

...to cast a shadow again

A Performance Guide

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Author Note

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Abstract

This performance research document is presented as a guide to the performance of Ewazen's *...to cast a shadow again* for Medium Low Voice, Trumpet and Piano. In addition to biographical information on the composer, poet, and musicians who premiered the work, it will also contain an analysis of the poetry and music. Additional suggestions for performance and overall impressions will also be included.

Keywords: ...to cast a shadow again, Ewazen, Gekker, Voice, Trumpet, Piano

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Ewazen's *...to cast a shadow again* was written in 1991, commissioned by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble for a solo recital by ensemble member, trumpeter Chris Gekker. Premiered in 1992 at the Merkin Concert Hall of the Kaufman Music Center in Manhattan, NYC. The cycle covers the many phases of romantic love, from the first spark of interest, through the hot and cold moments, and finally after the story comes to an end.

Biographical Information

Many of the members of the artistic team that went into the creation and subsequent premiere of *...to cast a shadow again* enjoy close relationships that go back to the 1970's and beyond. The poet happens to be the sister of the trumpeter for whom the work was commissioned. Further, the composer, trumpeter, and vocalist all pursued their undergraduate degrees together in the 1970's. Chris is said to have shared some of his sister Katherine's poetry with his colleague, Ewazen, while they were teaching together at Juilliard. Ewazen expressed interest in Katherine's work, and she later sent him this set of poems in the early 1990s.

Eric Ewazen

Born in 1954 in Cleveland, Ohio, Ewazen has had a long and distinguished career as a composer - especially for wind and brass instruments. He received his training at the Eastman school of Music (BM), Tanglewood, and the Juilliard School (MM, DMA), where he studied composition with Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Warren Benson, Gunther Schuller, and Joseph Schwantner. He has been a composer-in-residence with the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble of New York City, in addition to numerous residencies with ensembles and at universities throughout the United States, and his works have been premiered by internationally renowned

artists. Ewazen has been a member of the Julliard faculty since 1982, where he teaches composition, music theory and analysis.

Katherine Gekker

Poet Katherine Gekker is originally from Washington, D.C., where she founded a commercial printing company in 1974. Born into a musical family, *...to cast a shadow again* was commissioned for her brother, trumpeter Chris Gekker; she is an amateur pianist who finds herself playing when she is not writing. Her seasonal cycle, *Chasing the Moon Down*, was set by composer Carson Cooman and premiered in 2010. The *New York Times* has called her poetry “effecting” and “elusive,” with other publications calling it “ethereal” and “sensuous.” Gekker has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart prizes; *In Search of Warm Breathing Things*, her first full-length collection, was published by Glass Lyre Press in 2019.

William Sharp

Grammy Award winning baritone William Sharp is recognized for his high level of artistry and versatility, with several dozen recordings spanning over 900 years of music. At home in concert, recital, and opera, he is a frequent choice for contemporary composers, including Leonard Bernstein, John Harbison, John Musto, Jon Deak, Libby Larson, David Del Tredici, Lori Laitman, Steven Paulus, Scott Wheeler, and David Liptak. He received his undergraduate training at the Eastman School of Music, studying with renowned mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani, herself an expert in modern and avant-garde literature. Sharp has taught at the Aspen Music Festival and School, Boston University, and the Peabody Conservatory, where he has served on the faculty since 2002.

Chris Gekker

A member of the American Brass Quintet for 18 years, trumpeter Chris Gekker has made a name for himself for performances ranging from Bach's Christmas Oratorio at Carnegie Hall to collaborations with contemporary artists such as Sting. With over 30 solo recordings, and over 100 chamber, orchestral, and jazz recordings, he is featured on the 2005 Deutsche Grammophon compilation, "Masters of the Trumpet." Praised by the New York Times for his "bright virtuosity" and "clear toned" playing, his versatility and ability to play expertly over a wide dynamic range has made him an artist of high demand. Trained at the Eastman School of Music and the University of Maryland, Gekker has taught at the Julliard School, the Manhattan School of Music, and Columbia University. He is currently Professor of Trumpet at the University of Maryland.

Colette Valentine

Known for her "clean, sparkling technique" and "consummate skill and musicianship," pianist Colette Valentine has performed at many of the most noted venues, including Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress, the Phillips Collection, the Corcoran Gallery, and internationally in Paris, Zurich, Tokyo, Seoul, and Hong Kong. She has been the pianist for the Ecco Trio, and has collaborated with the New York Philharmonic Winds, St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, the Washington Chamber Society, the Left Bank Concert Society, the Grand Teton Music Festival and the Rembrandt Chamber players. She has been the staff pianist for numerous international piano, instrumental, and vocal competitions, and has recorded for the Albany, Fontec, Antara, Well-Tempered and CRI labels. She received her training at the University of

Maryland and SUNY Stony Brook; she is currently Associate Professor of Collaborative Piano at The University of Texas at Austin.

Song Analysis

The poetry for *...to cast a shadow again* centers on the high and low points of a relationship, eventually leading to its end. Written over a period of almost a decade, beginning in the early 1980s, these poems were originally presented to the composer in the exact reverse order. Ewazen suggested changing the order, and Gekker “immediately saw that he was absolutely right.” Additionally, it was Ewazen who also suggested the title, to which Gekker agreed; the order and title have been listed that way ever since, appearing in their new format in Gekker’s collection, *In Search of Warm Breathing Things*.

Stopped by the stream

I.
Stopped by the stream
we steam like two workhorses

The moisture lies white
on the field
and your shoulders

Our own fog melts
thin shingles of ice water

I lean over to kiss
your halo of moisture

My face comes away wet.

Text.

Gekker’s imagery evokes a post passionate scene, where both parties, exhausted and out of breath, are stopping to rest. The heat and sweat from their breath and bodies cover the room like dew. Even the skin is cool and wet to the touch.

Music.

The first piece begins majestically with C# octaves in the lower registers of the piano, followed by a trumpet fanfare on the open 5th. The contour of the trumpet melodies attempts to build momentum as they ascend, often interrupted or slowly making their descent, until the meter finally settles at m.13. This lazy, tender rhythm supports the opening text, with the trumpet echoing the vocal line. Nevertheless, the vocal line and trumpet never seem to get in sync; one always begins or ends before the other. The high point of this piece comes in mm.35-38, where the lovers connect; here the voice and instruments are at their most intense. A quick transition toward stillness in mm.39-40 leads to a tender and exposed delivery of the final line of poetry.

Performance.

Despite the opening tempo marking of 60 bpm, the premiere recording is at 75 bpm and my recital performance was at 70 bpm. There is quite a bit of rubato in both recordings, which lends to expressivity but perhaps takes away from the *maestoso* indicated by the composer. Much of the forward movement and pulling back comes from the contrasting triplet and duple figures, and there should be a general sense of momentum building until the tempo settles at m.13. While the tempo slows a bit at this point, it is important to maintain a sense of motion until the delivery of the final line at m.41. The piano and trumpet need to be aware of the potential to cover the voice at m. 24, when the voice is low in the range, and at mm.36-38, when the dynamics and range of the instruments are higher.

Luminescent moonlight startles me

II.
Luminescent moonlight startles me
I'm wildly awake in the wrong season

Your foot hangs out of the covers
and like a lighthouse for the moon

directs its rays to a safe landing
there's a pulse on your instep

Everything else is night
but your foot, the moon, my eyes

What woke me
the whiteness of your skin

Text.

In this next scene, the lovers are lying in bed. In the still, darkness of the night, the smallest details become vibrant. The whiteness of the lover's skin beckons illumination from the moonlight, and the beating of the lover's heart can be seen in the farthest extremity. Energy from the lovers fills the room with light.

Music.

The jarring rhythms and sonorities found in the piano at the beginning, coupled with the anxious rhythms in the trumpet, sets up the scene of awaking from a tumultuous dream. The rhythms settle in m.12, with the arpeggiated chord of the right hand signaling a half dream-like state. We hear the bubbling of the pulse in the trumpet at m.20, which then takes over the piano's dream-like role at m.25. From m.33 to the end, the trumpet represents the brilliance of the light reflecting off the lover's skin, as the voice and piano slowly return to sleep.

Performance.

The opening marking of *espressivo* allows for some liberty in tempo; the premiere recording starts at about 74 bpm and settles to 64 bpm at m.7, while my ensemble started at 60 bpm and settled at 55 bpm. I think that staying close to the marking of 68 bpm would give the feeling of frenzied tossing and turning, as well as supporting a sense of breathlessness when the voice awakes at m.7. The broadening of the tempo is covered by the sustained octaves with an added seventh in the piano at m.25, allowing the performers to keep the tempo steady through

the end. The C# on the word “skin” might be difficult to sing loud enough to avoid being covered by the trumpet and piano in m.36.

Two bees are fighting or courting

III.

Two bees are fighting or courting;

I can't tell which.

The ground's covered with flowers
smooth as kid leather bats' wings.

We sit surrounded, our backs hard
against the tulip magnolia.

Your words drift down

like blossoms around my ears.

Text.

In the heat of the moment, love and anger fluctuate - and sometimes it is hard to tell the difference. The bees are engaged in a dance of life, necessary for the continuation of both theirs and the plant species. In the same way, your soft words give me life.

Music.

At the beginning we hear a bee represented in the trumpet, quickly darting around as the piano's clashing major 2nds seem to warn us of a struggle. At m.6, the piano introduces the second bee, which in contrast to the 2nds and tritones in the trumpet, makes the piano's inverted arpeggiation of the diminished 7th sound smoother and more melodic. At m.18, the piano takes on the character of the field being gently disturbed by the breeze, with the trumpet gently landing on the tops of the flowers. It continues to touch down and fly away, until finally settling in the last measure with the piano and voice.

Performance.

When compared with my recital's opening tempo of 114 bpm, much slower than what is marked, I much prefer the premiere's tempo of 143 bpm. The faster tempo promotes a lightness

in the trumpet and piano as they dart between pitches. It also provides a contrast in texture with the vocal line's smoother and more elongated delivery. In much of this piece, the trumpet and voice are trading back and forth, and in the times when they are together, the voice is mostly higher in register than the trumpet, avoiding balance issues.

That didn't take too long

IV.
That didn't take too long;
I thought I was asleep. But
your hand —
currents over my hip.

Five seconds
changed the color of leaves
the smell of earth
the shapes of stars.

I'm awake now, always.
The moon is company. Its only comfort:
a blue whiteness on my body
where I long for your hand to cast a shadow again.

Text.

In this scene, the protagonist awakes from a dream, perhaps a pleasant memory of a time with the lover, to find himself alone. Just moments ago, he was enjoying a magical moment, not to be faced with the reality of loneliness. The only comfort is a memory.

Music.

The muted trumpet at the beginning can be thought of as representing the lover, who now exists only in a dream. The lack of piano gives a sense of emptiness. At m.13, the piano takes the lead in moving the action forward rhythmically, as the piano and trumpet have been exchanging – unable to come together. Only at m.24 do the voice and trumpet finally meet, but they fail to share the same rhythm until “always,” and then remain out of sync until the very end.

Performance.

The premiere recording and my recital were decidedly slower than the marked tempo of 58 bpm, which might feel slightly too energetic for awakening from a pleasant dream; our tempi were more in the area of 44 bpm. Between m.12 and m.18, there is a natural forward motion accomplished by the churning eighths in the piano and the triplets in the vocal line. This momentum halts at m.24 when the piano drops out, and resumes at m.27, only to drift off once again going into m.32. The vocal line at m.31 is quite low, and the option is given to take it an octave up; depending on the singer, the better option might be to take it up the octave as long as softness can be maintained from the previous measure.

(Interlude)

(Instrumental)

Text.

None.

Music.

This number is the most virtuosic for both the pianist and trumpeter; there are several hand-offs between the two, the first taking place at m.5. The rhythms often confuse the feeling of simple and compound meter.

Performance.

It would be easy for this piece to feel a little too frantic, especially if the tempo was to be pushed too far forward without a sense of lightness or variation in intensity. The premiere recording is close to 101 bpm, which works well for them. Having worked on this with two different pianists, I could easily tell the benefit of the variation in intensity, leaning into the

strong beats and lightening the weaker ones. This lends to a more playful, dance-like feeling, and makes “sticking the landing” at the end more exciting.

Everyone says it snowed last night

V.
 Everyone says it snowed last night
 but I know it's the whitening of your love
 blowing across my eyelids
 where your lips used to rest.

A confused tree sends out one green branch,
 covets its few withered leaves and won't release them to the snow.
 Not evergreen, but half green:
 like us.
 Our feet kick up white storms
 wet ankles skim over the trails

This is what I want to hold:
 One green branch on a hibernating tree.
 It bent softly when I brushed against it.

Text.

To others the cold is just a change in the weather, but the protagonist knows that it is because the lover's feelings are changing. The protagonist feels run down – but won't let go. Both lovers are just merely holding on, and the protagonist is clinging to the softness and life that gave the relationship meaning.

Music.

The beginning opens like a calming lullaby or barcarolle, providing a veneer of peace. The coldness between the lovers is exposed at m.18, with the ascending vocal line, descending trumpet melody, and absence of motion in the piano, which then returns to sooth at m.20. The action begins to move in the vocal line as it ascends in m.28, joined by the piano's rhythmic motion at 29. The voice and trumpet harmonize at measure 33, and finally share a brief unison at

34 on “but half green” in a moment of agreement. For the rest of the song, the trumpet and voice remain separate, commenting on each other without accord.

Performance.

Rather than feeling this piece in three, it may be better for the flow and prosody of the text if it were to be felt in a very slow 1. The marked tempo is a good choice, although it could be done slightly slower or faster depending on how the large 1 is felt. While the trumpet and piano are often layered, there are several spots that could be problematic for the ensemble. The trumpet’s entrance at m.11 can easily cover the voice, in the lower part of its range, as can mm.15, 21, 30, 37, 59, 63, and mm.69-72.

Hands underwater on my body

VI.

Hands underwater on my body
gentle fingers flutter
frictionless, like fish
brush against me
and quick swim away.
Waves chop.

Your hands can’t rest, they find no purchase
I’m about to go under

You only touched me once under water
but this is how I remember it always:
your hands slide away.

Text.

The protagonist feels the lover’s connection at the surface; leaving when the waters get rough. The lovers can’t seem to reconcile or connect. Instead of remembering a gentle touch, now all the protagonist can feel is the lover pulling away.

Music.

The rhythmic and harmonic figures in the piano seem to represent the rippling of tiny waves on a small body of water. Melodic motion is often instigated in the voice and followed by the trumpet, but from time to time the order switches. Intensity builds at m.17 with the voice higher in the range and with increasingly stronger dynamics. This continues to m.23, where despite moving lower in the range, the intensity remains in the voice until it suddenly drops off, as if to give up. The rippling water figure returns at m.25, and the voice enters, swelling each line as if they were sobs of regret. These swells get longer and more intense, until finally dropping away in exhaustion. Slowly, the disturbances in the water recede as the trumpet plays its final, calmer wave-like figure.

Performance.

The marked tempo of 118 bpm might be slightly too brisk; it needs to be quick and light to represent the shimmering of the water, until the piano represents the choppy waves at m.13 by adding a heavy octave low in the register on each downbeat. The trumpet and voice do a lot of handing off in this, coming together rhythmically at important points in the text, such as mm.20, 36, 38-39. The biggest dynamic challenge comes on the final word at m.40; being lower in the range and with the trumpet line continuing through the bar, the voice must be careful to maintain ample intensity.

Cordite surrounded you

VII.

Cordite surrounded you
Caps popped in my heart
the day we held fireballs in our mouths
red tongues dangerous drums

our small battles squealed roman candles

now you march
across the street to me
through a haze of gunpowder:
Battalion guarding my heart fortress.

VIII. (separate texts combined in musical setting)

Lie down and cry.
And tears will roll into your ears.
Your words, my words, blank ceiling,
And my ears are wet, cold.
Your words did that to me.

Text.

Explosions, fireworks, heat and fire... the lovers anger ignites over the smallest spark.

The protagonist can sense the battle before it begins but is helpless to stop it. All that can be done is protect oneself.

Now, what was once the place of bliss is one of sadness. When all is said and done, lying in the same bed, the protagonist is still wet and cold – this time from tears.

Music.

The furioso opening has the piano providing explosions, with the trumpet offering argumentative interjections. When the explosions clear, the piano seems to stalk forward with its constant 8th notes in the right hand and off-beat pounding in the left hand. The trumpet then seems to sound like two people yelling at each other, with its constant 16ths, quickly changing back and forth between registers. The more angular vocal line marches forward over the beating of the piano. The marching finally stops at measure 51 when the lovers confront each other and stand their ground. Immediately, we are returned to the majestic motive that opens the cycle, but instead of being followed by tenderness, it is followed by tears. The set then ends with a more muted, subdued echo of the opening statement. This melancholy bugle call is used to signal

“lights out” on the relationship, with a sorrowful C# minor chord and the tender instability of the minor third in the trumpet’s melody.

Performance.

This final song, which contains two poems, has the most challenges for ensemble in the opening section. The constant, clashing eighths in the piano combined with the brilliant ascending lines in the trumpet can easily cover the descending arpeggios in the vocal line. The intensity of this section is perhaps the highest in the set, which could cause all musicians to push dynamics and tempo. The voice will need crisp consonants to punctuate the line. The reiteration of the opening motive at m.57 might be well served by adding a slight lift prior to the downbeat, separating it ever so slightly from the intense, driving rhythm that precedes it. When the voice re-enters at m.63, the consonants can be used to establish the new, slower tempo. Finally, a breath might be helpful prior to the penultimate word to allow the instruments to slow to a point where motion seems to drift away to nothingness at the end.

Impressions

Ewazen states that, “the trumpet serves as a type of Greek chorus, commenting upon and highlighting the deeply felt and emotional words.” Throughout most of the work, this is very effective in mitigating the balance issues that can arise from this instrumentation. Chris Gekker, despite being known for being a “model of quiet perfection,” was still unable to mitigate the issues of balance inherent in the composition during the premiere performance. The reviewer stated, “the trumpet, when used between lines of text, joins the piano in a useful commentary. When the trumpet and vocal music mingle, though, the trumpet is generally an intrusion.” Even the most skilled musicians would be challenged to solve balance issues raised by the sensitive writing and instrumentation; hence, it is important for both the piano and trumpet to feel

comfortable playing at lower dynamic levels – and perhaps more generally than just in the many places where the vocal line might struggle to project.

In my performances, we tried a few different configurations for the piano, trumpet and voice. Using the piano lid as an acoustic shell for the voice was a good strategy, but then finding a place for the trumpeter where he can still be connected to the ensemble proved problematic. My guess is that finding some sort of modified “V” formation might work best, with the pianist’s back being most upstage and the trumpet facing more inward toward the piano lid might work best. In any case, a fair amount of experimentation will need to be done depending on the musicians, their instruments, and the space.

When I first approached the text, I must admit to an initial awkwardness. The poetry is hyper-sensual, which can lead a performer toward feeling especially exposed in front of an audience. Furthermore, despite the text being gender neutral, its origins are biographical and from the poet’s perspective. Hence, the words range from soft and tender to steamy and animalistic. Maybe that is what drew me to this work; it is not often that I can explore publicly those aspects of my being that many might consider to be more feminine than masculine. In future performances I would hope to allow myself to be even more vulnerable; this text would allow anyone who wishes to explore a more defenseless expression some wonderful opportunities.

Despite being composed for the baritone voice, the indication is for “medium low voice.” The balance challenges are likely to prove to be similar, as the range and tessitura of the vocal line would present similar issues of projection and ensemble when performed up an octave. More important is that female identifying singers might find even more fertile ground in exploring and interpreting the poetry.

As a literary device, the poet seems to enjoy the use of alliteration. In the first line of the poetry we see a primary example in “stopped”, “stream” and “steam.” These repeated sounds create a rhythmic stress, the prosody of which is set musically in a way that emphasizes strong beats or recurring rhythmic patterns. It seems as though the composer may be attempting to capture this effect in the trumpet line; from the very opening figure, the main theme which returns to bookend the work, and throughout the remainder of the songs, the trumpet line is laden with repeating tones.

I was distinctly struck by the fact that the poems were originally written in reverse order. It took the eyes of an outside observer to see that the story might be more effectively told if the text was set the other way around. Additionally, the poems were written over the course of a decade, which led me to think of the stages of grief and how that process may have informed the writing. The original first poem, which serves as the text to the final song, is filled with the most negative emotions. Maybe this is due to being written in closest proximity to the real-life events that inspired it. The middle poems show bargaining and confusion, signs of being farther along in the grieving process, while the poem that was originally written last shows acceptance. When set musically in reverse order, the first song can look back with fondness and innocence, allowing the audience to experience the changing sentiment more naturally as the story progresses.

There is something about the relationship between the creators of this piece that I envy; to know that these words were written by the trumpeter’s sister, whose relationship is such that they could share such intimate details of their lives, is something quite special. To then present the poetry to one of your long-time friends to compose the music, and finally premiere the work with trusted friends and colleagues would be magical. To share that time and space, and to co-

create a world of thought manifest in music, filled with intimacy and heartbreak... this is a work that requires a great sense of connection among its performers that goes beyond musical skill.