presents

Faculty Recital

Featuring the music of
Richard D. Hall, Jack Wilds,
and Michael Ippolito

Performed by Daveda Karanas,
Karla Hamelin, Michael Ippolito,
and Richard D. Hall

THURSDAY | NOVEMBER 19, 2020
SAN MARCOS, TX

7:30 PM | STREAM
TXSTATE PRESENTS
Program

Lady Bird Suite (2019) for cello and live electronics

Richard D. Hall
Karla Hamelin, cello
Richard D. Hall, live electronics and digital, video art

Once I Knew a Fine Song (2019) for mezzo-soprano and cello

Jack Wilds
I. Places among the stars
II. I saw a man pursuing the horizon
III. A man saw a ball of gold in the sky
IV. Stars, I have seen them fall
V. Once I knew a fine song

Daveda Karanas, mezzo-soprano
Karla Hamelin, cello

Folk Songs, for piano (2020)

Michael Ippolito
1. Bitola (as learned from Alan Bern)
2. Tish Nign (as learned from Michael Alpert)
3. Waltz (as learned from Judith Eisner)
4. Cuckoo Variations (after Jeanne Ritchie, recorded by Alan Lomax)

Michael Ippolito, piano

Six Sassoon Songs (2013)

For low voice and piano

Michael Ippolito
1. Aftermath
2. I Stood with the Dead
3. Suicide in the Trenches
4. Does It Matter?
5. Aftermath (Reprise)
6. Slumber-Song

Daveda Karanas, mezzo-soprano
Michael Ippolito, piano
Program Notes and Texts

_Lady Bird Suite_ for cello, live electronics and digital, video art (2019)

Lady Bird Suite is a piece written in 2019 by Richard D. Hall for Cello and Live Electronics or Laptop Computer. It was written for the cellist Dr. Karla Hamelin. The work is inspired by the Lady Bird Wildflower Center located in Austin, TX, and is organized into the following sections: The Streams, The Creatures, and The Flowers. The cello material is variations derived from the melodic and harmonic material found the first movement of Cello Suite No. 3 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The Live Electronics consist of delay and looping effects which are triggered in real-time and the digital, video art is performed in real-time using various MIDI controllers. The digital, video art is manipulations of various looped videos filmed at the Lady Bird Wildflower Center.

_Once I Knew a Fine Song_, for mezzo-soprano and cello (2019)

The texts in this cycle are united by addressing difficult, often absurd aspects of human existence. I collected them in the midst of studying Ecclesiastes and, in many ways, combining them into a coherent whole was inspired by the book’s opening verses.

Four of the five texts were written by Stephen Crane. The fifth, _Stars I Have Seen Them Fall_, was authored by A.E. Housman. The title is taken from the final poem. While it allows for many different readings, mine is that the poem represents a sad reflection on innocence, sanity, or efficacy lost in the face of existential angst.

“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” - Ecclesiastes 1: 14-15

I. Places among the stars by Stephen Crane

Places among the stars,
Soft gardens near the sun,
Keep your distant beauty;
Shed no beams upon my weak heart.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness,
Not your golden days
Not your silver nights
Can call me to you.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness
Here I stay and wait.
II. I saw a man pursuing the horizon by Stephen Crane

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I was disturbed at this;
I accosted the man.
“IT is futile,” I said,
“You can never —“

“You lie,” he cried,
And ran on.

III. A man saw a ball of gold in the sky by Stephen Crane

A man saw a ball of gold in the sky;
He climbed for it,
And eventually he achieved it—
It was clay.

Now this is the strange part:
When the man went to the earth
And looked again,
Lo, there was the ball of gold.
Now this is the strange part:
It was a ball of gold.
Aye, by the heavens, it was a ball of gold.

IV. Stars, I have seen them fall by A.E. Housman

Stars, I have seen them fall,
But when they drop and die
No star is lost at all
From all the star-sown sky.
The toil of all that be
Helps not the primal fault;
It rains into the sea,
And still the sea is salt.
V. Once I knew a fine song by Stephen Crane

Once, I knew a fine song,
—It is true, believe me, —
It was all of birds,
And held them in a basket;
When I opened the wicket,
Heavens! They all flew away.
I cried, “Come back, little thoughts!”
But they only laughed.
They flew on
Until they were as sand
Thrown between me and the sky.

Folk Songs, for piano (2020)

Folk music has played an important part in my musical life for many years, but I found myself turning to familiar folk songs in a new and specific way during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stuck at home, with tremendous anxiety and uncertainty about the future, I found myself wanting to compose, to feel productive or at least to take my mind off everything by working. I found I didn’t have the mental clarity or focus to be able to write anything new, but what did keeping coming to mind were various songs I learned and played over the years. Each song reminded me of a specific time and place, and the person who taught it to me. Maybe the social isolation had something to do with it, or a longing for a time before all this mess, but as I played these songs, I found myself responding, as if in conversation, adding variations ranging from subtle to more unusual or abstract. These began as private improvisations, then a few became compositions written for no one but myself (my own musical memories), but as I lived with them, I gradually began to think of them as something to share with others. I chose three songs which seemed the most complete: a Macedonian song I learned in Cincinnati (the first piece I learned on the accordion), a Jewish song I learned in Weimar, and a waltz I learned while playing in a Klezmer band in Minneapolis. I rounded out the set with a transcription of my wind ensemble piece, Cuckoo Variations, which is based on a British/American folk song sung by Jeanne Ritchie.

Six Sassoon Songs, for low voice and piano (2013)

War has always occupied a central place in our culture. Whether we read and reread the Iliad or glance at antiwar graffiti still wet on the walls, the unmistakable sameness of it all overcomes distance and time and we simply respond to the humanity and the pity of it all. While civilization everywhere is scarred by the destructive power of war, there is some comfort in these humble attempts to understand and memorialize loss and render some semblance of humanity out of raw destruction. As Wilfred Owen, another soldier-poet said, “My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.”
In 2005, when I began to look at Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry, I was struck by the similarities between war-hungry Britain at the beginning of World War I and the flag-waving patriotism of America as we began our second war in as many years. I was moved by Sassoon’s own disillusionment, as his poetry transformed from themes of triumph and glory to the horrors and grim realities of trench warfare, and by the biting contempt Sassoon had for cheering crowds back home, who knew nothing of the soldiers’ experiences. While I shared Sassoon’s anger and frustration, I also felt strangely reassured by his bleak poetry; it documented not only the shared experience of the war itself, but also the pessimism and disillusionment that inevitably comes with it.

As I began to explore Sassoon’s work, the project quickly grew beyond the scope of a song-cycle for voice and piano as I originally intended, and eventually Songbook of the War took shape as a dramatic cantata for solo voice, choir and ensemble. Since then, I have always wanted to return to my original plan and recast a portion of the work in a more modest setting for voice and piano.

The resulting song cycle, Six Sassoon Songs, begins with four songs lifted with little change from Songbook of the War (and rearranged for solo piano accompaniment). These songs deal directly with the horrifying images of the war, at times pleading and immediate, at times distant, or biting and sarcastic. A brief reprise of the opening poem bookends the war imagery and also leads into the final poem, Slumber-Song, which is entirely new to this song cycle. While Songbook of the War is about the soldier’s relationship to society at large, represented by the choir, the protagonist of Six Sassoon Songs must undergo a personal transformation. In the concluding lullaby, the larger questions of war and death remain unanswered, but we can find personal salvation in intimacy and love.

I. Aftermath
Have you forgotten yet?...
For the world’s events have rumbled on since those gagged days,
Like traffic checked while at the crossing of city-ways:
And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow
Like clouds in the lit heaven of life; and you’re a man reprieved to go,
Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.
But the past is just the same—and War’s a bloody game...
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you’ll never forget.

Do you remember the dark months you held the sector at Mametz—
The nights you watched and wired and dug and piled sandbags on parapets?
Do you remember the rats; and the stench
Of corpses rotting in front of the front-line trench—
And dawn coming, dirty-white, and chill with a hopeless rain?
Do you ever stop and ask, ‘Is it all going to happen again?’

Do you remember that hour of din before the attack—
And the anger, the blind compassion that seized and shook you then
As you peered at the doomed and haggard faces of your men?
Do you remember the stretcher-cases lurching back
With dying eyes and lolling heads—those ashen-grey
Masks of the lads who once were keen and kind and gay?

II. I Stood with the Dead
I stood with the Dead, so forsaken and still:
When dawn was grey I stood with the Dead.
And my slow heart said, 'You must kill, you must kill:
'Soldier, soldier, morning is red'.
On the shapes of the slain in their crumpled disgrace
I stared for a while through the thin cold rain...
'O lad that I loved, there is rain on your face,
'And your eyes are blurred and sick like the plain.'
I stood with the Dead...They were dead; they were dead;
My heart and my head beat a march of dismay:
And gusts of the wind came dulled by the guns.
'Fall in!' I shouted; 'Fall in for your pay!

III. Suicide in the Trenches
I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

IV. Does It Matter?
Does it matter?—losing your legs?...
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.
Does it matter?—losing your sight?...
There’s such splendid work for the blind;
And people will always be kind,
As you sit on the terrace remembering
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter?—those dreams from the pit?...
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won’t say that you’re mad;
For they’ll know you’ve fought for your country
And no one will worry a bit.

V. Aftermath (reprise)
Have you forgotten yet?...
Look up, and swear by the green of the spring that you’ll never forget.

VI. Slumber Song
Sleep; and my song shall build about your bed
A paradise of dimness. You shall feel
The folding of tired wings; and peace will dwell
Throned in your silence: and one hour shall hold
Summer, and midnight, and immensity
Lulled to forgetfulness. For, where you dream,
The stately gloom of foliage shall embower
Your slumbering thought with tapestries of blue.
And there shall be no memory of the sky,
Nor sunlight with its cruelty of swords.
But, to your soul that sinks from deep to deep
Through drowned and glimmering colour, Time shall be
Only slow rhythmic swaying; and your breath;
And roses in the darkness; and my love.
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