cycle that explored mature love at the musical level of Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und leben*.” Augér and Larsen carefully worked together with the chosen text to create an abstract narrative of the psychological journey of love’s uncertainty.¹

Arleen Augér sang the premiere in 1989 at the Aspen Music Festival and performed it again in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1991. Joel Revzen conducted both performances, including the Minnesota Orchestra Ensemble that played on the recording.² Larsen won a Grammy Award in 1994 for producing the recording, *The Art of Arlene Augér*, an acclaimed recording that features *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Shortly after its release, Augér died of a brain tumor. Ironically, Arleen Augér’s life closely paralleled the love sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as both women found true love after the age of 40.

This cycle was Larsen’s first chamber music composition. Originally orchestrated, the piano reduction is performed most frequently and it is the piano-vocal

¹ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by Polly Butler Cornelius 25 May, 2010. Norfolk, VA.

² Libby Larsen, email to author, 11 September 2010.

version that is the focus of this document. Although many piano-vocal reductions fall short of representing original musical nuances within the orchestration, Larsen crafted this piano arrangement keeping in mind that “the best collaborative pianists would bring out the nuances of the orchestral score and keep its luminescence.”³ Larsen reflected the sentiment of each sonnet through poetic ideas and shared thematic musical material. Each song has inter-dependent vocal and accompaniment lines with specific musical factors that contribute to the portrayal of text.

A few other analytical sources briefly examined this work. These include “The relationship between text and music in the works of Libby Larsen” by Jeanenne Gray Barton Bezerra, (M.M. Thesis, Baylor University, 1999), and “A Poet Revealed: Elizabeth Barret Browning as Portrayed in Libby Larsen’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and Dominick Argento’s *Casa Guidi*” by Martha LuRowe, (DMA dissertation, The University of Arizona, 1996). This document, however, focuses on the inception of the cycle and its musical expression of the text, while providing an examination of the poetry and music. Written from the perspective of a performer under the guidance of the composer, this comprehensive study will serve as a resource for singers and accompanists planning future performances of this cycle. It is the task of the singer and pianist to coordinate and bring to fruition Larsen’s musical and interpretive demands.

To demonstrate the intentions of the composer, several methods were employed. These included personal interviews with the composer, close readings of the sonnets, and performing the cycle. Information was drawn from published materials, secondary

³ Libby Larsen, composer, email to author, 22 September, 2010.

sources relating to the topic, the poetry, the score, a recording, and personal insight as a performer. The study is organized into an Introduction and four chapters including Understanding the Poet, The Composer, Larsen's Compositional Approach and Performance Analysis, and An Insight to *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

After two years of researching Larsen's music, particularly this song cycle, a desire ensued to comprehend how much time, thought, and deliberation went into her compositional process. It was an invaluable experience interviewing Larsen at the Duffy Composers Institute in Norfolk, Virginia on May 26, 2010, two days after she received the prestigious Peabody Award. The Institute is an annual event supported by the Virginia Arts Festival, and Larsen was one of the composers-in-residence.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING THE POET

When studying any song cycle, one must analyze and understand the text.

Interpreting the poetry in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is essential in order to enhance the essence of a performance of this cycle. Comprehending Elizabeth Barrett Browning's state of mind and understanding Victorian courtship were important to Larsen before she began to compose this cycle. Several scholars, including Lorraine L. Bartkowski Gray and Jennifer Kingma Wall, wrote about Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), and her contribution to Victorian literature. This chapter discusses the sonnet as a poetic device, gives brief biographical information on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and describes her courtship with Robert Browning, her inspiration for writing *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

The etymology of the term sonnet was derived from the word "song." A sonnet is comprised of fourteen lines of poetry, with ten syllables each. Typically, a sonnet contains five-foot iambs, metrical units with stressed and unstressed syllables that rhyme according to a prescribed theme. A sonnet sequence is defined as "lyric poetry, collected in special form because of its biographical or narrative guise."⁴ Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* consists of forty-four poems in amatory

⁴ Lorraine L. Bartkowski Gray, "The Texts of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*: A Structural Reading." Ph.D Dissertation, The University of Detroit Mercy, 1978, 15-16.

sequence. Because amatory means of, relating to, or expressing sexual love, this amatory sequence is specifically an extended series of poems united by its single theme.⁵

Therefore, the primary theme in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sequence is love. These sonnets were identified as *Petrarchan* sonnets, rather than Shakesperean sonnets. The Petrarchan sonnet was developed in thirteenth-century Italy. Named for the famous poet Petrarch, it represented the highest expression of a theme.⁶ It consists of fourteen lines divided into an octave (first eight lines) which states a problem, asks a question, or expresses emotional tension. The sestet (final six lines) presents a change or resolution to the problem or question.

Gray wrote that *Sonnets from the Portuguese* were the "revitalization of amatory sequence which had been neglected for two centuries."⁷ She considered Barrett Browning a major author who wrote in literary tradition. Her revitalization of this writing style was her major contribution to literary history, and she attempted to depart from the formal aspect of sonnet sequences. "These poems were the first major amatory sequence written in English since the Renaissance," the first time a woman wrote a sonnet in first person.⁸ The forty-four *Sonnets from the Portuguese* record a wide range of personal emotions.

Elizabeth Barrett was the oldest of twelve children. In 1821, she became an invalid and was prescribed opium which she took on a daily basis. Some scholars have

⁵ Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature. [http://www.uncg.edu/libraries/Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature](http://www.uncg.edu/libraries/Merriam-Webster/Encyclopedia%20of%20Literature), accessed 7 July 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lorraine L. Bartkowsi Gray, "The Texts of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*: A Structural Reading." Ph.D Dissertation, The University of Detroit Mercy, 1978, 16.

speculated that her most creative moments occurred while she was under the influence of this drug. She was frequently ill, and remained secluded for years.

Barrett was already a well-known and respected writer when she met and fell in love with Robert Browning. He admired her *Poems* (1844), and was aware that his poetry inspired her. Their mutual friend, John Kenyon, arranged for the two writers to finally meet in 1844 after years of correspondence. Viewed as a thirty-eight year old spinster at this time, this did not seem to bother Robert. Elizabeth's father disapproved of her relationship with him. Therefore, a secret courtship began and Elizabeth wrote her sonnet sequence named from Robert Browning's pet name for her, "the Portuguese". The relationship began immediately after their first meeting and these sonnets chronicle her emotions and thoughts during their courtship.⁹ The two secretly married on September 12, 1846, against her father's wishes, which caused Elizabeth to be forever estranged from her father after the marriage. Robert and Elizabeth lived in Paris, Pisa and finally Florence where, in 1849, she gave birth to their only son, Robert Wiedermann Barrett Browning, nicknamed "Pen."

In 1861, an article from the *Edinburgh Review* on Barrett Browning stated:

One of the most peculiar characteristics of modern literary taste is the interest that readers find, not so much in the positive beauty and attractiveness of the works of a poet, as in the study of the character from which they spring. This feeling is excited not only by that love of psychological and individual analysis

⁹ Jennifer Kingma Wall, "Love and Marriage: How Biographical Interpretation affected the Reception of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850)," *The Victorian Web Literature, History & Culture in the Age of Victoria* (accessed 14 May 2008).

which is a growth of modern times, but also by the spectacle of an enthusiastic nature remaining courageously and unweariedly true to its own aspiration.¹⁰

Originally, the poems were described as powerful and lyrical, adhering to Italian poetic form used by Wordsworth, Milton and Shakespeare. “Her *sonnets* are an outpouring of passions and emotions. They were the most exquisite poems written by a woman, on the ground that the highest mission of a female poet is the expression of love and the ultimate form of that expression.”¹¹ Clarence Stedman declared that her writing was best developed in her sonnets because love was the greatest role for Victorian women. Written in the Petrarchan tradition, characteristics of sincerity, moral seriousness, and expression of poetry’s personal thoughts and expressions were prevalent.¹² Some criticized the sonnets as being too personal and inappropriate for a Victorian woman. Representing courtly love from the female perspective, love, longing, sexual tension and many aspects of mature love are themes that weave throughout the sonnet sequence.

Within *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning described a series of emotions she experienced through her entire relationship with Robert Browning. She tried to resist his love, slowly responded, surrendered (XVI), read his love letters (XXII, XXVIII), experienced separation (XXIX,XXX), was addressed by her endearing

¹⁰ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, quoted by Jennifer Kingma wall, “Love and Marriage: How Biographical Interpretation affected the Reception of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850),” *The Victorian Web Literature, History & Culture in the Age of Victoria* (accessed 14 May 2008).

¹¹ Edmund Clarence Stedman, *Victorian Poets*, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1895), 11.

¹² Melvin Goldstein, “Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in the Light of the Petrarchan tradition” (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1958), 15.

pet name (XXXIII), accepted his offer (XXXV), recalled his kisses (XXXVIII), apologized for her earlier distrust (XXXVII); pledged love even after death (XLII, XLIII) and finally gave him the gift of poems (XLIV).¹³ In 1849, after the birth of Pen, Elizabeth showed her love sonnets to Robert and he insisted that they be published as part of her works. Elizabeth died in 1861 in Florence, and Pen finally published Elizabeth's letters and poems in 1899.

¹³ Melvin Goldstein, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in the Light of the Petrarchan tradition" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1958), 15.

CHAPTER III

THE COMPOSER

Libby Larsen

Born in Wilmington, Delaware in 1950, Libby Larsen is a prolific and often-performed American composer whose music has been praised for its “dynamic, deeply inspired and vigorous contemporary American spirit.”¹⁴ Her works span genres including intimate vocal and chamber music, massive orchestral works, and operas. A past recipient of the 2010 Peabody Award and 2003-2004 *Harissios Papamarkou* Chair in Education at the Library of Congress, holder of the Eugene McDermott Award in the Arts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Larsen is a vigorous and vocal champion of music and musicians of our time.¹⁵ In 1973 she and Stephen Paulus co-founded the Minnesota Composers Forum, now the American Composers Forum, which has been an invaluable advocate for composers. She is consistently sought-after as a clinician and composer, and her music and ideas have refreshed the concert music tradition and the composer’s role in it.¹⁶

Larsen has held residencies with many universities and orchestras including the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, Minnesota Orchestra, Charlotte

¹⁴ Libby Larsen’s website, <http://www.libbylarsen.com/biography>, (accessed 21 July 2010).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Symphony, and the California Institute for the Arts. She holds M.M. and Ph.D degrees from the University of Minnesota where she studied composition with Erik Stokes, Paul Fetter, and Dominick Argento. She credits Argento as the mentor who gave her confidence in orchestration, “the longevity of lyricism, and knowledge that lyricism is a concept, not an art. He insisted that words must be set and sung as naturally as possible for the emotion of the piece and scansion of the text.”¹⁷ Larsen’s art songs embody this concept and her music is always informed by the text. Her intricate treatment of poetry and text setting is highlighted through musical depiction of words. From an interpretive standpoint, the music lends itself to the inflection and scansion of Browning’s poetry in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

USA Today hailed Larsen as “the only English speaking composer since Benjamin Britten who matches great verse with fine music so intelligently and expressively.”¹⁸ A self-proclaimed feminist, Larsen has previously set texts by many women including Calamity Jane, Eleanor Roosevelt, Brenda Ueland, and Willa Cather. She is always striving to find humanity in women who experienced emotions in words.¹⁹

Libby Larsen wrote in her biography,

Music exists in an infinity of sound. I think of all music as existing in the substance of the air itself. It is the composer’s task to order and make sense of

¹⁷Libby Larsen quoted by Douglas Boyer, “Musical Style and Gesture in the Choral Music of Libby Larsen.” *The Choral Journal* 34, October 1993, 18-19.

¹⁸Libby Larsen’s official website, <http://www.libbylarsen.com/biography>, quoting *USA Today*, (accessed 21 July 2010).

¹⁹ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

sound, in time and space, to communicate something about being alive through music.²⁰

Larsen has an eclectic writing style that incorporates different modes and chromaticism to create colorful sounds. She loves “sound,” and thinks visually during her compositional process identifying colors, then rhythm.²¹ Mary Ann Feldman, biographical author in *oxfordmusiconline*, described Larsen’s musical style as energetic, optimistic with rhythmic diversity, possessing colorful orchestration with liberated tonality without harsh dissonances, and having pervading lyricism.²² Larsen considers herself to be a “painter of sound” and creates a musical portrait of each poem she sets.²³

When composing vocal music for a specific singer, Larsen desires to know how the individual voice works. She listens carefully to recordings of the singer, then sits at her piano and plays along with the recording in order to find the singer’s comfortable range. After discovering where the “soul of the voice lies”, she composes vocal lines accordingly.²⁴ All of the aforementioned stylistic traits and many others are demonstrated throughout *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

²⁰Libby Larsen’s official website, www.libbylarsen.com/biography (accessed 21 July 2010).

²¹Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

²²Mary Ann Feldmann, “Larsen (Reece), Libby (Elizabeth) Brown,” www.oxfordmusiconline.com, (accessed 7 July 2010).

²³Libby Larsen, composer. interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

LARSEN'S COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF *SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE*

In this chapter, a performance analysis of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is presented. A brief overview of the poetic meaning, and primary rhythmic and melodic motives of each song are highlighted. This information is intended to give the singer, pianist, and audience a deeper understanding of the foundation of this song cycle. The songs in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* provide a singer the opportunity to learn challenging repertoire, and to develop skills in legato singing and dramatic interpretation.

After the intentional selection of texts, Larsen began to compose this cycle, always thinking about the interrelationship between text and music. Incorporating the sonnet form, she strove to “free up the discovering rhymes of vowels and consonants.”²⁵ She studied all forty-four sonnets and after reading them thoroughly, prose began to emerge. After experimenting with different groupings of the sonnets, much thought went into deciding which ones to set. Freedom of prose within the sonnet form was inspiring to Larsen who always admired Barrett Browning’s settings.²⁶ Known for setting letters and poetry, sonnets are not indicative of Larsen’s work.

Because most of Larsen’s texts were written by American authors, a challenge was setting the British-English language of the sonnets.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

Larsen previously wrote this about her native American-English language:

The rhythm of American English is like the rhythm of no other language. There is a choppy flow from one sentence to the next. Emphatic statements are made by pitch variation. Generally, however, the pitch of American English falls within the interval of a fifth. In the hodgepodge of Americanized foreign words, it has a difficult time rhyming elegantly. I love American English. I generally let the phrases and the word emphasis dictate specific rhythm, phrase structure, and melodic material. When my music is performed, the words and phrases should flow quite naturally, almost conventionally.²⁷

Larsen successfully set the elegant, British-English language in a manner that the words and phrases of the sonnets flow naturally and conventionally.

Larsen, Augér, and Revzen believed the following particular sonnets could highlight Elizabeth Barrett Browning's psychological love journey. *Sonnets I, XXVIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XL* and *XLIII* were set and orchestrated, along with the two which are no longer part of the cycle. Organized in a way that narrates the story, Larsen gave coherent musical structure to the entire piece. Her music gracefully portrays Barrett Browning as a woman who transitioned from fearing love to one who accepted and embraced it.

Sonnets from the Portuguese embody Larsen's personal musical style. All six songs in this cycle are through-composed. Each song is characterized by musical and rhythmic motives and themes that complement the text, with little recurrence of previously used harmonic and melodic material. A significant trait of Larsen's music includes strong rhythmic motives, and they are prevalent throughout the cycle. Larsen intentionally employed ambiguous harmonic language to closely parallel the poetry. Although tonality is sometimes suggested, resolutions are always uncertain. However,

²⁷ Larsen, "Double Joy," *American Organist* 18 (March 1984), 50.

her constantly shifting harmonic ideas and soft dissonances never strike the ear as atonal. Musical features in the accompaniments include unresolved cadences, unexpected leaps, countermelodies, and inner melodies. These specific traits can be found within all six songs.

Larsen provided sensitivity to important words. She combined speech-derived emphasis and operatic lyricism within the vocal lines. Using notated values that align closely with the natural rhythm of words, the result is a believable expression of text. She also employed text repetition, highlighting significant words and phrases. These songs require a soprano who is capable of adhering to Larsen's use of stresses, nuances of key words, language inflection, and dramatic intensity. Through these musical settings, a skilled singer is given a vehicle to project emotions, passions, and the intentions of the poet throughout her journey. The melodic lines are not memorable, (Larsen did not want to compose "western tunes"),²⁸ and each song adheres to the poetic language, providing an opportunity for a skilled singer to communicate with her audience.

Equally important is the accompaniment. The piano plays a vital role in text painting because it provides a foundation that depicts imagery within the poetry. Larsen's accompaniments are detailed with countermelodies, recurring motives, and is a strong indicator of the original orchestration. One example is the insertion of solo instrumental lines and countermelodies within phrases.

Each song is absent of a key signature and relies on the use of accidentals to indicate constantly shifting tonal centers. The vocal range of the cycle is from D4 to B5,

²⁸ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May 2010.

with the highest notes generally occurring in dramatic moments where the clarity of text is not at risk. The cycle was originally scored for flute, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, harp, percussion (vibraphone), two violins, viola, cello and bass.

“I thought once how Theocritus had sung”

Sonnet I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
 Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for-years,
 Who each one in a gracious hand appears
 To bear a gift for mortals, old and young:
 And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
 I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
 The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
 Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
 A shadow across me. Straightway I was ‘ware,
 So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
 Behind me and drew me backward by the hair:
 And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,-
 “Guess now who holds thee?”
 “Death,” I said. But, there,
 The silver answer rang, “Not Death, but Love.”

The first song is an abstract narrative of the journey of love’s uncertainty.

Throughout this sonnet, the poet evolved from suspecting she was near death, then discovering it was actually love.

In her youth, Barrett Browning was interested in Greek studies and literature, and fluent in the language. She wanted the public to know this and often referred to Greek mythological characters in her sonnets. For example, the poet paralleled herself with “Theocritus,” Greek poet and creator of pastoral poetry,²⁹ as both mistook love for death.

²⁹ Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature, www.uncg.edu/libraries (accessed 18 October, 2010).

The phrase, “and drew me backward by the hair;” provides a Greek reference to Athena who was pulled back by Achilles in Book I of the *Illiad*. Poetic themes of sexual violence and tension are also prevalent in this sonnet.

Larsen portrays Elizabeth Barrett Browning through many musical means. Melodic motives solidify the entire cycle and are present in the opening measures of the first song. Larsen spent a great deal of time composing the opening measures in her attempt to set the tone and mood of the entire work.³⁰ Characterized by $\frac{4}{4}$ meter ($\text{♩} = 54$) and marked “calmly, peacefully,” the song begins with open, augmented-interval “bell tones” or “chimes” that symbolize death and eventually love. Similar bell tones are also heard again in the postlude. In measure 6 of the piano-vocal score, Larsen changed the pitches C-4 to D-4 to reflect the orchestration. Figure 1, mm. 1-6, demonstrates Larsen’s use of bell chimes in the introduction and indicates Larsen’s revision.

Although ambiguous in tonality, there is a prevalence of minor, diminished, and augmented triads throughout the song. These triads, along with many minor intervals and tri-tones within the vocal line, depict the poet’s questions and uncertainty until the resolution at the end of the piece. The introduction appears to begin in the key of f minor, but immediately shifts to another tonal center after two measures. Bound by a corset and an overbearing father, the poet always struggled to find her own voice and independence. Larsen intended for tonality to parallel the “Victorian framework of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s life.”³¹

³⁰Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

³¹ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

Figure 1. “I thought once how Theocritus had sung,” mm. 1-6. Bell chimes.

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Harmonically, tonal centers constantly shift throughout this song. Because these shifts intend to accentuate the agony and indecisiveness of the poet, a singer may deliver the vocal line with an undertone of pathos, frustration, and pensiveness. The accompaniment is gentle and represents the contemplative nature of the piece. Used as dramatic devices, dynamics vary from *fortissimo* to *piano*, adding another dimension to the poetic tone. An example is when *subito piano* is indicated in measure 25 at the phrase “the sweet, sad years, the melancholy years.” The poet suddenly became reflective when reminiscing about her childhood and youth, and the singer can emote this by adhering to Larsen’s quiet dynamic marking.

Larsen portrayed the threat of “sexual violence” in measures 37-43. She indicates “growing gradually more agitated,” and each phrase is marked dynamically louder than the previous phrase. The text “and drew me backward by the hair” represents a constant

Death/Love struggle as she cannot comprehend what is causing her such agony; is it death or falling in love? This section marks the dramatic climax of the song, and is demonstrated in Figure 2.

The last line was written unaccompanied, marked “freely, recitative,” on the line “the silver answer rang!” The poetic meaning of this phrase is “love is the answer.” Larsen indicated a single mordent on the word, “answer,” which should begin on the upper auxiliary. A glimpse of tonal resolution represents love, and the song ends peacefully with a chime followed by an unresolved fifth chord that represents the uncertainty of the relationship.

“My letters!”

Sonnet XXVII

My letters! All dead paper, mute and white!
 And yet they seem alive and quivering
 Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
 And let them drop down on my knee tonight.
 This said,—he wished to have me in his sight
 Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
 To come and touch my hand, a simple thing
 Yet I wept for it...—this, the paper’s light...
 Said, Dear I love thee; and I sank and quailed
 As if God’s future thundered on my past.
 This said, I am thine—and so its ink has paled,
 With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
 And this...O love, thy words have ill availed
 If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

Figure 2. "I thought once how Theocritus had sung," mm 37-47. Death/love struggle.

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37 *growing gradually more agitated* *mf*
 how a mys - tic Shape did move Be - hind me and drew me back-ward by the

growing gradually more agitated *mf*

41 *f f ff*
 hair: And a voice said in mast'-ry, while I strove, - 'Guess now who

f

45
 holds thee?' 'Guess now who holds thee?'

After realizing she had mistaken love for death, the poet read letters from her lover. “The letters were dry and could crumble at any moment, were out of her control, and physically released.”³² Larsen’s music paints a scene of the letters falling out of the poet’s hands, falling to her knee and then to the floor.

In contrast to the first song, “My letters!” contains a rapid tempo and complex accompaniment. Beginning in $\frac{4}{4}$ ($\downarrow = 100$), the tempo is marked “very lightly, as a soft tremor.” Larsen convincingly used rhythm within the accompaniment to propel the music forward. The accompaniment consists of alternating sixteenth-note chords, an incessant ostinato that depicts the young lover’s heart beat. The ostinato continues throughout the song except during measures 14-18. Larsen chose this particular rhythmic pattern to represent the excitement and nervousness Browning felt as she read these letters for the first time. Maintaining the ensemble between the singer and pianist is difficult in this song, and Larsen suggests that the singer not coordinate with the pianist.³³ Figure 3 illustrates the quivering ostinato within the accompaniment.

Larsen suggests that the singer approach the text with breathless energy.³⁴ Representing the poet who continued to read the letters, not believing Robert Browning’s words, Larsen chose to repeat the phrase “he wished to have me in his sight” three times; each growing dynamically and with “buoyancy and exuberance.” At this point, the

³² Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Libby Larsen, composer. interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

accompaniment changes as the “heart beat” motive slows down and occurs in only the bass line on a low E-flat.

Figure 3. “My letters,” mm. 1-2. Quivering motive in accompaniment.

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The musical score for measures 1-2 of "My letters" is presented in three staves. The top staff is empty. The middle staff is the vocal line, marked *pp* and *Soft Pedal*. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a quivering motive in the bass line. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 100$ very lightly, as a soft tremor.

To emphasize the poet’s excitement of finally realizing Browning loved her, Larsen chose to repeat the phrases “Dear, I love thee,” and “I am thine” three times. The final exclamation of each is marked *forte* and should be sung emphatically, as illustrated in Figure 4. One can imagine how Elizabeth Barrett Browning felt, trying to believe these words after a life of her father’s empty eyes and heart.³⁵

The heart beat motive ceases and the melody slows down at mm. 49. At this point, the text reads “the ink has paled, that lying at my heart that beat too fast.” Larsen indicated this line to be sung freely, and it is written unaccompanied. Excitement ensues again in measures 57-63 on the final line “If what this says, I dared repeat at last!” The

³⁵ Ibid.

accompaniment includes a melodic figure within the right hand to represent chimes, while the ostinato “heart beat motive” continues until the final note of the song.

Figure 4. “My letters,” mm. 43-48. Repeated phrase, “I am thine.”

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43 *mf again, joyously*
This said, I am thine.

46 *f*
I am thine, I am thine.

as a heartbeat

rit.

f *mf*

“With the same heart, I said, I’ll answer thee”

Sonnet XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I’ll answer thee
 As those, when thou shalt call me by my name-
 Lo, the vain promise! Is the same, (the same)
 Perplexed and ruffled by life’s strategy?
 When called before, I told how hastily
 I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
 To run and answer with the smile that came
 At play last moment, and went on with me
 Through my obedience. When I answer now,
 I drop a grave thought, break from solitude:
 Yet still my heart goes out to thee—ponder how-
 Not as to a single good, but all my good!
 Lay thy hand on it best one, and allow
 That no child’s foot could run as fast as this blood.

The underlying meaning of this poem is that the poet differentiates her childhood response to her overbearing father to the present response of her lover. Larsen explained that as a child, when called by her father the poet would abruptly stop playing to “go to those she loved.”³⁶ After falling in love with Robert Browning, she opened herself to childhood innocence while simultaneously releasing from solitude. The text “the vain promise is the same” may be interpreted as *I love you*.

The poet’s questions, revelations, and decisions are all supported by rhythmical and musical motives. Specifically programmed after the second song, Larsen intended for the audience to understand Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a person who was creative,

³⁶ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

curious, open, and unguarded.³⁷ This song was crafted into two sections. The first section is brief, and begins slowly, lyrically, and freely. Written in $\frac{6}{8}$ ($\downarrow = 54$), there are many duple figures within the recitative-like, free vocal line. The opening tempo remains constant until measure 19 where a sharp change in rhythm occurs and the second section begins. The tempo shifts, ($\downarrow = 54$), and the accompaniment consists of repetitive, alternating sixteenth chords. Larsen's employed this minimalistic motive to represent childlike energy and rushing blood. Once again, Larsen's accompaniment provides abundant imagery through rhythmic motives that support the poet/singer's emotional state. She suggested that the pianist "approach the accompaniment by imagining blood rushing throughout life perplexes and strategies."³⁸ The vocal line is indicated buoyantly and brilliantly. The accompaniment stops abruptly at the lines "break off from a game" and "break from solitude" to signal change and represent the poet stopping at these points in her life. These lines are written *a capella* to emphasize "make a thoughtful decision."³⁹

The buoyant, childlike energy of the accompaniment in measures 20-25 and emphatic "brake off from a game" in measure 25 are illustrated in Figure 5. Larsen suggested the singer answer with anticipation in measures 39-42. At the end of the song, she set the text "lay thy hand on it, best one," specifically with no *ritardando* to depict

³⁷ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

how, after realizing she was truly in love, the poet found the open heart of her childhood.⁴⁰ The text is marked “breathlessly, with unbridled joy.”

Figure 5. “With the same heart, I said,” mm. 20-25. Childlike energy motive.

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18 *brilliantly, bouyantly*
f
 Per-plexed and ruf-fled by life's strat-e-gy? When called be -

22
 fore, I told how hast - 'ly I dropped my flow'rs or

25 *molto rit.* *lightly mp* *a tempo*
 brake off from a game, To run and an - swer with the smile that came At

molto rit. *a tempo, very lightly*
pp

⁴⁰ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

The vocal line is simple and remains in the middle soprano range. Rushing blood and excitement are heard again in the accompaniment during the final measures of 63-71. Larsen also incorporates a separate heart-beat motive above the accompaniment in the right hand on repeated, accented G's in measures 69-71. This particular motive is demonstrated in measures 69-71 in Figure 6.

“If I leave all for thee”

Sonnet XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
 And be all to me? Shall I never miss
 Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
 That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange
 When I look up, to drop on a new range
 Of walls and floors, another home than this?
 Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
 Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
 That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
 To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
 For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
 Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
 Yet love me—will thou? Open thine heart wide,
 And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

Within this sonnet, the underlying question of the poet is “can I leave everything I love for thee? If I leave everything, will you also?” She stated many questions, then finally reconciled and allowed herself to completely experience love. The tone is introspective and subdued as the poet asks for an equal or “feminist” marriage in Victorian times. Psychologically, this represents the central and timeless question for all marriages, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning was the first to write it in sonnet form.

Figure 6. "With the same heart, I said," mm. 63-71. Heartbeat motive.

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22

G

63

breathlessly,
mp with unbridled joy

Lay thy hand on it,

ff *mp*

66

best one, _____ and al-low That n^o child's foot could run as

69

fast as this blood.

This is Larsen's favorite song in the cycle, perhaps because it is the "most feminist."⁴¹ This song actually answers "My Letters," but was programmed fourth in the cycle.

A long, eight-measure introduction begins this song. Like the poetry, the music contains an introspective, calm tone, and begins "very legato, mysteriously." Written in $\frac{6}{4}$ ($\downarrow = 80$), Larsen's polyphonic texture conveys the simplicity of the sonnet. The vocal line consists of elongated rhythms, stepwise motion and clashing harmonies that represent tension and confusion. Because the vocal line and rhythm are linear and the tempo is slow, the singer can convey her contemplation and confusion. Throughout the song, Larsen wrote many specific instructions to the singer including "deliver with anticipation, mourn (wail)" in mm. 39-41. Many lines are unaccompanied and marked "free."

Larsen employed a significant, recurring melodic motive within the accompaniment. Representing polarity, it consists of extreme octaves that begin far apart on A-flats that gradually come together as the right hand pitches descend and the left hand pitches ascend. The result is a dissonant A-flat-4 in the right hand and A-natural-3 in the left. This motive represents and parallels the circumstances and psychology of the relationship through heightened chromaticism and dissonance that match the text. The two lovers kept seeking a union of the soul, but had difficulty making the decision to come together completely.⁴² This motive is demonstrated in Figure 7.

⁴¹ Libby Larsen, composer. interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

⁴² Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

Figure 7. “If I leave all for thee,” mm. 1-2. Psychological motive in accompaniment.

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♩ = 80, very legato, mysteriously

♩ = 80

p *f*

Larsen composed plaintive, simple melodies that complement the text. She gives specific instructions how to deliver each vocal line. For example, she indicates “Shall I never miss Hometalk and blessing” “simply, with a certain innocence” in mm. 19-20 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. “If I leave all for thee,” mm. 19-21. “simply, with a certain innocence.”

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♩ = 100

mf simply, with a certain innocence

19

Shall I ne - ver miss Home - talk and bless - ing and the com - mon kiss

♩ = 100

p

The text “Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love,” means that the poet believed love was death, not a physical illness, and her soul and life were lonely and gray. Larsen indicated this line be sung “as if drained of all energy” in measures 55-57.

Ironically, love was finally found after a life of not allowing herself to love. The final section of this piece begins in measure 60, and continues to support the voice as a chordal and hymnodic accompaniment. Larsen chose to repeat the text “Op’n thine heart wide” four times, each pushing slightly ahead, followed by the final phrase “and fold within the wet wings of thy dove.” The key hovers around A-flat Major on this vocal lines. The psychological, decision motive is heard again in the final measures, and the final chord does not resolve into any particular key. These musical traits are demonstrated in measures 60-72 in Figure 9.

“Oh, Yes!”

Sonnet XL

Oh, Yes! They love through all this world of ours!
 I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
 I have heard love talked in my early youth
 And since, not so long back but that the flowers
 Then gathered, smell still. Musselmans and Giaours
 Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
 For any weeping. Polypheme’s white tooth
 Slips on the nut, if after frequent showers
 The shell is over-smooth; and not so much
 Will turn the thing called love, aside to have
 Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
 A lover, my Beloved! Thou canst wait
 Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch
 And think it soon when others cry, “Too late.”

Figure 9. "If I leave all for thee," mm. 60-72. Psychological, resolution decision.

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60 $\text{♩} = 80$ pushing slightly ahead *f*

Op'n thine heart wide, Op'n thine heart wide, Op'n thine heart wide, _____

$\text{♩} = 80$ pushing slightly ahead

mf *f*

64 $\text{♩} = 72$ *p* (with a simple, humble heart)

Op'n thine heart wide, And fold_ with-in the wet wings of thy dove, fold_ with-in the wet

very gently, shimmering

$\text{♩} = 72$ *p*

68 *and less quiet*

wings_ of thy dove. _____

tenderly

pp

This sonnet describes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's affirmation to fall in love, and that it was not "too late," as many thought. Browning referred to Greek literature and mythology again in the text "Musselmans and Giaours Throw handkerchiefs at a smile." Musselmans (muslims) and Giaours (those outside Islamic faith) are characters who represent betrayal. Once again, the poet paralleled the characters in her life to mythological characters. She associates them to those who did not believe she would ever find love "Polypheme," the most famous Cyclops, son of Poseidon,"⁴³ is also mentioned.

Joel Revzen described this as the "rabbit song" because of its fast, loud accompaniment that represents a "ruthlessness, warrior."⁴⁴ "Oh Yes!" is musically and intellectually challenging. Dynamics within the vocal line and accompaniment are extreme, and Larsen incorporates strong rhythmic motives.

Along with a brisk tempo marking ($\text{♩} = 144$), there are frequent meter changes that alternate between $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$, and $\frac{7}{4}$ throughout. The constant meter changes enable a singer to project and inflect the declamatory text. In the opening line, Larsen chose to repeat the phrase "oh yes" three times. The first "oh yes" is marked piano, the second is marked mezzo forte and the third is *forte*. The final realization of "oh yes" is emphatic and the singer can convey this with great force. "They love through all this world of ours" is also indicated *forte* and unaccompanied in measures 4-5.

Larsen asked for the line "Polypheme's white tooth slips on the nut if after frequent shower's the shell is over smooth;" to be sung "whitely" by taking vibrato and

⁴³ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, www.uncg.edu/libraries, (accessed 18 October, 2010).

⁴⁴ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May 2010.

harmonics out of the vocal line.⁴⁵ Within the complex accompaniment, the right hand moves in tandem with the vocal line during this section.

There are hints of tonal centers in measures 7-11, and again in measures 17-19, but each ends with an abrupt shift. Larsen's *ritardando* marking, change of meter to $\frac{4}{4}$, and sudden change of the accompaniment to supporting chords at measures 17 to 20 enables the singer to pause and reflect back to childhood, is illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. "Oh, Yes," mm. 17-19. Reflection motive.

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16 *rit. to m. 20* //

not so long back but that the flow'rs Then gath-ered, smell still.

p *f* *rit. to m. 20* //

In measures 38-43, the text "and not so much will turn the thing called love to hate" is indicated *fortissimo*. This marks the climax of the song and is demonstrated in Figure 11.

⁴⁵ Libby Larsen, composer, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

Figure 11. “Oh, Yes,” mm. 38-43. Climax of “Oh, Yes!”

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38 *ff*
and not so much _____ Will turn the thing called love to hate

There is a brief melismatic passage that occurs on measure 49 on the text “But thou art not such a lover, my Beloved.” This line is unaccompanied and indicated to be sung freely. As the final line states “And think it soon, when others cry ‘Too late!’” once again, Larsen used text repetition to emphasize the poet’s thoughts. “Too late” is repeated three times, each growing dynamically louder. This repetition represents Browning’s revelation that it is never too late to find true love.

“How do I love thee?”

Sonnet XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth, and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday’s
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints,— love thee with the breadth,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's best-known sonnet, "How do I love thee?" represents the final proclamation of mutual love. Larsen was apprehensive about setting this famous sonnet.⁴⁶ Musically, the vocal line is lyrical, warm, and not overly dramatic, and a singer should approach it with simplicity. Again, there is no true melody in the vocal line. Marked "very freely throughout," the vocal line emulates a quasi-*recitative* style and the singer should approach it accordingly. Larsen used rhythmic motives including syncopation, and duples in the vocal line set against triplets in the accompaniment, and vice-versa, to provide momentum. Expanded, calm, soft, and jazz-inspired chords "played with equal balance"⁴⁷ serve as an underlying accompaniment. Most of the song is in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter and maintains a continuous, steady rhythmic pulse throughout ($\text{♩} = 92$).

Larsen includes a soft, bell-chime motive again to represent wedding chimes. The text in measures 11-14 "my soul can reach" is repeated three times and marked *a poco a poco crescendo*. This phrase should accelerate and grow until the final dynamic marking of *forte*, which completes the sentence "when feeling out of sight is the end of being and ideal grace." The phrase acceleration is indicated in measures 11-15 of Figure 12.

⁴⁶ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Figure 12. "How do I love thee," mm. 9-15. Phrase acceleration.

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7 *freely, recitative* [A] *a tempo, gently*
mf
 Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and

freely, recitative *a tempo, gently*
mp *mf*

10 *push ahead* *f* *mf* *poco a poco cresc.*
 breadth and height _ My soul _ can reach, My soul _ can reach, My soul _ can reach, _ when

push ahead
f *mf* *poco a poco cresc.*

14 *J* *rit.*
 feel - ing out _ of sight _ For the ends of Being and i - deal Grace

ff *rit.*

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for the song "How do I love thee" by Libby Larsen, measures 7 through 15. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 7-9) features a vocal line starting with a recitative tempo and a piano accompaniment that transitions to a tempo. The second system (measures 10-13) includes performance instructions like "push ahead" and "poco a poco cresc." with dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*. The third system (measures 14-15) ends with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking and a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic in the piano part.

The lyrical vocal line in measures 18-25 is set against syncopated chords in the accompaniment. The climax of the song occurs in measures 28 and 29 on the text “and with my childhood’s faith. I love thee with the passion.” At this point, the tempo accelerates and there is dynamic growth indicated from *mezzo piano* to *forte* crescendo marked above the text, “and with my childhood’s faith, I love thee with the passion,” as illustrated in Figure 13.

Figure 13. “How do I love thee,” mm. 28-29. Climax.

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25
 — as they_ turn from Praise. I love thee with the pas - sion put to use in my old griefs,
f

28
 and with my child - hood's faith. I love thee with the pas - sion...
mp with anticipation *f*
accel. *rit.* *very legato*
p

After the climax, the tempo immediately slows down and the accompaniment abruptly shifts to *piano* bell-chimes for the next four measures. The final line states “and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.” Written *a capella* and indicated *mezzo piano*, the music represents the poet’s quiet, introspective nature. The final note of the vocal line was originally written as a G-4, but Larsen changed it to a high G-5 at the request of Arleen Augér. This note, and word, should be caressed and sung *sotto voce*. Larsen suggested that the singer “let all of her breath out at the end of the song, following the words ‘after death.’”⁴⁸ Larsen chose to end the piece, and cycle, with an unresolved FMm-M13 chord. This signifies the beginning of the couple’s uncertain and unresolved future together. Larsen’s revision of this chord in the piano-vocal score is seen in measure 49, Figure 14.

The conclusion of the set should provide a peaceful understanding of mutual love to the audience. The final message is a resolution of trust. To create a peaceful atmosphere, Larsen suggested “Don’t deliver the expectations, but import timelessness. Allow the poetry to do its work and do not out-sing the poem. There should be silence at the end to create that atmosphere.”⁴⁹ This serves as both the poetic and musical conclusion to this cycle. Figure 14 demonstrates the final and peaceful end of the piece.

⁴⁸ Libby Larsen, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, 25 May, 2010.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Figure 14. "How do I love thee," mm. 40-50. End of song. Peacefulness.

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40 **E** *poco rit.* *mf*
warmly, legato and, if God choose,
poco rit.

46 *mp* **F** ♩ = 92 *rit.*
 I shall but love thee bet-ter af-ter death.
 ♩ = 92 *mf* *gently rit.* *p*

CHAPTER V

AN INSIGHT TO LARSEN'S *SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE*

Libby Larsen's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* present an opportunity to pursue the poetry that inspired her to set the cycle within her own unique compositional style. Her music gracefully portrays Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a Victorian woman who evolved from fearing love, to one who eventually allowed herself to experience and embrace it. Personal interviews with Larsen yielded a substantial amount of information presented in the study. An impetus for the creation of the document was to provide insight and information that would facilitate the preparation and performance of each song. The provided information can assist in finding ways that are sensitive to and expressive of the poetry, thus making these songs more accessible to sopranos, pianists, coaches, and voice teachers searching for American art songs to program on recitals.

Because Larsen feels strongly that the collaborative relationship between a singer and pianist is important, she crafted this piano arrangement knowing that the best pianists would capture the nuances of the various orchestral instruments. One can explore the full-score and compare how the instrumentation differs and is similar to the piano accompaniment.

Perhaps Larsen's most prevalent identifying compositional factors are uses of rhythmic motives, musical motives, and text repetition. The most significant rhythmic and musical motives in this song cycle were demonstrated in this document. Her

incorporation of intricate text painting within accompaniments provides a foundation for the text and vocal lines. Used as a dramatic device, text repetition enables the performer to emphasize important words and phrases. Always striving for her music to closely correlate with the text, subtext, and accompaniment, she successfully adheres to the British-English language of the sonnets. Larsen accomplished this through uses of texture, rhythm, and color, and clear scansion between the text and vocal line. A thorough understanding of each of these compositional devices will enable a singer to present an artistic interpretation of Larsen's songs.

This song cycle is meant to be performed as a whole. The emotional and musical impact of the songs is not as powerful when prepared and performed individually. During the preparation for a performance of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, one should consider the intentions of the poet by studying the cultural, historical, and social context of the poetry. Also, an investigation into the compositional process through which Larsen crafted the work will lead to an effective and successful performance. Through the intense study and application of this knowledge, gleaned with the intuitive and personal artistic style, a performance of this intimate song cycle can be meaningful and expressive to an audience.

The breadth of Larsen's output spans orchestral, chamber, choral, operatic, and vocal literature, and she continues to produce numerous art songs. As a composer of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-first century, Larsen will likely be remembered as a major composer whose unique style does not adhere to the trends of this period. She has composed for a variety of media, and her music has been performed by recognized

orchestras and artists around the world. Larsen's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* emerge as being an important addition to the vocal literature of the era. The traditional text is incorporated into an expressive musical style that is largely, without parallel, among her contemporaries. Because she is a working, living composer, Libby Larsen is an invaluable resource to musicians of our time. Striving to inspire, challenge, and invigorate those who study and perform her works, Larsen continuously writes art music that expresses the human condition.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

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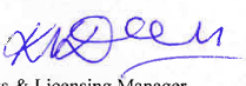
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To: Elizabeth Keathley
School of Music
236 Music Building

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 4/22/2010

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption
Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation
Study #: 10-0162

Study Title: A Guide to Performance Practice: Libby Larsen's Sonnets from the Portuguese

This submission has been reviewed by the above IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

The purpose of this study is to provide a historical overview of Libby Larsen's song cycle *Sonnets from the Portuguese* from the perspective of the composer.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. The IRB will maintain records for this study for three years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

CC: Polly Cornelius, Chris Farrior, (ORED), Non-IRB Review Contact, (ORC), Non-IRB Review Contact

Primary Subject Consent

Student Investigator: Polly Butler Cornelius

Contact Information: 1008 N. Eugene Street Greensboro, NC 27401

336.312.4883; 336.273.3579

pbcornel@uncg.edu or pcornelius@elon.edu

Topic: A Guide to the Performance Practice of Libby Larsen's Song Cycle: *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

Research goal:

The purpose of this study is to provide a historical and performance related overview of Libby Larsen's song cycle, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, from the perspective of the composer. Human participants are needed to gather the pertinent historical and performance related data about this significant composition.

As a participant, you will be asked to discuss the events of your life that defined your career as a composer. The principal investigator will ask you to explain the circumstances, which led up to the composing of your music and any historical events leading up to or during the premieres of these works. The principal investigator will also ask you to describe insights into your compositional process of art song, and suggestions for effective teaching of this particular cycle. Data collection will occur by way of personal interview. The interviews will require approximately one to five hours. At any time, you may withdraw from this study by notifying the researcher. In this case, all your recorded data to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed. Furthermore, all data collected for this study will be stored in the principle investigator's home office in a secure filing cabinet.

Research method:

Personal interviews of primary subject.

Method of recording data:

Personal interviews of primary subject will be audio and video recorded.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality will not be maintained. However, the participant will have the right to ask that any specific comments not be published.

Time Commitment for participants:

No less than 1 and no more than 5 hours. Minimal e-mail and phone calls as needed.

Data storage/Length of storage:

Data will be stored indefinitely. Data and consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the investigator's home office.

Participant withdrawal:

The participant may voluntarily remove himself from the study at any point without penalty.

Risks:

There is no risk for participating in this study. However, each participant will have the right to request that any specific comment not be published.

Benefit to participants:

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, a history of Larsen's composition, education thought process for this particular work will be

recorded so that others can read and learn. The published document will provide information as to the contributions of Larsen to the world of music.

Benefit to society:

Society will have an understanding of not only Libby Larsen's contribution to music as a composer, but her lifelong dedication to music as both a composer and scholar. Society will also have an opportunity to learn about the aspects of Larsen which helped shaped her as a composer of this work and others.

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will not be protected because you will be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Polly Butler Cornelius at (336) 273.3579. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Polly Cornelius.


Participant's Signature* _____ Date 05-26-2010