JAMAICAN PLIGHT: A SONG CYCLE FOR HIGH VOICE AND PIANO

Mikhail Johnson

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2017

Committee:

Christopher Dietz, Advisor
Mikel Kuehn
Christopher Dietz, Advisor

This composition entitled Jamaican Plight is a six-song cycle for high voice and piano with text by the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett-Coverley, in the Jamaican patois. This patois is a dialect specific to several islands in the Caribbean and consists of broken English (creole) mixed with African words and inflections, truncated or abandoned grammar and phrases with extensive use of literary devices such as similes and metaphoric prose. The duration of the work is approximately 25 minutes.

The narrative of the cycle depicts a peddler having to tutor a recently unemployed relative on how to make a living being a peddler; a task the relative once thumbed their nose at. Low income and high prices, along with the plummeting Jamaican economy have made the struggle even greater. This brings about a resolve to seek greener pastures—The United States. A few years after migration a heavy sense of nostalgia slinks in. The yearning to return to their homeland is great but sadly the entire extended family has also migrated to the United States. There is no one to return home to. Eventually a visit is paid to Jamaica and they marvel at all the changes that have taken place in such a short time. Visiting their hometown, they reunite with neighbors and friends but the reunion takes an interesting turn when their neighbors and friends express great disappointment in their returning without a foreign accent.

The composition employs traditional Jamaican singing as well as operatic recitative. While fundamentally diatonic, the melodic material subtly yet deliberately deviates into more chromatic territory. The piano will essentially function as the narrator and provide a dramatic enactment to
that which is being sung. The composition requires the pianist to execute extended techniques such as direct hand-muting of the strings, plucking with the fingers or a plectrum, slapping the strings and knocking on the body of the piano. As the song cycle progresses, the pianist will be required to speak more and more often while playing, representing an act of solidarity and an understanding of the singer’s plight.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank God Almighty with whom all my musical endeavors have been made possible.

Special thanks to Dr. Christopher Dietz and Dr. Mikel Kuehn for being exceptional professors and composers, for shaping my compositional career in such a significant way, and for seeing and believing the great promise this composition possessed from its inception.

Finally, I would also like to thank my vocalists Jennifer Cresswell and Autum Cochran-Jordan who helped to workshop and premiere movements and excerpts from this work. Your extraordinary talents have brought multiple dimensions to this composition.
JAMAICAN PLIGHT

For high voice and piano (2017)

I- When Trouble Teck Man - 4 min.
II- Duty Tough - 6 min.
III- A Merica - 4 min.
IV- Home Sickness - 4 min.
V- Changes - 3 min.
VI- No Lickle Twang – 4 min.

Approximate total duration – 25 minutes.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Accidentals carry throughout the measure in the register they appear. Chromatic clusters are indicated by the following notation (approximate register is shown by the placement in relation to the staff):

All metronome marks are approximate and may vary slightly depending on the acoustical properties of the hall, etc.

Jamaican Plight requires the execution of several “extended-piano” techniques such as pizzicato playing, “Aeolian harp” effects, muted tones and glissandi across strings. In order that the execution of these effects be accurate, it is important that the strings be clearly labeled. Some pianists prefer to mark only those strings which correspond to the black keys; in this way, the sense of the keyboard is replicated and the pianist’s orientation is more immediate. N. B. Since the construction of pianos varies considerably among manufacturers, and even among different models produced by the same firm, the pianist should choose an instrument which facilitates the execution of as many of the various special techniques as possible.

Pizzicato- pluck string with either the fingertip (indicated by “f.t.”) or with the fingernail (indicated by “f.n.”). Location of where along the indicated string(s) should be plucked is left to the discretion of the pianist. Normal playing on the keys is indicated by the instruction “on keys.”

Glissandi- strum across the indicated range with the fingertip (f.t.). The strings may be strummed in front of the dampers (i.e. between the front structural beam and the pins) or behind the dampers. The precise duration of the glissando is always given in the score.
\( + \) = mute base of string (with firm pressure at the agraffe) with free hand. This should produce the maximum resonance and integrity of tone whilst exuding a very percussive sound.

All boxed notes with diamond noteheads are to be depressed silently.

The pedal instructions are precise and should be followed exactly. It is critically important that each piano be equipped with a correctly functioning *sostenuto* pedal.

\( \text{I} \) = right (damper) pedal (also \( \text{I} \)
\( \text{II} \) = middle (*sostenuto*) pedal
\( \text{III} \) = left (*una corda*) pedal
\( \text{I} \) *sempre* = keep damper pedal depressed throughout (let sounds vibrate through pauses).

The \( \text{I} \) symbol alone means the pianist should use the damper pedal at their discretion until otherwise indicated.

The durations of the following fermatas are in relation to the normal fermata:

- Short fermata
- Normal fermata
- Long fermata (If a number is indicated above this fermata, it indicates the approximate number of seconds to pause.)

Ties not directly attached to subsequent notes imply *l.v.* (*laissez vibrer*) and therefore the subsequent notes should be reiterated.

The composer suggests that the movement titles be listed in the printed program.

**PATOIS GUIDE**

Some of the text has been altered in the score to emulate more accurately the articulatory phonetics of Jamaican patois.

For a comprehensive guide to the pronunciation of the texts, audio files are available. Please contact the composer at johnomuzik@gmail.com for these audio guides.
**PROGRAM NOTES**

*Jamaican Plight* is a six-song cycle for high voice and piano with text by the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett-Coverley, in the Jamaican patois. This patois is a dialect specific to several islands in the Caribbean and consists of broken English (creole) mixed with African words and inflections, truncated or abandoned grammar and phrases with extensive use of literary devices such as similes and metaphoric prose.

The narrative of the cycle depicts a peddler having to tutor a recently unemployed relative on how to make a living being a peddler; a task the relative once thumbed their nose at. Low income and high prices, along with the plummeting Jamaican economy have made the struggle even greater. This brings about a resolve to seek greener pastures—The United States. A few years after migration a heavy sense of nostalgia slinks in. The yearning to return to their homeland is great but sadly the entire extended family has also migrated to the United States. There is no one to return home to. Eventually a visit is paid to Jamaica and they marvel at all the changes that have taken place in such a short time. Visiting their hometown, they reunite with neighbors and friends but the reunion takes an interesting turn when their neighbors and friends express great disappointment in their returning without a foreign accent.

The anecdotes were popularized by Jamaican poet Louise Bennett Coverley in the 1940’s where she expounded on many Jamaican proverbs and scenarios (including her own) in Jamaican patois dialect. The soloist is the voice of the people and the pianist is the metaphoric and dramatic enactment of the situation being explained. The pianist is also a person who once was a stranger to the soloist but gradually becomes more familiar and even rambunctious as the cycle progresses.

*A brief description of each movement—*

**I- WHEN TROUBLE TECK MAN**

The Jamaican saying, “When trouble teck man, pickney boot fit him,” literally translated “when trouble takes hold of a man, a child’s boot will fit him.” It means when a man is in trouble he will attempt the impossible. It sums up this anecdote of an individual of high financial status who looked down on their relative who is a low-income earner—a peddler. Interestingly, the tables turn and this high-profile individual lost their job and now must do the very thing they once thumbed their nose at in order to stay financially afloat—peddling. The peddler (the soloist) in this movement gives the full account of the incident.

The pianist in a rhapsodic nature is representing the emotions of the peddler and the relative simultaneously. There are episodes of mocking and jeering, sadness, frustration and eventually joy with continuous introduction of new material symbolic of the learning process of the new trade. Also, apparitions of material that will present themselves fully in subsequent movements of the cycle.
II- DUTTY TOUGH

“Rain a fall, but dutty tough,” which means that although the rain is falling, the ground is still dry and parched, is a Jamaican proverb that has a deeper meaning when applied to a person’s finances, as it could refer to the all-too-familiar situation in which income is being earned, but it is just not enough to cope with all the bills. Your money evaporates as soon as you get it, just as a drizzle of rain in the arid desert. The rising and falling melodic lines of the soloist are indicative of the soloist’s optimism and current reality respectively and they are even juxtaposed with text opposing this notion evoking the irony.

The percussive effects of the piano represent hitting the ground (i.e. times of economic hardship and the magnitude therein) and the aftermath is mere dust as a sign of no breakthrough. There are instances of relief (some big, some small) but all is short-lived.

III- A MERICA

“Every seckey got him jeggeh, every puppy got him flea” translated “Every beggar had his bundle of kindling stick, every puppy has its fleas,” is just a way of summarizing the Jamaican tradition of holding on to cultural wisdom across space and time enabling the community to survive in new environments. With the rising emigration phenomenon/trend occurring in Jamaican at the time it made one contemplate what the fuss was all about going abroad? Such was the case with the peddler’s disenchanted behavior towards the notion that emigration had become to many a fashion trend. The peddler retells the gossip received from locals and accounts from many who have sojourned in foreign land, but in a facetious way with snarky commentary. As the movement progresses the peddler begins to contemplate and warm up to the idea of making said move for the sake of improving her current living situation.

The pianist acts as a temporal conduit that connects the act of people emigrating (ascending scalar passage ending with chords) and the thoughts of the peddler in Jamaica retelling the stories (descending arpeggiations and Jamaican rhythmic motives). Eventually, the two merge and the pianist starts to sound more like an airplane engine with the seatbelt signal sound (once in the background) emerging to the fore.

IV- HOMESICKNESS

This movement is one that is oh too familiar—homesickness. After years of being in a foreign country it is natural that one would want to be home again and bask in the things you have always been accustomed to and enjoyed. The soloist contemplates returning but forgot their entire family had migrated and so prior to this realization the soloist describes the things they miss and compare what they see in foreign land and how it does not match what they had in Jamaica. There is reminiscing about the good ole days and current cravings for island delicacies.

The pianist uses apparitions of several Jamaican/Caribbean Folk tunes melodies in conjunction to rhythmic nuances specific to Jamaica to evoke the many things what the soloist describes and specifically yearns for.
V- CHANGES

Many years pass and finally a visit is paid to Jamaica. To one’s amazement, there are many changes that have occurred, to the point where the area they once knew is hardly recognizable. The soloist gives a full description of what he/she witnesses.

In this movement, the piano represents the changes that the soloist witnessed and spoke of and is indicative of unspoken changes they may/ may have not liked. The aleatoric nature of the piano brings this to the fore and although there are main figurations that are indicative of things that may have been unchanged, overall no one performance will be the same.

VI- NO LICKLE TWANG

This movement is where the soloist specifically visits their hometown to reunite with neighbors and friends. But the visit soon will not be a very joyous occasion as great disappointment is expressed in the “foreigner” returning without an accent. The idea of an accent from a foreign land though it sounds superficial, was deemed by many a form of prestige and also evidence that such an event occurred to begin with.

The pianist exudes a very pungent Jamaican flare that is indicative of a fusion of the Reggae and Mento genres. With a minimalistic quality and simply implied chordal progression, it becomes something easy to follow but it becomes interrupted by bursts of uneasy flourishes that leads to an erosion of the figuration in its second iteration symbolic of the disappointment. The work seeks to maintain optimism but it plummets further to disdain symbolic of not being able to hide their full expression any longer.
TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS
Selected poems of Louise Bennett

1- When Trouble Teck Man

Proverb:- When trouble teck man, pickney boot fit him.
Interpretation:- When a man is in trouble, he will attempt the impossible!

When trouble teck man, pickney boot
Fit him—an dat is true,
For wha day me prove it wid Cous Bella
Aunty pickinni Sue.

She come a yard pon a cryin
Seh she lose her job as nurse,
She no got nowhe fi sleep and ongle
Four-bit eenah her purse.

Me tek har een, buy some food-kine
An load one basket well,
An cya har a street wid me nex day
Fi learn har how fi sell.

Me start fi call out--'Ackee! Pear!
Ripe plantain going poo!
Me have breadfruit!' Hear de gal backa me,
'Me too! Me too! Me too!

Me wait lickle, den call again,
'Green gungoo goin poo!
Me have seasonin an coaknut ile!
Hear de gal again, 'Me too!'

De fus time me did feel fi laugh,
But now me temper flame.
Ah seh, 'Gal, shet up yuh "Me too"
An call out de food-dem name!

'Yuh tink yuh too igh fi call out?
An anodder sinting to:
Tickya people go hear yuh seh "Me too"
An tink me dah sell yuh!'
'Yuh wan get me eena truvel?
Lacka ow me badlucky,
Mine yuh meck police arres me
Fi walk an sell smaddy!'

'Same time she start fi cry. Me seh,
'Gal, dis stop shed yuh tear!
Ef ah did know is so you sof
Ah hooda sell yuh fi ripe pear!'

'Massa, she start cry wussera!
Me dis get bex an bawl,
'Gal, tun back go back home, yaw!
Doan falla me at all!'

'She tun back, and me gwan me ways—
Business wasn so bad.
When me ketch home Sue was singin loud
An really lookin glad.

'Me stan up speechless, for de gal
Basket stone empty!
Me open me mout when ah see har
Tread-bag full up a money!

'Hear har to me, 'Ah call out mah,
Doah ah doan like higglarin;
Before me tumble dung me hole macca,
So ah sell off everything.'

'You want to get me in trouble?
Like how I’m unlucky
Mind you cause police to arrest me
For walking and selling somebody!’

'At the same time, she started to cry. I said,
Girl, just stop shedding tears!
If I knew you were so soft
I would’ve sold you for ripe pear!’

'My friend, she started to cry even worse!
I just got vexed and shouted,
‘Girl, turn back, go back home, you hear?
Don’t follow me at all!’

'She turned back, and I went my way—
Business wasn’t so bad.
When I reached home, Sue was singing aloud
And really looking glad.

'I stood up speechless, for the girl’s
Basket [was] stone empty!
I opened my mouth when I saw her
Thread-bag† was filled with money!

'Hear her to me, ‘I called out ma’am,
Though I don’t like being a peddling;
Before I tumbled down my entire basket,
So I sold everything.’

*bit- 4½d, fourpence halfpenny
†Pear- avocado
‡Thread-bag- small cloth bag, tied or drawn closed with a thread or small string, and chiefly used by peddlers for carrying their money.
II- Duty Tough

Proverb:- Rain a fall but duty tough.

Interpretation:- Money is not enough to cover expenses.

Sun a shine but tings no bright;
Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;
River flood but water scarce, yaw;
Rain a fall but duty tough.

The sun is shining but things aren’t bright;
Though the pot is boiling, food is not a lot;
The river floods but water is scarce, (you hear me?); Rain is falling but the dirt is tough.

Tings so bad dat nowadays when
Yuh ask smaddy how dem do
Dem fraid yuh teck it tell dem back,
So dem no answer yuh.

Things are so bad that nowadays when
You ask someone how they’re doing
They are afraid you will take it and use it against them,
So they don’t answer you.

No care omuch we da work fa
Hard-time still een a we shut;
We dah fight, Hard-time a beat we,
Dem might raise we wages, but

No matter how much we are working for
Hard time is still in our shirt (like a stain)
We are fighting, hard times are beating us,
They might raise our wages, but

One poun gawn awn pon we pay, an
We no feel no merriment
For ten poun gawn awn pon we food
An ten pound pon we rent!

One pound goes on our pay and
We don’t feel any merriment
For ten pounds went on our food
And ten pounds on our rent!

Saltfish gawn up, mackerel gawn up;
Pork an beef gawn up same way,
An when rice an butter ready
Dem jus go pon holiday!

The prices of Saltfish*, mackerel,
Pork and beef have gone up in like manner,
And when rice and butter are ready
They just go on holiday (they no longer exist in stores)!

Claht, boot, pin an needle gawn up
Ice, bread, taxes, water-rate;
Kersene ile, gasolene, gawn up;
An de poun' devaluate.

Cloth, boots, pins and needles have gone up;
Ice, bread, taxes, water rate,
Kerosene oil, gasoline, gone up;
And the pound devaluates.

De price a bread gawn up so high
Dat we haffi agree
Fi cut we yeve pon bread an all
Tun dumplin refugee!

The price of bread has gone up so high
That we have to agree
To turn our eyes from bread and even
Become dumpling refugees!

An all dem marga smaddy weh
Dah gwan like fat is sin,
All dem-deh weh dah fas wid me,
Ah lef dem to dumpling!

And all those meager persons who
Are behaving like being fat is a sin,
All those who are being inquisitive with me,
I’ll leave them to their own demise!
Sun a shine an pot a bwile, but
Tings no bright, bickle no nuff.
Rain a fall, river dah flood, but
Water scarce and dutty tough.

The sun is shining and the pot is boiling but
tings aren’t bright, food is not a lot;
Rain is falling, the river is flooding, but
water is scarce and the dirt is tough.

* Saltfish- cured salt cod

**III- A Merica**

_proverb:- Every seckey got him jeggeh, Every puppy got him flea._
_interpretation:- A way of summing up the Jamaican tradition of holding on to cultural
wisdom across space and time enabling the community to survive in new environments._

Every seckey got him jeggeh, 
Every puppy got him fleas,
An yuh no smaddy eh yuh no 
Got family oversea!

Every beggar has his bundle of kindling, 
Every puppy has its fleas, 
And you’re not somebody if you don’t 
Have family overseas!

‘Uncle Zacky sen a parcel’, 
‘Air mail cable come from Sue’, 
‘Sammy boat pull out dis mawnin’, 
‘Yuh no hear seh Sarah flew?’.

‘Uncle Zacky sent a parcel’, 
‘Airmail cable came from Sue’, 
‘Sammy’s boat pulled out this morning’, 
‘Didn’t you hear that Sarah flew?’.

Everybody dissa talk bout 
Finger-printing an passport, 
Finance Board, Merican Council, 
Airways ticket, winter coat!

Everybody is only talking about 
Fingerprinting and passport, 
Finance Board, American Council, 
Airways ticket, winter coat!

Ah wonder is what fault dem fine 
Wid po li Jamaica 
Meck everybody dah lif-up 
An go a Merica?

I wonder what fault they have found 
With poor little Jamaica 
Why everybody is getting up 
And going to America?

Bi de time yuh seh ‘puss pickney’, 
As yuh yeye quint, as yuh yawn, 
Yuh miss smaddy an baps yuh hear 
Is Merica dem gawn!

By the time, you say ‘kitten’ 
As your eyes squint, as you yawn, 
Someone goes missing and poof you hear 
It’s America they have gone.

Some a go weh fi vacation, 
Some a go weh fi tun ‘high’, 
Some a go fi edication, 
But de whole a dem a fly!

Some are going away for vacation, 
Some are going away to become elite, 
Some are going for education, 
But all of them are flying!
I ask myself what’s the matter,
I ask myself why:
Is it a tidal wave, or earthquake or
Is it a storm they are expecting?

Jane said she met so many old friends
When she strolled down New York
That she felt as though she was walking down King
Street or Luke Lane (local streets in Jamaica).

They might call me ‘follow fashion’—
But what am I to do my child?
If you don’t follow fashion you
Will never be in style.

So I am going to follow fashion,
I am going to get up and go away.
Any time you don’t hear my mouth
I am in America.

*Follow fashion- (copycat)

IV- Homesickness

I am dying to drink some coconut water,
See a breadfruit tree,
Lord, to walk in the boiling sun
And bathe in the sea.

I ate cabbage and potato chips
And acted as if I was pleased,
But my belly was just hollering
For a plate of rice and peas,

For a dumpling, a duckoonoo*
For a bulla* full of spice,
An to cool me sugar and water (lemonade)
With a quattie* lump of ice.

And to board a market train and hear
The people chatting
About the good foot they stubbed
Or the bad dream they had.
English country road-dem pretty
An sometime when me dah roam
An me see a lickle village
Me feel jus like me deh home.

But me galang an me galang,
Me no see no donkey cart!
Me no meet up no black smaddy,
An it heaby up me heart.

For me long fi see a bankra basket
An a hamper load
A number-leven, beefy, blacky,
Hairy mango pon de road!

An me mout-top start fi water,
Me mout-corner start fi foam;
A dose a hungry buckle-hole me
An me waan fi go back home,

Go back to me Jamaica,
To me famby! To me wha?
Lawd-amassi, me figat—
All a me fambly over yah!

English country roads are pretty
And sometimes when I am roaming
And I see a little village
I feel just like I’m at home.

But a go along and I go along,
I don’t see any donkey carts!
I don’t meet any black people,
And it makes my heart heavy.

For I long to see a “square-cornered” basket
And a pannier load
A number eleven, beefy, blacky, (types of mangoes)
Hairy mango on the road!

And my mouth starts to water,
My mouth corner starts to foam;
A dose of hunger grabbed me
And I wanted to go back home,

Go back to my Jamaica,
To my family! To my what?
Lord have mercy, I forgot—
All my family is over here!

*duckoonoo - a kind of puddling made of some ‘starch’ food sweetened, spiced, traditionally wrapped in plantain or banana leaf, and boiled.
†bulla - round, flat cake.
+quattie 1½d, penny half-penny (quarter of a 6d)
V- Changes

Bless me y’eye sight wat a sinting
Me noh eena me right sense?
Racecourse got gate and flowers!
Racecourse got painted fence!

Memba wen Racecourse was a
Ramgoat roses cemetary?
An now Racecourse tun park
Racecourse name after royalty.

Me never know me woulda live
Fe see a sight as dat!
Racecourse tun cenotaph an
Cenotaph tun parking lot.

Whole heap o’ street tun one way street
Is easier fe walk
You kean drive tru you haffe
Circle roun Victoria Park.

Chi-chi bus gone wid him chi-chi
Weedy bus come wid him bell,
Wen yuh buz bus-buzzer now, it soun
Like ambulance so tell.

Only five year since me go weh
An in dat deh lickle space
So much changes teck Jamaica
Ah can hardly know de place.

Police a-keep point duty under
Umbrella me dear
Z.Q.I. tun rediffusion wid
Commercials pon de air.

Me walk all bout de city an
Me marvel at de scene
An dung Duke Street House of
Representatives sweep clean!

Bless my eyesight what a thing
I’m not in my right sense?
Racecourse have gate and flowers!
Racecourse have painted fence!

Remember when racecourse was a
Ram-goat roses cemetry
And now racecourse tuned into a park
Racecourse has been named after royalty.

I never knew I would live
To see a sight as that!
Racecourse turned into a cenotaph and
Cenotaph turned into a parking lot.

Many streets turned into one-way streets
It is easier to walk
You can’t drive through you have to
Circle around Victoria park.

Chi-Chi* bus has gone with his loyal passengers
Weedy bus has come with his bell
When you buzz the bus-buzzer now, it sounds
Like an ambulance until.

Only five years since I went away
And in that little space of time
So many changes have occurred in Jamaica
I can hardly know the place.

Police are keeping point duty under
Umbrellas my dear
Z.Q.I. turned into re-diffusion with
Commercials on the air.

I walked all about the city and
I marveled at the scene
And down Duke Street House of
Representatives sweep clean!
I told Jane not to fret about her little suck-finger child. He will live to become professor at the University.

This is the age of progress. At the rate we are growing, any day now we might hear that the Mona dam is overflowing.

VI- No Lickle Twang

I am glad to see you come back, boy,
But lord, you have let me down
My proudness has fallen to the ground.

You mean you went to America
And spent six whole months there,
And came back not a piece better
Than how you went away?

Boy, aren’t you ashamed? That’s how you came?
After you stayed so long!
Not even a little language, boy?
Not even a little “accent”?

And your sister that worked only
One week with an American
She speaks so nice now that we have
The deuce to understand?

Boy, you couldn’t improve yourself!
And you’re getting so much pay?
You spent six months overseas and
Returned ugly same way?
Not even a drapes trousiz, or
A pass de riddim coat?
Bwoy, not even a gole teet or
A gole chain roun yuh troat?

Suppose me laas me pass go introjooce
Yuh to stranger
As me lamented son what lately
Come from Merica!

Dem hoolla laugh after me, bwoy!
Me couldn tell dem so!
Dem hodda seh me lie, yuh wasa
Spen time back a Mocho!

No back-answer me, bwoy — yuh talk
Too bad! Shet up yuh mout!
Ah doan know how yuh an yuh puppa
Gwine to meck it out.

Ef yu waan please him, meck him tink
Yuh bring back someting new.
Yuh always call him ‘Pa’ — dis evenin
When him come, seh ‘Poo’.

Not even a drapes trousers, or
A “pass the rhythm” coat?
Boy, not even a gold tooth, or
A gold chain around your throat?

Suppose I lost my pass and introduced
You to a stranger
As my lamented son that lately
Returned from America!

They would’ve laughed at me, boy!
I couldn’t tell them that!
They would’ve said I was lying, you were
Spending time at Mocho*!

Don’t smart-mouth me, boy—you speak
Awfully! Shut up your mouth!
I don’t know how you are your father
Are going to have it out.

If you want to please him, and make him think
You brought back something new.
You always call him ‘Pa’—this evening
When he arrives, say ‘Poo’.

*Mocho- a very rural area in Jamaica where the patois is dominant.

~ English Translations by Mikhail Johnson


Used with permission
JAMAICAN PLIGHT
For High Voice and Piano
Texts from Louise Bennett's "Selected Poems" and "Jamaica Labrish"

I-When Trouble Teck Man

Very Rhythmic $q=100$

Voice

When troubl-le teck man, pick ney boo-r fit him. An dar_ is true!

Senza misura $q \approx 75$

Piano

For wha day mi prove in wid Cous Bell-a Aunt-y pick-in-ni Sue.

She

Copyright © 2017 Mikhail Johnson
All Rights Reserved.
Come a yad pon a cry in. She lose her job as nurse, She nuh got no whe fi sleep and on gle four-bit ee-na har purse.

Meno mosso \( \text{mf} \) = \( \text{90 poco rit.} \)

Mi tek har een, buy some food kin a load one bask-et well, An cya har a street wid me nos day fi learn har how fi sell. Mi start fi call out 'Ac-kee! Pear!'

Poco più mosso \( \text{mf} \) = \( \text{94} \)

Ripe plan-tain go ing pool! Mi have bread butt! Hear di gal back a me, 'Me too! Me too! Me too!'

Più mosso \( \text{mf} \) = \( \text{100} \)
An an odd-a sin- ting too: Tick ya peo ple go hear yuh seh "Me too" An tink mi ah sell yuh!

(Yuh waan get mi ee na tru- vel?) Lack a ow mi bad luck - y-

Mine yuh mek po lice-

Tempo Rubato =80

at re mi Pi walk and sell sm add-y? Same time she start fi cry. Mi seh, 'Gal dis stop shed yuh tear! Ef ah did know is so yuh sof' Ah

(Ruh)

(Bar)

(Bar)
II-Dutty Tough

Voice

Senza misura

mf molto

freely but very expressive and deeply saddened

Sun a shine

but tings nuh bright;

Doah pot a bville

bick-le nuh nuff.

Palm on str.

(mart.)

Riv a flood

but wa ta scarce yawl!

Strict tempo ($q = 100$)

Tings so bad dat now-a-days when yuh aks sm-add-y how dem do?
Dem frid yuh tey f tell dem back

Voice

Piano

Senza misura

pian. (f.n)

$mf$ pizz. (f.n)

l.v. sempre

Piano

5

Voice

pian. (f.n.)

Gradually release
More frustrated!

Gawn up, An’ when rice an’ but ta read y dem jus’ gah pon hol-i-day!
Chalk, boot, pin, an’ nee gle gawn up, ice, bread taxes was ta rate.

Pianist shout (non-muted sempre)

Same way!

In shock!

In surrender (give up!)

Senza misura
Freely (quasi recitative) with anger and disdain!

An' all dem mar-ga sm-add-y whe diah gwan like fa__ sin! All dem - deh whe ah fa' wid me; Ah lef dem to dump- lin'!

Freely gliss. over strings (1 finger, f.t.)

pizz. (f.t.)

Gradually release
Sun a shine, an' pot a bwile, but tings nuh bright, bick le nuh suff.

Rain a fall, riv a

Senza misura

Freely, but pensive and deeply saddened!

Struggling to the end!

60

Dah flood but wa ta scarce an' dun tough.

11 March 26- June 26, 2015

Bowling Green, Ohio
III-A Merica

Con brio $i \approx 100$

Strict time ($\approx 100$)

Eve ry seck-ey got him egg-oh,

Eve ry puh-py got him flas,

An’ yuh nah sm-ad-y ef yuh nah got fam’ly

gradually release
Uncle Zack sent a parcel

Air mail cable come from Sue,
Sammy bout pull out dis mawn in'

Pianist exclaims:
"Yuh nuh hear seh Sarah flew?"
By di time yuh hear

As yuh yaw'n, quint

Yuh miss sm-a-d-y an' BAPS yuh hear is America dem gawn'

Some a go whe fi va-ca-tion,

Some a go whe fi tun high.
Jane seh she meet so much ole fren'.

When she stroll dung New York,

Dat she feel like is dung King Street or Luke Lane she ah walk.

Lento

sound of airplane
seatbelt sign

tre continue
niente f

freely gliss. over str.
(4 fingers, f.s.)

Più mosso

accel.

Tempo I (q=100)

But wha fi do mi chile?

Ef yuh nuh fal la-fash in,
yuh wi nev-a een a style.
mi dah guh fal-la-fash in,
Mi dah lif-up an guh weh. An y time oon-ooh mah hear mi mout, Is

subito

Mer-i-ca mi deh.

mute strings near agraffe (2 fingers)

February 2 - March 15, 2017
Bowling Green, Ohio.
**IV-Homesickness**

Reflective \( \text{=84} \)

Voice

Senza misura

Freed, very expressive and yearning

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mi ah dead} & \quad \text{fi drink} \quad \text{some coconuts water,}
\end{align*}
\]

Piano

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Senza misura} & \quad \text{uncoordinated with the voice}
\end{align*}
\]

Strict tempo \((\text{=84})\)

Rubato

A tempo \((\text{=84})\)

See a bread-fruit tree,

Lawd, fi walk een a di broil-in sun

An bade een a di sea

Mi fam cab-bage an pitt-a ta chips an gwan like seh mi please

But mi bell-y diss a holl a

Fi a plate a rice an peas,
Fi a duck-oo- noo-a, Fi a bul-la full a spice, An fi cool me sug-an-wat-a.

Bout di good foot Wid a quart-de lump a ice.

An some time- when mi ah roam An mi see a Wid a ice.
corn a start fl foam; A dose a hung ry buck-le hole mi An mi waan fl guh back home;

Senza misura

Very Slow (\(q = 40\))

*Pianist laughs hysterically*

then asks: "To yuh wha?"

gradually release
mi yah see what a sin ting!
Mi nev a know mi would-
in a live
Pi see a sight as dat!
Race-course tun cen-o-taph

V-Changes

Voice

Piano

Mem-ba wen race - course was a ram-goat rose
cem-e-ter-y
An now race course tun park
Race-course name af-ta roy al - ty

Whole heap o' street tun one way street
Is eas - i -
Più mosso \( (\dot{=}112) \) accel.

Tempo I \( (\dot{=}98) \)

Wid pianist proclaim enthusiastically:

"Police a-keep point duty uma della mi dear"

Mi walk all bout di ci-ty an mi mar vel ar di scene, An dung Duke Street House of Rep.re-sen.t.a.tives sweep clean!
VI-No Lickle Twang

Quasi Cadenza

Vivace $j = 108$

Mi glad fi see yuh come back, buwy____ But

Lawd, yuh let mi dung____

Mi shame a yuh suh till____ all a mi proud-ness drop a grung____

Yuh mean yuh guh ah Mer-i-ca

An spen six whole mont deh____ An come back not a___ piece bert-a dan
how yuh did guh weh? Bwoy, yuh nuh shame? Yeah! suh yuh come? Af ta yuh tan so

Groovy $v = 96$

lang! Not ev - en lick-le lang - uage bwoy? An yuh sis - tu wha work on - gle one week wid Mer - i - can She talk so nice now dat we have di jooce fi un - da - stan?
Bwoy, yuh coud-n im-prove yuh-self! An yuh get suh much pay Yuh spen six mont-a for-aign

Quasi Recitative
Vivace (\( q = 108 \))

Not ev-en a drap-es troo-in-

Or a pas-s di rid dim coat

\( \text{una corda} \)

\( \text{ppp voice and crystaline} \)
Buoy not even a gole: tear, or a gole chain round yuh throat?

Suppose mi lass mi pass guh intro- ject__ Yuh to a strang a__ As mi

lament-ed son who late-ly come from Mer-i-ca!__ Dem hood-a laugh aff'-ta mi buoy!__ Mi could-a' tell
A tempo (q=120)

Pianist exclaims in anger:
“Shut up yuh mouth! Ah don’t know how yuh an yuh puppa gwine to meck it out!”
tink yuh bring back some ting - new.

Yuh always call him 'Pa' dis eve-nin.

Quasi Recitative

When him come.

Poo? Yes 'Poo'.

Pianist* calls the name of the soloist as though in another room*

April 7- May 1, 2017
Bowling Green, Ohio.

When

soloist replies

Poo?!