THE SONGS OF LORI LAITMAN
An Analysis of Sunflowers and Early Snow

DMA Document

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ABSTRACT

The music of American composer, Lori Laitman, has charmed and impressed many art song enthusiasts, inspiring both admiration and devotion. Having written over 200 art songs, the American composer has continually earned the respect of critics as well as other composers, and perhaps most of all, singers. Her great respect for and assiduous attention to text and melody, in an age where something as simple as a memorable melody can seem scarce, has won her a place within the hearts of many. Known for her lyric writing - her soaring phrases and brilliant climaxes – Laitman’s music is both rewarding, and at times, deceptively difficult. Her music has been recorded and performed by numerous professional artists, and has finally landed the composer an entry in the eminent Grove Dictionary of American Music (which will be added to the 2012 edition).

Along with a biography of the composer, this paper takes a look at Laitman’s compositional technique as applied to the song cycles Sunflowers and Early Snow. An examination of these songs reveals Laitman’s various melodic and harmonic methods
used both to enhance her music as well as bind it together. This exploration provides insight into Lori Laitman’s compositional style, devices, architecture, and musical palette.
To Brad, Graham, Christopher, Hannah and Little Will. This is for you.
Acknowledgments


Permission granted by composer Lori Laitman for the use of her previously published material excerpted in this document
VITA

1974 ....................................................... Born Dayton, OH

1998 ....................................................... B.M. Music (Voice) magna cum laude, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

1998 ....................................................... Recipient, Margaret Speaks Distinguished Singer Award, The Ohio State University

1998 ....................................................... 1st Place, Women in Music Columbus Competition, Columbus, OH

1998 ....................................................... Maturina, Don Giovanni (Gazzaniga), Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Lucca, Italy

2000 ....................................................... Participant, Cleveland Art Song Festival, Cleveland, OH

2000 ....................................................... Encouragement Award, Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Cincinnati, OH

1999 – 2001 .............................................. Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Music, The Ohio State University

2001 ....................................................... M.M. Vocal Performance, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

2001 ....................................................... Donna Anna, Don Giovanni (Mozart), American Singers’ Opera Project, NY, NY

2002 ....................................................... Mavra, Mavra, The Ohio State
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<td>Soprano Soloist, Benedicité</td>
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<td>Vocal Health Lecture, Otterbein University, Westerville, OH</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009-2012</td>
<td>Graduate Teaching Associate</td>
<td>Department of Music, The Ohio State University</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>OMEA Competition, Olentangy Schools, Powell, OH</td>
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2001 – 2012 ............................. Senior Lecturer, Voice Faculty, Otterbein University, Westerville, OH

Fields of Study

Major Field: Music


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INTRODUCTION

The music of American composer, Lori Laitman, has charmed and impressed many art song enthusiasts, inspiring both admiration and devotion. Having written over 200 art songs, the American composer has continually earned the respect of critics as well as other composers, and perhaps most of all, singers. Her great respect for and assiduous attention to text and melody, in an age where something as simple as a memorable melody can seem scarce, has won her a place within the hearts of many. Known for her lyric writing - her soaring phrases and brilliant climaxes – Laitman’s music is both rewarding, and at times, deceptively difficult. Her songs are highly accessible and many are suitable for both young, developing singers and polished singers. The bulk of her songs were written for the soprano voice (many of which, she acknowledges, are possible for tenor), but a fair number of songs have been written for mezzo-soprano, and some for baritone, bass, tenor and countertenor. She has composed some duets as well. The majority of her songs are for piano and voice, but Laitman does have settings for voice with instrument(s), (e.g. cello, saxophone, trumpet, violin, etc.).
Laitman’s music has been recorded and performed by numerous professional artists, and has finally landed the composer an entry in the eminent Grove Dictionary of American Music (which will be added to the 2012 edition).
CHAPTER 1:
LORI LAITMAN

Lori Laitman was born on January 12, 1955 in Long Beach, New York, to Milton and Josephine Laitman - their 3rd and last child. At the age of seven, her family moved to New Rochelle, NY, where she lived until entering Yale at sixteen. Her musical training began upon her arrival, as she grew up hearing her mother singing and playing both piano and violin. Though Laitman says her mother’s singing was likely a subliminal influence, she still recalls distinct memories of her mother’s sound. Even as a child, Laitman’s ears were attuned to tone quality and the use of vibrato.¹

During her childhood, Laitman was “plopped in front of the record player,” at times, providing her growing mind with the music and drama of Peter and the Wolf, Tubby the Tuba, Bongo the Bear, and Peewee the Piccolo. Laitman sees these records as having had a profound influence over what would become a proclivity for dramatic music. She says, “I’ve always had a good dramatic sense. Here’s something that I figured out just a few years ago: Everything stems from the fact that I was an accident. My parents were older (ancient in those days, 36 and 38), young by today’s standards. But my sisters were older – eight and thirteen years older – and my parents were tired.”² Having
purchased the aforementioned recordings just a few years ago, Laitman revisited her
roots, calling them “terrific compositions, full of story and drama,” and bearing a great
influence over her sensibilities. 

The Laitman family was quite musical. Laitman’s two sisters (8 and 13 years her seniors)
were musicians as well. It is no wonder that the Laitman three became accomplished
musicians, having career musicians, as well as supporters of the arts, for parents. Like
her sisters before her, Laitman was offered a chance to go to France in order to study
with the great Nadia Boulanger. Unlike her sisters, she turned the offer down,
preferring the other option of Interlochen Music Camp in Michigan, pursuing flute
performance (and her childhood dream of becoming a professional flutist).

It was during the summer after Laitman’s sophomore year at Yale that she attended
Interlochen. There, the seeds were planted that would grow and blossom into a love of
writing music for the voice. This impetus came in the form of soprano, Lauren Wagner,
who would become a life-long friend and supporter of Laitman’s vocal compositions.
Though Laitman entered Yale as a flute performance major, she graduated magna cum
laude, with a degree in composition.
After receiving her Master of Music from The Yale School of Music, Laitman turned her attention to writing film and theater music. Though she composed mainly instrumental music for a period of years, she came back to writing for the voice upon receiving a request from Lauren Wagner, in 1991, who desired some new songs to put on her debut CD. So it was with some trepidation that Laitman composed her now revered song, “The Metropolitan Tower”, with poetry by Sara Teasdale. It was premiered by Ms. Wagner at Merkin Hall in NYC, December 16, 1991. At an after party, Laitman was introduced to composer, Richard Hundley, who’d been planning to set the very same poem (but said he would no longer entertain the idea after hearing it already set so beautifully). The success of “The Metropolitan Tower” seems to have stimulated Laitman’s discovery of her own talent for melody and drama, and weaving that into a sung text. She says, “And that was the beginning. I found my voice in writing for voice.”

Laitman sees her success as a mixture of luck, connections, the right personality for self-promotion, and, of course, talent – a gift for melody, an appreciation for words and over-all beauty. Many compliments have been given to Laitman’s superb talent for crafting attractive songs with impeccable attention to the setting of the text. Fanfare Magazine asserts “Her affinity for the voice . . . is beyond doubt . . . her songs represent outpourings of great beauty.” Gregory Berg, writing for the NATS Journal of Singing in 2010, said, “With nearly 200 songs already to her credit, there seems to be not the
slightest diminishment in the expressive impact of her writing or the bracing originality of her ideas.” He went on to say, “. . . Laitman seems to create great songs as easily and naturally as a tree produces apples, and one might add that hers are especially delicious and distinctive.”8 Laitman says, herself, that “. . . I feel that I was producing a great product . . . so, once a singer heard the song, they also wanted to sing it. The work, I feel, speaks for itself.”9

Laitman considers her “compositional birth” to be 1991. She believes her work with Lauren Wagner and the success of “The Metropolitan Tower” - and the resulting cascade of successes that followed - to be the real starting point of what she terms her “accidental ‘career’” in writing vocal music. She says:

“. . . having Lauren teach me how to write for voice - and writing all the early works for her when she was still singing - and when people heard her, was a breakthrough time as well. One thing flowed from another, and I found that she knew people and then they wrote to me (or I wrote to them) . . . Now, with all the articles in the NATS Journal of Singing and elsewhere, I find that I have to turn down work. People are always asking me to write songs. I have to learn how to say ‘no’.” 10

Currently, Laitman has about a four-year waiting list of people wanting song projects from her – a composer’s dream!
Lori Laitman, and husband Bruce Rosenblum (her college sweetheart), have lived in Potomac, MD, for approximately the past thirty years, where they raised their daughter (presently 29 years old) and two sons (26 and 32 years old). All of their children are musicians - the two boys, pianists, and the girl a cellist and composer. As a stay-at-home mom, Laitman had to learn to balance her life as both a composer and a parent. When “The Metropolitan Tower”’s success brought her talent into the forefront, Laitman was elated and a little shocked. After all, this was her first serious endeavor into the art song realm, and a rather easy one at that. Laitman felt, given the instinctive comfort and ease of this composition, that it perhaps was not very good. She was surprised and amazed that a mom from Potomac, “driving kids” could be so successful. She has had enough commissions, projects, and travels to keep her busy over the years and to this day. At this point, Laitman has composed 210 art songs for voice, as well as two operas, one oratorio, and two choral works. She deems her instrumental compositions to be of little note and has not kept track of them. However, she does include a “song without words,” for alto sax, in her full works list (noting that the song originally had a text, but the permission for its use was revoked after the composition’s completion). Laitman is in the process of completing a new choral work, a third opera, *Ludlow*, (based on a “verse novel” by poet David Mason) and has a potential commission for a children’s opera in the works.
Lori Laitman has composed both single songs and song cycles, and has set a wide range of poetry. She has used the verse of such poets as Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625), Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886), Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894), George Elliot (1819 – 1880) and Robert Browning (1812 – 1889), and has expanded to the 20th century poetry of Sara Teasdale (1884 – 1933), Dana Gioia (b. 1950) and Mary Oliver (b. 1935), among others. She has incorporated the use of various instruments alongside the voice, ranging from piano and voice alone, to voice with cello, saxophone, trumpet, violin and even chamber orchestra.

Laitman admits that the compositional process proves more challenging the bigger her works get, but she is more than up to the challenge. The composition of larger scale works, such as operas and choral works, requires so much more attention to the layering of text and rhythm, pacing, and dramatic affect in order to come out with understandable text and vivid colors. In discussing choral writing, Laitman says, “It was very difficult . . . because I am so attuned to the words themselves, and then to have 90 people all saying the same words, how do you make use of the different colors and have
them interact so that people can still understand the words (if you don’t want everyone singing the same rhythms, etc.)? It’s a big challenge, but I finally figured it out.”¹² She feels similarly about operatic writing, saying, “Sometimes I have a lack of confidence . . . but then I regain my confidence (although I am surer of the arias than anything else).”¹³

When in the midst of composing, Laitman says she will often find herself awake in the middle of the night, scrawling down ideas (once, on a tissue box, as that was all that was around). When it comes to the construction of the art song, however, Laitman is very much at home, especially since the completion of her opera, *The Scarlet Letter*. Moving from an expanded form back to one that is more compact feels “like settling into a Jacuzzi.”¹⁴

Laitman began her collegial experiments in composition with ragtime, an easy form, she says, with which to work in those days. Eventually, though, Laitman’s attention was drawn to film and the theater, where she spent some years working within this musical genre. Her work in this area has held the most sway over her compositional style. She says, “. . . I treat the poems as baby films . . . So, I am still writing film music in a way. Every inspiration comes from the words and my desire to not only set them right for the singer and my desire to create a beautiful melody, but also to create the right dramatic underpinning for the emotions behind the words.”¹⁵ She goes on to say, “I am not sitting around thinking about what harmonies to use in a technical sense, but more in a coloristic sense. That, in a way, is also like a film because I often think in a visual,
dramatic sense. That’s how everything is unified.”¹⁶ Laitman’s technique then, no matter what the vocal genre, is to always start with the vocal line, emphasizing what she regards as the most important words therein, allowing for her own interpretation of the text via her music. Thus, Laitman’s compositional process begins with the text, followed by a custom-fitted vocal line. The text is always the key, with the melodic line of each phrase crafted to best enhance the most significant lines of the text. “I never, never get a melody and squish words into it. . . I always compose the vocal line first, but I always have a sense of the harmonies, which I use to color the emotions behind the text” states Laitman.¹⁷ For her, the “DNA of the music” is enclosed in the melody, which serves as the vessel for her feelings about the poem or libretto.¹⁸

According to Lori Laitman, her compositional style is a truly organic process, one that is unique to her and can embrace no particular label. Though she is a 21st century composer, she does not ascribe any special classification to her way of writing or technique. Where music through the centuries has been categorized by words such as “impressionist”, “neo-romantic” or “minimalist”, Laitman does not see her music as fitting into a neat box. She will go so far as to call herself a “melodist,” but nothing more. “I do whatever I want. I am a free agent. The forms are irrelevant to me” says Laitman.¹⁹ When considering the influences others’ music may have had on her, Laitman says she will use “anything good.” In her view, all music has some influence, as she gleans what she can from the good, but feels inspired to do better upon hearing
that which is less than inspirational. Laitman acknowledges the works of Bach, Mozart, Barber, etc. as well as the popular tunes from *West Side Story*, *Oklahoma* and *My Fair Lady* as part of her musical upbringing. Again, her good friend and singer, Lauren Wagner, who played an important role in her early exposure to art song, introduced her to the music of Paul Bowles, cultivating Laitman’s passion for his writing. She admits, “...I loved the music of Paul Bowles. So, I patterned the first song [Metropolitan Tower] after his ‘Secret Words.’ I thought I would be so happy if I could ever write something as beautiful as that.” She also cites the works of Puccini and Verdi and “all the great melodists” as having taught her about drama. Still, in examining text, Laitman finds that sometimes she discovers a different structure or angle that was unintended by the poet; thus, she concludes that her process is unique and her interpretation alone.

Laitman’s music is characterized by her use of shifting meters, lack of key signatures, word painting, largely lyric writing, and memorable melodies. She says her “tonal centers shift so often that it would be impractical to utilize key signatures . . .” Impeccable attention to text is first and foremost, as is her choice of poetry, which spans across the wide spectrum of poetic styles. Her song cycles are not only linked together by the poetry, but by the music as well, with various leitmotifs - or “Laitmotifs” - which are sometimes “word paintings” circulating throughout a work and establishing a deeper connection. These “musical cells,” as Laitman terms them, can be
any figure that unifies an individual song or a whole cycle.\textsuperscript{23}  Says Laitman, “There is also another overarching architectural sense to my songs, where there is a sense of balance that I have in terms of, let’s say, high notes that connect over the course of the song, so that everything just feels right to me . . .”\textsuperscript{24}

The compositional method Laitman employs has deliberately gone through little change. Though she knows she has certainly “learned some things” over the years, she tries nevertheless to hold tight to what she feels she has always done intuitively. “It is all about the words – respecting them and respecting the singers and musicians – and trying to create something of beauty . . . that’s how I find my structure – always go back to the meaning of the words” says Laitman.\textsuperscript{25}  Once she has worked through a suitable melody and rhythm to accompany the text, she adds the harmony to flush out the emotions and to “add to the interpretation,” sometimes with bar lines following eventually. This delayed addition of bar lines is often the reason why her writing includes frequent use of changing meters, which results in an auxiliary layer of complexity. At times, she feels it is best to determine a path for the words before deciding the value of each measure. This way, she is better able to serve the meaning of the text. She says, “. . . the thing about that is when I am writing . . . I don’t know what the meters are. I don’t always write with bar lines, and then I have to figure out the best way to notate it – and there are so many choices. The piano parts always come afterwards, and I try to integrate everything.”\textsuperscript{26}  Laitman mentions, as well, that she
always contemplates dramatic balance when composing a song cycle, so as to create an easy flow from piece to piece. She looks to have contrasts between fast and slow, an equilibrium of emotion, within an individual song as well.

When it comes to choosing poetry, Laitman contemplates the length of the poem, the complexity of the text, and how much room is left for musical interpretation. Longer poems with numerous sections can present a compositional dilemma. Likewise, poems with a lot of homonyms and difficult words can be problematic. She has found that poems that are narratives are more suitable for an audience, especially when the audience is unable to refer to the text in a program.27 Lastly, Laitman looks for some “emotional breathing space . . . so that the music can take over what is left unsaid.”28

Laitman’s love for poetry is certainly a driving force behind her sublime music. She maintains that she must have an interest, a connection, to the poetry that she sets. Upon receiving a commission, Laitman will discuss the desired text(s) and overall theme with the commissioner, then reflect upon the text - or numerous texts - by the selected poet. When considering the text for a song cycle, Laitman says she often will complete the first song, then consult her stack of poetry to find the most suitable order for the rest of the texts, always looking to create the best dramatic effect.29
There are some guidelines Laitman would have followed regarding the interpretation of her songs. While she acknowledges an individual performer’s unique outlook, at the same time, she does provide some guidelines. First, Laitman leaves the door wide open for transpositions. She is ecstatic about having her music sung by as many people as possible, thus transposition is not an issue. She has even offered her assistance in doing so in order to provide a clean version, one that avoids voicing problems and “muddy accompaniment.” She has provided suggestions in her cycle *Living in the Body* that would enable a different voice type to sing it. She further notes that single songs may be extracted from her song cycles. She does not require that they remain intact in a group. Next, Laitman points out that her expressive markings, metronome markings, and even pedal markings are up for interpretation. She admits that she prefers a “blurred sound so the harmonies merge,” but would allow performers to make pedaling changes as needed for the performance space. She says, “For me, an expressive performance is paramount, so in a way, the markings are only guidelines. I hope each performer will find the best way to make the music leap off the page. . . . when I perform my own music, I can rarely stay in one tempo for even one measure.” Lastly, when it comes to her opera scores, Laitman is very particular about the instrumentation and requests that no changes be made there. She feels that the timbre of her chosen instruments intimate “psychological insight into the characters.” Laitman currently
maintains an *errata* section on her website. Score corrections and/or additions can be found there.
CHAPTER 3:
PREMIERES, COMMISSIONS AND REVIEWS

The songs of Lori Laitman have been performed around the world, receiving ample commendation. Her music has been premiered at such venues as Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Hall, Alice Tully Hall, The Cleveland Institute of Art, U.S. Holocaust Museum, the Kennedy Center, and Galleria Nazionale Palazzo Spinola di Pelliceria (Italy). Her opera, The Scarlet Letter, will have its professional world premiere at The Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver, CO, in May of 2013 by Opera Colorado. Her music has drawn the attention of such talented and renowned performers as Grammy-award-winning soprano Hila Plitmann, soprano Sari Gruber, soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, baritone Randall Scarlata, baritone William Sharp, Austrian baritone Wolfgang Holzmair, and pianist and coach/accompanist, Warren Jones. Each of these artists has performed her compositions in concert or in recordings.

Currently backlogged by approximately four years, Laitman constantly receives requests for commissions. Her music has been commissioned by singers, art song enthusiasts and scholars, foundations, etc. She has received commissions from Music of Remembrance (Kongsgaard-Goldman Foundation), a national foundation dedicated to
supporting music related to the Holocaust, as well as from her fervent supporter, Dr. Adelaide Whitaker, the Lyrica Society for Word-Music Relations, The West Chester University Poetry Conference, author Susan Dormady Eisenberg, the Randolph College Chorale (Virginia), Wolfgang Holzmair, The Nebraska Music Teachers Association, The University of Central Arkansas, The Sorel Organization, and the list goes on.

Laitman’s music has received enormously positive reviews. The reception has been overwhelmingly affirmative and optimistic. Major publications which have printed reviews include *The New York Times*, *NATS Journal of Singing*, *Opera News*, *Fanfare Magazine*, *American Record Guide*, *Gramophone Magazine*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Washington Post*, etc. Dr. Sharon Mabry, writing for the *NATS Journal of Singing*, said:

> The American song composer, Lori Laitman, has been lauded by reviewers as one of the most extraordinary song composers working today, likening her to Ned Rorem. She has an innate ability to capture the essence of textual meaning, a keen perception of vocal nuance, and a lavish intellectual and musical vocabulary that she uses with a facile ease.33

Rorem, acclaimed for his attention to text and vocal nuance, is generally held up as the quintessential American musical voice in the art song genre. Thus, a comparison to him is quite a compliment to Laitman’s accomplishments and appeal. Laitman’s song cycles, *Sunflowers* and *Early Snow*, were both commissioned by Dr. Adelaide Whitaker, a singer,
scholar, and ardent supporter of Laitman’s talent. Both cycles are settings of poems by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Mary Oliver. Whitaker commissioned *Sunflowers* for her former voice teacher, Dr. Thomas Houser, who’d introduced her to the poetry of Mary Oliver. Whitaker, holding a PhD in musicology, became a singer (a soprano) late in life at the age of 45, after her kids were grown. She retired from singing, however, at the age of 65 after premiering *Sunflowers*.\(^{34}\) The premiere was on December 10, 1999, at the Sumner School Museum in Washington, DC. *Sunflowers* was later recorded by internationally known soprano Sari Gruber, with Laitman at the piano, on Laitman’s second album entitled *Dreaming*. The album was reviewed by Gregory Berg of the *NATS Journal of Singing*, who said:

> This is...a stunning collection of widely varied songs by one of the finest art song composers on the scene today. Lori Laitman deservedly stands shoulder to shoulder with Ned Rorem for her uncommon sensitivity to text, her loving attention to the human voice and its capabilities, and her extraordinary palette of musical colors and gestures.\(^{35}\)

*Early Snow* was commissioned specifically for American soprano Jennifer Check to perform at her graduate voice recital at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, PA. It was premiered by Check in April of 2000 and was also recorded by her on Laitman’s third album entitled *Becoming a Redwood*. Gregory Berg, writing for the *NATS Journal of Singing* in 2007, wrote of the album:
Here is yet another collection that confirms the greatness of song composer Lori Laitman. It is difficult to think of anyone before the public today who equals her exceptional gifts for embracing a poetic text and giving it new and deeper life through music. She has an unerring way of enhancing a text’s beauty and meaning while not obscuring the text through artifice or excess. One also has to admire how deeply personal her songs are, and that depth of self-expression is surely one of the chief reasons why singers are drawn to her work and find her songs so gratifying to perform... Throughout this disk, one cannot help but be impressed at how well Laitman manages to set poignant texts of heartbreak and loss, and then in the very next song will write just as effectively in a more light-hearted vein.36

Lawrence A. Johnson of Gramophone Magazine wrote:

It’s inevitable that any American art-song composer will at some point be compared with Ned Rorem, as is done in this disc’s booklet notes. It’s a testament to the quality, melodic richness and subtlety of Lori Laitman’s songs that for once the comparison is not inapt...“Becoming a Redwood,” is an extraordinarily impressive achievement... [This] disc... gives increasing evidence of a major talent; Lori Laitman’s beautiful, sensitively crafted songs deserve to be performed widely, and much better known.37

Though Laitman’s reviews have been largely positive, as previously mentioned, there have been other opinions, such as that of Charles T. Downey of IONARTS, the moderator of this Washington, D.C.-based arts blog. Mr. Downey published a review of Laitman’s
music which was performed by Laitman herself (on piano) and others in March of 2012, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Mr. Downey wrote:

Laitman made a selection of her own songs, representing the sweep of her output from the 1990’s to the present, and a few excerpts of recent operas. Presented with that much Laitman, one had the sense of a body of music that was rather unvaried – sensitive to textual setting but too much of the same color and overly sentimental . . . after five songs, this was not in the least disagreeable, because the craftsmanship is at a high level; after twenty, it was exhausting, too much sweet nostalgia.\(^\text{38}\)

Cecelia Porter, a freelance writer for The Washington Post, said of the premiere of Laitman’s choral work “The Earth and I”:

The afternoon centered on the premiere of Lori Laitman’s “The Earth and I,” a first-time commission by the chorus. An unaccompanied setting of three poems by Emily Dickinson, the cycle generally adheres to the traditional language of 20th-century choral writing. But it has some lively interruptions of texture with interchanging contrapuntal and repetitive ostinato devices that emphasize Dickinson’s power-packed imagery.\(^\text{39}\)

Lori Laitman has created 4 albums of music to date. They are all on the Albany Records label. They include her debut CD, Mystery – The Songs of Lori Laitman (2000), Dreaming - Songs of Lori Laitman (2003), Becoming a Redwood – Songs of Lori Laitman (2006), and Within These Spaces (2009).
CHAPTER 4: 
MARY OLIVER

Mary Oliver is a celebrated American poet who resides in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Born in Maple Heights, Ohio, in 1935, Oliver attended The Ohio State University as well as Vassar College (though she did not complete a degree at either institution). She is as well known for her brilliant poetry and essays as she is for her private manner. She has been known to turn away many requests for meetings and/or interviews (as Laitman discovered), giving “very few interviews over the years . . . [preferring] to let her work speak for itself.” To this day, Lori Laitman has neither met Oliver nor heard from her regarding the musical settings of Oliver’s poems.

In 1984, Mary Oliver won the Pulitzer Prize for literature for her fourth book entitled *American Primitive*. Described as a “romantic nature poet,” Oliver’s work within this genre has met with both critical acclaim and controversy in the literary world as her poetry tends to obscure some commonly held boundaries that generally govern what had been for many years a traditionally male perspective. These boundaries encompass the dichotomies that exist between “nature and self, soul and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, subject and object, culture and nature, language and muteness,
immortality and death, imaginative poet and immature child, transcendence and immanence.”

Scholar Janet McNew says:

Hence, when we examine the archetypic situation of modern nature poetry and find a single human speaker considering his relation to a landscape (as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey") or to another creature (as in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"), we also recognize the interplay of these mythologically opposed pairs. Furthermore, all of these dichotomies have also been philosophically and mythically related to that most pervasive pair, masculine and feminine. The usual sexual dynamic in romantic nature poetry assumes, therefore, a speaking male subject who explores his relation to a mute and female nature.

Thus, Mary Oliver’s whole perspective takes on a decidedly positive feminine viewpoint in a genre that has traditionally employed a very male perception and characterization of women. McNew goes on to say that Oliver’s “. . . dreams of reunion with female creatures and with maternal nature receive the validation in feminist terms that male developmental theories and literary criticism built on them would deny.”

Stephen Prothero of Search compared Oliver’s work to that of Thoreau’s, saying:

Like Henry David Thoreau of Transcendentalist fame she is a naturalist whose attention to what used to be called the Book of Nature borders on both devotion and experimentation. Her poems . . . speak about the mysteries of mortality in a language that feels like home . . . mindfulness seems to be Oliver’s métier, looking and listening her scientific method and contemplative practice.”
Susan Salter Reynolds of the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review* said:

It has always seemed, across her 15 books of poetry, five of prose and several essays and chapbooks, that Mary Oliver might leave us at any minute. Even a 1984 Pulitzer Prize couldn’t pin her to the ground. She’d change quietly into a heron or a bear and fly or walk off forever. Her poems contain windows, doors, transformations, hints on how to escape the body; there’s the ‘glamour of death’ and the ‘life after the earth-life’...The new poems teem with creation: ravens, bees, hawks, box turtles, bears. The landscape is Thoreauvian: ponds, marsh, grass and cattails; New England’s ‘salt brightness’; and fields in ‘pale twilight.’

Oliver has won many awards, among them the Shelley Memorial Award; a Guggenheim Fellowship; an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Achievement Award; the Christopher Award and the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award for *House of Light*; the National Book Award for *New and Selected Poems*; a Lannan Foundation Literary Award; and the New England Booksellers Association Award for Literary Excellence. Oliver has held numerous residencies at universities, led workshops, served as a reader in most of the U.S. states and abroad, and holds three honorary doctorates from The Art Institute of Boston (1998), Dartmouth College (2007), and Tufts University (2008).

“The Sunflowers,” “Dreams,” and “Sunrise” were published in a collection of poetry entitled *Dream Work* (© 1986). “Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me,” “Blue Iris,” and
“Early Snow” were included in *What Do We Know*, a collection of poems and prose poems (© 2001).
CHAPTER 5:
TEXT AND MUSIC IN SUNFLOWERS

_Sunflowers_, a setting of three Mary Oliver poems from her collection _Dream Work_, logically bears a nature theme, the perspective of the poetic persona being constantly influenced by the world around her. The three songs all share a highly atmospheric mood. The title piece, “The Sunflowers,” the first in the cycle, is perhaps the most energetic, moving more often in a rollicking fashion; however, it still has its moments of flowing and soaring exuberance mingled with a delicate charm and intimacy. Songs two and three, “Dreams” and “Sunrise,” although more subdued in a way, have their moments of sweeping beauty with rising vocal lines and mounting peaks (“Sunrise” in particular). Laitman calls the cycle “richly atmospheric” and says the songs “. . . run the gamut of tempos and moods.”

Laitman has said of Sunflowers that it is among her most difficult works from both a performance and compositional standpoint, and for that reason, these songs are particularly dear to her. It was a more arduous process, the birth of this and other Mary Oliver projects. Oliver’s poems are longer and have more sections than those Laitman had previously set. So, the length, as well as the changing meters, intervals and
harmonies, render these songs somewhat difficult for the vocalist. *Sunflowers* took approximately nine months to complete. After its completion, Laitman received a letter from Oliver and her agent requesting a recording of the songs. Since a recording had not yet been made, Laitman sang the songs herself and sent them to the poet. In a letter of approval, Oliver wrote back saying how she “admired Laitman’s spunk.” Though Laitman was never granted permission to meet Mary Oliver, she was granted the right to set more of her poems (which is more than some other composers have been allowed).49

As mentioned previously, all of Laitman’s songs are her interpretation of the poetry she has set. She says, “. . . to read of her [Oliver’s] descriptions of sunflowers is just so gorgeous . . . her language, it makes you think about the beauty of the world . . . it’s a great honor to then filter those thoughts through my own lens.”50 The filtering of those thoughts has resulted in the songs’ being divided “. . . into sections that have distinct melodic characteristics” in the title song of *Sunflowers*.51 Laitman goes on to say, “. . . it all seems to flow from one to another, almost as if music represents the sunflowers swaying in the wind.”52 As is characteristic of Laitman’s writing, the songs from *Sunflowers* do not have a key signature or a constant meter. The meter changes frequently per Laitman’s technique of adding bar lines after composing the melody.
5.1 The Sunflowers

Range: $B^\flat_3 - G_5$   Tessitura: $E^\flat_4 - F_5$   Song Cycle Time: 14:00

Voice Type: Soprano   Song Time: 5:28

“The Sunflowers” is through-composed with the opening text repeated at the end, and has a largely homophonic texture. Laitman utilizes both broken and stacked chords, large leaps of 6ths and 7ths in the vocal line as well as a little chromaticism (though chromaticism is largely absent from this song, most notes fitting into a given mode). Her harmonic basis is mostly modal. She has created clear sections which are delineated by tempo changes and sometimes a meter change as well (making counting deceptively difficult). The music is riddled with diacritical markings changing tempi, dynamics and attitude or delivery of text and accompaniment, with notations like “pick up a bit,” “rubato,” “relaxed,” “lightly,” and “slightly slower.” The tempo of the entire song fluctuates between 132 and 176 to the quarter note.
From Mode to Mode – A Detailed Analysis

Again, the music of this song cycle stays firmly rooted in modality, forsaking the traditional major and minor tonalities. Thus, the use of multiple modalities in favor of tonality negates the need for a key signature. This lack of key signature and frequently changing meter, as mentioned above, is a nice reflection of the flexibility of the poetic meter. So, it is interesting to see how very often Laitman changes mode throughout this song, in a couple of cases using the appearance of tonality (a major key, or Ionian mode) instead of her more typical use of modality (with a lowered scale degree 7) to reflect the text.

“The Sunflowers” opens with the piano portraying the sunflowers swaying in the wind, as Laitman stated, via repetitive 8th note figures in the upper voice of the piano, and a lilting, ascending 8th note pattern in the lower voice. This lifting off of sorts on the strong beat of each measure in the piano’s lower voice adds to the swaying effect. The voice is given a couple of measures of broken chords in waltz fashion prior to its entrance. The modality from mm. 1 – 23 is F♯ Mixolydian. The time signature is a steady 3/4 until m. 24, where it expands to 5/4 with a tempo change, moving slightly faster as indicated. At this point, things become more difficult for the singer as the mode moves to C Mixolydian with the upper two voices and the piano’s lower voice meeting in a half-step collision (Fig. 1). Measures 24 – 42 see the vocal line following
the clashing tonalities doubled in the piano’s upper voice (receiving some reinforcement of the melody). The lower voice of the piano changes mode from bar to bar, starting with an emphasis of C Mixolydian (m. 24), moving to $D_b$ Lydian (m. 25), possibly $D$ minor

then $A_b$ Lydian or a III7 chord in E Major (m. 26), then a V chord in E Dorian by m. 27, continuing E Dorian into m. 28 (although, there’s not enough of scale degrees 6 or 7 to be certain of the mode in mm. 26 – 28). Based on the above, we see that Laitman does explore traditional (functional) harmonic relationships (thus our ability to apply a Roman numeral analysis off and on). The vocal melody, however, in mm. 24 - 33 contains

![Figure 1: m. 24](image)
phrases which slide down in half and whole steps (in tandem with the piano’s upper voice of triadic polychords, or opposing triads, in m. 24) moving into large leaps of 6ths and 7ths at the beginning of new phrases, not settling into a particular key. The dissonance achieved by the collision of tones does test the musician’s ear; however, help is given by the upper voice of the piano blasting out the vocal line (for the most part) an octave up. The descending trend of mm. 24 - 33 is reversed in mm. 33 – 36, where the melody slinks upward, moving from middle C to F♯5. The key shifts to E Aeolian (mm. 34 - 35), arriving in C Major by m. 36. In m. 36, the lower voice of the piano, playing a I chord followed by a V⁷ chord in C Major, is met with the upper voice’s polychords yet again (as in m. 24). Of note here is the V⁷ chord in the second half of mm. 36 and 37 (Fig. 2).

![Figure 2: mm. 36 – 38, Polychords/Chromatic Displacement](image-url)
Theorist Richard Bass would say this unusual seventh chord is the result of “chromatic displacement,” the idea being that the key pitches of a normal V\(^7\) chord are replaced by pitches that are moved up a half-step. So now, what normally would have been a G - (B) - D - F chord is spelled G - (B) - D\# - F\#, the 5\(^{th}\) and 7\(^{th}\) raised a half-step. This is a technique which is associated with the music of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Kabalevsky.

Regarding this idea, Bass said:

. . . It is the displacement of individual notes within the system that is fundamental to the technique. A chromatically displaced, or so-called ‘wrong’, note is also a kind of substitution, that is, it appears instead of, rather than in addition to, the notes of the chord. It does not function as an altered note, but represents a diatonic one; the diatonic note it represents is present as a ‘shadow’ cast by the displacement itself, and the result is a musical ‘synesis’ in which function is clear but terms in the diatonic syntax are not in strict agreement. Chromatic displacement depends heavily on perception in the illusion it creates. A displaced note is treated exactly as its diatonic counterpart would be – it is neither prepared nor resolved, and behaves as though nothing were ‘wrong’ with it in the first place . . . It derives from the concept of expanded tonality rather than from the concept of tonal dissolution’. . . it is evidently one which permits a relationship approaching equivalency between any two key systems separated by a semitone.\(^{53}\)

Another noteworthy technique employed in the beginning of the song is chromatic sequencing. In mm. 24 – 26, the piano’s lower voice has an ascending chromatic line (C chord, to a D\# chord, to a D chord, Fig. 3).
This chromatic sequence is suspended until mm. 32 – 35, where it picks up again briefly (E♭ chord, to an E chord). Between these two instances, the piano’s upper voice, along with the vocal line, has some quickly descending chromaticism in mm. 30 - 31 (C♯, C, B, B♭, A, A♭, and G), which occurs again in the vocal line, but up a 3rd, in mm. 38 - 39. This chromaticism brings us through the rapidly changing modalities of mm. 24 - 42, until a landing in E♭ Dorian in m. 43.

Meter shifts begin to permeate the song in m. 24. The 5/4 quickly dissolves into 4/4, then 3/4, 6/4, finally alternating between 6/4 and 5/4 for about a page. Measures 43 –
46, in Eb Dorian mode, portray the more lyric, relaxed mood requested. The piano accompaniment is stripped down to single notes in each hand, the raucous chords set aside, allowing for a more delicate affect for the text, “they are shy.” Descending 3rd motion can be observed in the piano’s lower voice (B♭ to G♭ to E♭) in mm. 44 - 46. But then the modality morphs to E Lydian for mm. 47 and 48, moving up a half-step to the new mode. Measures 49 – 51 bring the collaborative effort to a bi-tonal state in a 5/4 meter with a slightly faster tempo. The vocal line and the upper voice of the piano are clearly in the key of C Major (mm. 49 - 50), while the lower voice of the piano plays in the key of D♭ Major in a half-step relationship (Fig. 4).

![Figure 4: mm. 49 – 51, Bi-tonal Section with Quartal Alignment (arrows) in m. 49](image)
This clashing continues into m. 51 with the upper two voices in D♭ Major and the lower voice in D Major (again, a half-step relationship, offering dissonance). Through this section, you can see how Laitman outlines stacked 4ths (quartal alignment) in the descending melodic line of m. 49, adding to the interest (and also a precursor for what appears to be the chordal basis of “Dreams,” song number 2 in this cycle, Fig. 4). The musical feeling and the text in this section and beyond, mm. 49 – 56, bring back the rollicking, optimistic feeling and thicker chordal structure of mm. 24 – 38. The piano helps in developing this sentiment with its youthful, rollicking motif of mm. 36 – 38, which is repeated in mm. 51 – 53 and m. 56.

The second half of m. 51 through m. 54 finds the piano’s upper voice descending by half-step motion, not settling into a particular mode, while the lower voice continues with D Major. Measures 56 - 57 show an emphasis of D Lydian mode, which delivers us into another section of bi-tonality by m. 59. Measures 59 - 62 have the upper two voices (piano and vocal line) in the key of C Major, while the lower voice of the piano moves from E♭ Major (mm. 59 - 60) to D minor (mm. 61 - 62). The next couple of bars move all voices into D♭ Lydian. These tonal centers are reached via descending chromatic motion. It can be observed that the bass voice on the downbeat of mm. 59 and 60 moves down chromatically into mm. 61 and 62, and then again into mm. 63 and
64. This rapid changing of tonalities would certainly exemplify the text, “wand’ring,” in mm. 61 - 64. This text painting is further accomplished by the descending vocal line followed by an oscillating 8\textsuperscript{th} note figure in these bars (Fig. 5).

![Figure 5: mm. 59 – 64, Descending Chromatic Motion in Bass; Bi-tonal Section](image)

Measures 65 - 67 bring us through D minor 7\textsuperscript{th} chords to E\textsubscript{b} Major 7\textsuperscript{th} chords (piano’s lower voice, m. 67) and quartal harmonies (piano’s upper voice, m. 67). There is an arrival into E Mixolydian in m. 68, which is soon lost to a lowered scale degree 2 in m. 69, where an F Major 7 chord greets the ear, tainted only slightly by the A\textsubscript{b} in the piano’s upper voice. The upper two voices carry an ascending chromatic line from mm. 67 – 69, the chromaticism ending with a leap of a 6\textsuperscript{th} in the vocal line. Laitman shifts into m. 70 by moving up a half-step to F\# Major. This is abandoned by the next bar as the piano’s upper voice becomes freely chromatic, while the lower voice moves from G
Major to C# minor (m. 71), A Major (m. 72), then B♭ minor (m. 73). Through these measures, the lower voice maintains tertian harmonies, while the upper voice moves chromatically by single note (m. 71) followed by quartal dyads (mm. 72 - 73). The key of B Major is suggested in mm. 74 - 76, where a strong I - V - I is repeated in the bass, finally arriving more securely in the key by m. 77. Laitman transitions into this section via a diminuendo and a ♪♫♩ rhythmic pattern (mm. 74 – 76), which continues as a part of the new section in mm. 79 – 86, nicely bridging into the new material. The exuberance and mf/f dynamic and energy level from previous bars continues through m. 76, as the text, “Don’t be afraid to ask them questions,” is imitated in the piano’s R.H. in mm. 69 – 70 and mm. 72 - 73 in a partial quote of “to ask them questions.”

A “slightly slower” tempo begins a new mood in m. 79, arriving in A Dorian with an A pedal tone repeated on the downbeat of each bar through m. 86 (which helps to anchor the vocal line). This key continues through m. 92, until it shifts into G♭ Ionian (Major) in m. 93, the G♭ resounding as tonic. This arrival into a new tonal center is met with a meter and tempo change: 3/4 and “A Bit Faster” with ♩ = 152. For me, this portion effectively changes course along with the text, moving the music, singer and listener into the sunset of the youthful feeling of innocence and play; the feeling of the day
being over, the boisterous fun coming to an end, and the poignant, more mature reflection rising. It feels like a real turning point. The piano’s thicker chords gradually drop away into the broken chords of the single note patterns in the piano. Measures 93 - 97 see the return of the opening figure in the piano’s lower voice from the beginning of the song, bringing us back to the ♫♩♩ swaying of the sunflowers. The vocal melody in mm. 95 – 97 recalls the opening text of “into the field of sunflowers,” from mm. 18 – 21, evoking that initial sentiment of wonder and joy.

Measure 101 begins a shift away from G♭ Major, transitioning and migrating to F# Mixolydian, (m. 103), C Lydian (mm. 104 - 107), arriving in G♭ Lydian by m. 108, as the mf chords in the piano help to establish the new, calm mood at the slowest tempo yet, = 132. Measures 118 – 120 transition through C♭ Lydian (m. 118), A♭ Dorian (m. 119), to an E Major sonority (spelled with flats, as if it could be F♭ Lydian) via descending 3rd root motion (m. 120). We finally arrive in C♯ Dorian (mm. 122 – 125) then return to F# Mixolydian (mm. 126 – 128) as in the opening of the song. More text painting abounds in mm. 121 – 122, as the vocalist sings, “The coarse roots in the earth,” in a descending line, illustrating a decline into the earth. Measures 129 – 137 are harmonically flavored
with B centricity, but moving toward F# Major in mm. 135 - 137. The piano’s upper voice is almost mournfully reminiscent of the earlier text, “into the field of sunflowers,” in these bars (mm. 135 – 137). The end of the song brings our ears back to the sounds of F# Mixolydian in mm. 138 - 150, except for the sour, almost questioning last note of the song - which is the leading tone - leaving the listener with the suggestion of discontent or melancholy.

Overarching Structural Elements

Through this analysis, there are some overarching structural elements that can be discerned, giving us insight into Laitman’s general compositional technique. Laitman’s basic harmonic language is hugely triadic and modal, not tonal. “The Sunflowers” flits from mode to mode, often every several measures or even every measure in some places (as in mm. 24 – 35). There is also this stacking of 3rd (triads) which permeate the harmonies (tertian harmonies). Most interestingly, Laitman’s harmonic language uses a basic tonal triad which is enhanced by the addition of either a 2nd, 4th or 6th above the root of the chord, adding a sense of color. For example, in the very first measure an F# major triad is outlined (F# - A# - C#). The D# in the lower voice of the piano is heard as
an appoggiatura, while the G♯ in the piano’s upper voice is a 2\textsuperscript{nd} above the root of the chord, providing the color previously mentioned (\textit{Fig. 6}).

\textit{Figure 6}: mm. 1-2, 2\textsuperscript{nd} above root of chord (m. 1); 4\textsuperscript{th} above root of chord (m. 2)
Another example of this, among many, is in mm. 93 - 94 where the notes stack into a G♭ major 7th chord (G♭ – B♭ – D♭ - F). The A♭ in the upper and lower voices of the piano gives us the 2nd above the root of the chord, and the E♭ in both voices of the piano provides the 6th above the root, thus allowing for enhancement of a plain triad (Fig. 7).

An example of the addition of a 4th above the root can be found in m. 2, where a minor v chord (C♯ E- G♯) is enhanced by the addition of an F♯ in the piano’s upper voice (Fig. 6).

Within Laitman’s modal approach, there is often a use of sub-tonic (lowered scale degree 7) and not a leading tone (raised scale degree 7.) The technique of adding particular notes above the root for color (added-note chords), as well as the use of
modality, became common around the late-romantic era and into the impressionistic era and beyond and was used by composers like Debussy, Ravel and Grieg. This idea is considered a “... modification of the traditional tertian system of chord construction ... . [it] will frequently feature either a 2nd (or 9th) or 4th above the chord root ... [the 4th being] particularly likely to occur in jazz arrangements.”54 A couple examples of 21st century composers who utilize this technique are choral composers Eric Whitacre and John Rutter. Their music emulates this idea.

Another notable harmonic quality of Laitman’s music is her use of root motion by 3rds. This is a practice that began in the late romantic period in a movement away from the root motion of 4ths and 5ths applied during the common practice era (approximately late Baroque through early to mid-Romantic period) and to what was considered a more vibrant harmonic quality with root motion by 3rds. By Debussy’s time, some common characteristics of impressionist music included “... irregular phrases, avoidance of traditional harmonic progressions, unresolved dissonances, use of 9th chords, frequent use of modality and exotic scales ...”55 An example of this is when Laitman moves from m. 22 in the lower voice of the piano to m. 24. Movement into the new mode of C Mixolydian happens via an E to a C, the C being the root of the I chord in the new key (Fig. 8).
This also happens between mm. 31 - 32, where the piano’s lower voice sounds an F♯, the root of the F♯ Major arpeggiated chord, moving into the new mode of E♭ Ionian (Major), the E♭ on beat one being the root of the I7 chord. More root movement by a 3rd can be seen in the transitions from mm. 35 - 36, 48 - 49, and 92 - 93 (heard as a third, though it is written as a 2+).

Lastly, chromatic voice leading permeates Laitman’s music. She has instances of chromatic sequencing as well as instances of arriving in a new mode via what sounds like a leading tone to tonic relationship. This can be observed in numerous places, like mm. 29 - 30, where in lieu of traditional dominant to tonic function, Laitman establishes dominant functionality by using a major triad built on the leading tone of the new key. The F Major chord has a dominant function, as it resolves up a half-step to an F# Major.
chord (Fig. 9). You can hear that it has a dominant function, but it is not a traditional leading tone or dominant chord; a traditional leading tone chord would be a diminished triad built upon the 7th scale degree (E♯ or F♮), and a traditional dominant chord would be a major triad built upon the dominant scale degree (C♯). Theorist William Hussey says:

... a chromatic scale is symmetrical, realized through a recurring pattern that does not define a key. As Daniel Harrison has stated, a half step alone can, on some level, function as a dominant agent... Chromatic alteration of a diatonic chord is not uncommon in tonal music, and such changes to diatonic harmony often involve the dominant, such as the V+ chord, with a raised scale degree 2 that functions as a leading tone to scale degree 3 of a subsequent tonic harmony.

This leads to all three notes of the F Major triad resolving upward chromatically.

Moments of cadence are articulated by this half-step voice leading, where the major triad a half-step below moves into a new tonal center by ascending chromatically. The
same dominant functionality can be seen as the D Major chord in mm. 56 - 57 moves up a half-step into E♭ Major in m. 59.

Overall, “The Sunflowers” is a journey through periods of youthful enthusiasm, a playful sense of wonder and awe to a more seasoned sentimentality, reflection, and sense of being. We experience her “free color associations” during moments of transparency and lightness (as in the beginning of the piece) which are followed by some brassy, clangy moments of rollicking fun (mm. 49 – 70). Laitman guides us through this progression with a bright and colorful spectrum of musical nuance on an engaging and vibrant palette of meter shifts, polychords, and tertian and quartal harmony among other tools. We are brought through an affective series of rolling waves, ebbing and flowing from one emotion into another, bound together by the expressive power of Laitman's vision.
5.2 Dreams

Range:  C4 – A♭5
    Tessitura:  E♭4 – F5

Voice Type:  Soprano  
    Song Time:  4:09

“Dreams” shares the same through-composed form of “The Sunflowers” as well as the lack of key signature in favor of changing modalities. The texture is mostly homophonic with a hint of polyphony in mm. 40 – 47. There are melodic quotations of the vocal line in the piano’s upper voice as in the previous song. We see numerous instances where the meter changes, accompanied by many directives requiring a change in feeling, tempo or declamation of text. For example, Laitman requests that the singer “emphasize the ‘c’ with a hiss,” in the word “center,” (m. 10) or that the “m” of “imagine” should be elongated and begun on a certain note (as in mm. 13 – 14). Other specifications include directions like, “bring out imitation here,” “slight rubato here,” “push tempo a bit, as if falling down,” and “exhausted.” Though, as has previously been mentioned, Laitman allows for differences in each individual performance, she is nevertheless very clear about the direction her music should take. Pedal is used throughout and is sustained longer in some cases (e.g. m. 3), adding a layer of fog to the dream. This use of pedal blurs together harmonies, creating the desired effect.
Melodic components include a mixture of conjunct and disjunct motion with some large intervallic leaps, as in mm. 31 – 32 where the vocalist must leap an ascending 10th and a descending 8ve in m. 75. The harmonic basis of this song is once again modal. “Dreams” begins in Bb Aeolian with an “Elastic tempo” and “ebb and flow with the phrases” as indicated with $\dot{\text{\Large \text{.}}}$ = 160. The time signature starts out at 5/8 then quickly turns to 2/4, 3/4, and back to 5/8 all within the first page of music (12 bars). The song progresses through composite, duple, triple, and quadruple meter, ultimately ending in 3/4. The meter changes work particularly well to enhance the disorderly, free nature of dreams. These changes in meter are not necessarily in line with tempi changes which, again, work to complement the poetic idea. The dream-like state, as per the title of the song, is carried out by means of the flexible tempo and cascading 8th note pattern in the piano’s upper voice. The piano introduces the ebb and flow with the solitary descending upper voice figure, the vocal line entering by the end of m. 2. During the opening text, the lower voice of the piano gently hammers out a treble clef “bell-like” (as indicated) alternating $\text{♩. ♩/♩. ♩.}$ pattern from mm. 3 – 7, increasing the performers’ awareness of time, a helpful addition to this flowing asymmetric, composite meter which makes counting challenging (mainly because the singer must keep counting 8th notes in a changing 3 + 2 to a 2 + 3 composite configuration) (fig. 10).
Though there are definite transitions or shifts which define sections of the song, the poem itself doesn’t migrate through emotions and sections quite in the same way as “The Sunflowers.” The revelation of meaning seems much more subtle and remains a misty reflection gleaned from bleary eyes and a dazed psyche upon waking from a night’s parade of hazy images. “Dreams” maintains a hypnotic, atmospheric feel throughout without quite as much sectionalization as “The Sunflowers.” A single narrative is achieved here with only momentary excursions into different emotional climates. Measures 36 – 47, on the text, “and there are diversions . . .” clearly changes in feeling, eliciting a more energetic musical response to the mystery of the happenings. The piano accompaniment becomes heavier and laden with 16\textsuperscript{th} and 32\textsuperscript{nd} note passages (the 32\textsuperscript{nds} painting the image of the birds in the text, “birds that come and go,” illustrating the fluttering of wings in the piano’s upper voice in mm. 41 and 47) (fig. 11).
As the piano becomes more animated in this section, there is a hint of polyphony as the upper voice of the piano presents an elaboration on the vocal melody, changing only slightly in rhythm (mm. 42 – 43). The vocal line builds to a climax on an A₅⁵, the peak of the song’s vocal range, with the direction to be “more ‘floaty’ than aggressive.” This moment of dream-like confusion comes to an end in m. 51 as the piano finishes a four-bar transitional rant, re-entering a more relaxed tempo. The ebb and flow of the opening music is reiterated as a new section begins in m. 52, the piano’s R.H. playing the cascading 8th notes with the same intervallic skips in 5/8 time, but in bass clef instead of treble clef.
There are numerous instances of text painting throughout “Dreams.” I have already mentioned the piano’s illustration of the word “birds” in mm. 41 and 47. Earlier on, however, the m. 17 text, “string them all together” sung on an ascending vocal line with the word “string” carried over two and a half beats in this 3/4 section exemplifies the notion. The text “It is a long night” in mm. 26-28 sees more sustained, chordal figures in the piano accompaniment, effectively slowing down the rhythmic motion from the 8th notes of the previous section, and dragging out the word “long” over the course of m. 27. As the music continues into the “diversions” section in m. 37, the diversions are represented by the changed, more energetic musical atmosphere of the piano accompaniment. Another more intriguing idea on text painting comes in m. 62, as the word “roots” is sung while the bass sounds a broken quartal harmony on A and E, the only notes outside of the measure’s mode of E♭ Phrygian. It is a striking idea that perhaps Laitman was hinting at the harmonic “roots” of the song, as the basis of her chordal structure appears to be quartal throughout the entire song (fig. 12).

The last instance of text painting occurs in m. 82 on the word “blossoms,” as the piano and vocal line reach a dynamic level of forte, the vocal line cascading down in imitation of the opening measures of the piano’s 8th note figures (mm. 1 – 7), in a blossoming effect. This blossoming is then repeated by the piano in mm. 83 and 84.
The piano accompaniment successfully reinforces the text on numerous occasions, imitating the vocal line, as it did at the end of the song as discussed above. There is an exchange of melodic material between the vocal line and piano in mm. 11 – 12 as the line, “In the center of every petal is a letter,” sees the upper voice of the piano reiterate the “is a letter” portion in mm. 12 – 13. A few bars later, the text “only remember,” is imitated in m. 16 by the piano’s upper voice as well. Special attention is called to this one as Laitman inscribed, “bring out imitation here.” Moving along, as the tonalities reminiscent of the music of Samuel Barber bring about a new section and mood in m. 25, the text, “It is a long night,” is repeated in the piano’s upper voice in mm. 28 – 30. The vocalist’s very next utterance of “and not an easy one,” is immediately quoted in mm. 31 – 32, but in the rhythm of the “long night” text of mm. 27 – 28 (and slightly different intervalically on the last two notes). Interestingly, as a side note, Laitman
transitions from flats to sharps here in m. 32, having the piano read sharps while the vocal line remains in flats (which she does in other songs as well). This would presumably aid the singer as the flat spellings make for an easier translation of intervallic leaps, particularly at the end of m. 31. F to Eb is easier to understand as a Major 2nd than is F to D#, which visually is a 3rd. There are two more occasions of imitation. The upper voice of the piano leaps up an octave in mm. 34 – 35 to gently restate the text, “so many branches,” from mm. 31 – 33. Finally, the m. 65 text, “two or three syllables,” is imitated in part by a ♬ ♩ figure on beat 3, quoting only the words “two or three.” The many echoes of the vocal line during the song help to enhance the dream-like state, the meandering thoughts that seem to emphasize a point that remains just out of reach.

Overarching Structural Elements

Like “The Sunflowers” before, “Dreams” is mostly modal. The beginning modality of Eb Dorian lasts until m. 14, where a Cb in the vocal line, the only note outside of the scale, offers a subtle shift into the new mode of Db Dorian. Of interest, Laitman makes use of arpeggiated quartal harmonies in mm. 10 -12 in the piano’s lower voice, a significant element in this song as previously mentioned (fig. 13).
The next shift comes in m. 19, where the G in the upper two voices signifies a change to D♭ Lydian mode. As Laitman transitions to a new section, we see yet again a technique which has become a common mark of a Laitman transition in this song: quartal harmony. The chords in m. 22, underpinning the text “answer,” lead us into the transitioning tones spelled out by quartal dyads (two notes stacked into 4ths intervalically). Measures 23 - 26 begin the quartal harmonies which become the foundation of all transitions in the song. These chords bring about the new mode of G♭ Ionian in m. 25, as well as a new mood (fig. 14).
The piano’s lower voice maintains a G♭ chordal structure in mm. 28 - 29, leading us into the next bar (m. 30) where G♭ Ionian still seems to be emphasized; however, the F♭ in the piano’s lower voice suggests the possibility of G♭ Mixolydian, though the upper voice of the piano maintains an F♮. The very next bar sees the piano’s lower voice step up to the F natural, providing a solid G♭ Ionian mode (m. 31). This is only fleeting, however, as m. 32 leaps down to C♯ Aeolian. C♯ retains its tonicity through m. 36, then shifts to a B♭ centricity (B♭ Aeolian) in mm. 37 - 47. Quartal tetrachords are employed in m. 37 on beat 3, perhaps giving emphasis to the text, “diversions” (fig. 15).
Upon reaching mm. 48 - 49, the transitional method of mm. 23 - 26 once again finds ground. This time, however, the chords have become thicker, the quartal dyads of the previous bars replaced by quartal tri-chords in the piano’s upper voice, while the dyads are retained in the lower voice (an interesting expansion on the earlier transitional idea) (fig. 16). This transitional material (mm. 48 - 51) is played during a poco accelerando, ending in a relaxed tempo, mimicking the previous transition. Measures 50 - 51 of this transition contrast triads with quartal dyads (m. 50), then 7th chords with quartal dyads (m. 51), this expansion finally reaching a climax (fig. 17). As we return to the descending chords and relaxed ebb and flow of the opening of the song (m. 52), the new key is F Aeolian. This new key lasts through m. 59, where the G♭ in the piano’s lower voice becomes our only preparation for the new mode of F Phrygian in m. 60.
The stability of this mode is slightly undermined by the F♭ (receiving a tenuto) in the piano’s lower voice in mm. 60 and 61. The F♮ in the bass in these bars, however, helps us stay in F Phrygian. In keeping with the pattern, we quickly move away from this mode and into another (E♭ Phrygian) in m. 62. This is the bar, as previously discussed, that bears the possibility of text painting on the word “roots,” which is underpinned by the broken quartal dyad.
The song continues into D Ionian in m. 64, with no preparation for the new modality in the previous bar. This lack of preparation perhaps suggests text painting on the words, “and leap awake,” jolting the listener into a new mode (and notably Laitman’s first use of Ionian mode in this song) via an intervalllic leap. This mode melds into B Lydian (m. 66) followed by B Mixolydian (m. 67) and B♭ Dorian (mm. 68 - 73). A VI chord in the mode of B♭ Aeolian greets our ears in m. 74. Measure 76 begins a move away from a B♭ tonal center with an E♭ Major 7th chord, followed by a D♭7 chord (m. 77), and E Major 7th chord (m. 78), then an F# Major chord (m. 79) and a G Major 7th chord (m. 80). This is a tendency of Laitman’s, to add a 7th, 9th or 11th above the root of a chord (extended tertian sonorities). Some examples of this can be found in mm. 8 (9th), 10 (7th), 14 (11th),
Finally, we clearly arrive in A♭ Ionian in m. 81, which quickly gives way to E Major (mm. 82 - 83), E Lydian (m. 84), and ends in the key of A♭ Ionian (mm. 85 - 87).

The last major harmonic technique used by Laitman is the addition of a 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, or 6\textsuperscript{th} above the root of a basic triad, adding color and interest to what would otherwise be a more tame harmony of stacked 3\textsuperscript{rds}. “Dreams” is riddled with this technique (as was “The Sunflowers.” Some places where this can be found are m. 25 (4\textsuperscript{th} above root), m. 32 (2\textsuperscript{nd} above root), m. 79 (6\textsuperscript{th} above root), and m. 81 (6\textsuperscript{th} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} above root).

“Dreams” moves from a beginning modality of E♭ Dorian to an ending key of A♭ Major, but leaving the listener without an absolute resolution as the vocal line and upper voice of the piano sound a resounding B♭, subtracting from the consonant sound of the A♭ Major chord. This song is the shortest of the three in the song cycle, providing a nice thematic transition from night time to the splendor of the rising sun as depicted in the last song, “Sunrise.” Though the text of “Dreams” stays within the same basic framework or thought process, both “The Sunflowers” and “Sunrise” contain a more elevated progression of purpose. In “Dreams,” we see a relationship to “The
Sunflowers” as the two songs bear much of the same connective tissue, i.e. the changing modalities and meter, enhanced triads, extended tertian sonorities, the use of polychords and quartal harmonies, bi-tonality, text painting, playing with major and minor sonorities, and chromatic voice leading. These techniques form the foundation of Laitman’s songs, linking them together, providing the backbone of the song cycle. As we will see in “Sunrise,” much of the same binding can be observed.

5.3 Sunrise

Range: E4 – B♭5  
Tessitura: F4 – G5

Voice Type: Soprano  
Song Time: 4:29

In keeping with the other songs in the Sunflowers cycle, “Sunrise” too is through-composed, homophonic and has a lot of musical quotation of the vocal melody in the piano part. There is no key signature, once again, due to Laitman’s use of frequently changing modalities. The meter changes often and several tempo changes occur with (or without) expressive markings like “very expressive,” “a bit freely,” and “sighing.”

Alongside the frequently shifting modalities, “Sunrise” has numerous instances of extended tertian sonorities, a couple cases of bi-modality, as well as flirtation with
major and minor tonalities within the same bar, enhancement of plain triads, text painting, harmonic sequencing, and root motion of a 3rd, all of which add up to the glue which links this song cycle together (along with the poetry, of course). “Sunrise” begins in the mode of B♭ Aeolian, the piano opening with broken chords, followed by the entrance of the vocal line in m. 2. There are numerous instances of quotation, the piano echoing the vocal line. The first occurrence is in m. 4, where the upper voice of the piano echoes, in a partial quote, the text “die for it.” The whole of the text, “You can die for it,” is quoted rhythmically in mm. 6 – 7 in the piano’s upper voice again. Measures 8, 10, 12, 16, 18 – 22, 23 – 24, 35, 39, 81 – 84, 93 – 94 and 105 - 107 all contain either rhythmic or melodic quotes as well via the piano’s upper voice. There are a couple of bars where Laitman has the piano begin a rhythm and/or melody which is then immediately quoted by the vocal line. This occurs in m. 54 as well as mm. 80 – 81, the upper voice of the piano pre-empting the text in the vocal line, this reversal adding interest, as it only occurs twice.

In exploring Laitman’s use of changing modalities, it may be noted that Ionian mode occurs infrequently and as a text painting tool. The first occurrence of this mode is in mm. 45 – 50, where E Ionian (Major) appears along with the text, “joyfully,” contributing to the upbeat mood. It is notable that this same mode, E Ionian, resurfaces for one bar (m. 77) during a line of text about happiness, but more significantly returns in mm. 98 –
104, as “happiness, happiness” is repeated in the vocal line. So this sentiment of joy is melded with the happy key of E Ionian (forsaking the regularly lowered scale degree 7 of the other modes that have been used most often). Not only is Ionian mode used to complement emotion, but some twinkling treble quartal & quintal harmonies are iterated in the piano’s upper voice as well, further solidifying the change in emotion and thus the text painting in both passages (fig. 18). Besides these measures, the Lydian, Dorian, and Aeolian modes pretty much dominate this song, allowing for the instances of Ionian to really stand out.

A case for further instances of text painting can be made for mm. 26 – 28, the “dawn” exemplified by the expansive feel of the arpeggiated chords in the piano as well as the
shift from $B^\flat$ Aeolian (m. 25) to the sounds of $E$ Lydian (mm. 27 – 33). Measures 46 – 51 seem to illustrate the rising sun yet again via a basically ascending vocal line, pushed up by a mounting crescendo from $mp$ to $f$.

In the discussion of Laitman’s use of modality, another common thread within this song cycle is Laitman’s use of bi-modality, which is found yet again in “Sunrise.” The first instance of this occurs in mm. 11 – 13, where the piano’s lower voice is in the key of $D^\flat$ minor while the upper two voices share $D^\flat$ Lydian mode (fig. 19). This bi-modality returns in mm. 16 – 18, the lower and upper two voices divided into the same modes as before (fig. 20). In both of these cases, the piano’s upper voice moves through the bi-modality in the same descending rhythmic sequence of ♬♩♩♩♩♩♩, providing commonality between the two passages.
Figure 19: mm. 10 – 13, Bi-modality (mm. 11 – 13)

Figure 20: mm. 16 – 18, Bi-modality
Continuing through the realm of connective tissue, Laitman’s use of extended tertian sonorities, as well as harmonic sequencing, can be observed in mm. 19 – 22. A whole-step sequence is used in the bass as the downbeat of each measure sees movement from C# to B to A then G, progressing through undetermined modal centers with 11th chords (*extended tertian sonorities* – this time stacked 3rd's up to an 11th) (*fig. 21*).

Measures 20 – 22 harbor Bⅰⅰ, Aⅰⅰ, and Gⅰⅰ chords, respectively. The sequence serves as a transition into a new emotion as depicted by the text at its end in m. 22 (and m.23), “But this morning . . .” In accordance with the other two songs of the *Sunflowers* cycle, m. 19 is yet another instance of Laitman’s play with minor vs. major mode, thus the feeling of not quite settling into either key.

*Figure 21: mm. 19 – 22, Extended Tertian Sonorities (mm. 20 – 22) & Descending Whole-step Sequence (arrows, mm. 19 – 22)*
Using another technique that we’ve seen previously, Laitman shifts into the new mode of B♭ Aeolian in m. 23 via root motion of a 3\textsuperscript{rd}, the bass moving from a G up to a B♭.

Again, this way of entering a new mode is one of the hallmarks of Laitman’s compositional method. It can be seen in various other places in this song, as in mm. 50 – 52 where the bass note doesn’t actually shift a 3\textsuperscript{rd}, but the mode relationship is that of a 3\textsuperscript{rd} (E Major to C Major to A Major). Another example can be found in the movement from C Lydian to E♭ Dorian in mm. 64 – 65, and then back again from E♭ Dorian to C Lydian in mm. 70 – 71.

Finally, the method of enhancing triads via the addition of a 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 4\textsuperscript{th} or 6\textsuperscript{th} above the root of the chord, a technique associated with a move away from the Common Practice Era, can be observed in “Sunrise” as well. Some examples include m. 23 (2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} above root), m. 45 (2\textsuperscript{nd} above root), m. 65 (4\textsuperscript{th} above root), and m. 66 (2\textsuperscript{nd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, and 6\textsuperscript{th} above root). Again, these chords offer some color and interest beyond the stacked thirds of a triad, a method which began in the late romantic era in a movement toward something that, at the time, was considered atypical and exciting. This technique, combined with the use of modality, brings to mind Laitman’s idea of “free color associations” once again, giving the music its 20\textsuperscript{th} Century feel.
CHAPTER 6:
OVERARCHING COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS OF EARLY SNOW

*Early Snow*, which consists of “Last Night The Rain Spoke to Me,” Blue Iris,” and “Early Snow,” is compositionally similar to the *Sunflowers* song cycle. The cycle is approximately 9.5 minutes in length, “Blue Iris” being the shortest (1:44) and the title song, “Early Snow,” being the longest (4:45). Each song is through-composed. There are numerous elements in this song cycle that were seen earlier in *Sunflowers*. Among these elements are Laitman’s consistent use of modality (more often than tonality, though the Ionian mode is explored more frequently in *Early Snow*), homophony, shifting meter, text painting, the addition of a 2\(^{\text{nd}}\), 4\(^{\text{th}}\), or 6\(^{\text{th}}\) above the root of a chord, extended tertian sonorities, root motion of a 3\(^{\text{rd}}\), and in one case bi-modality as well.

There are, however, a few elements that stand out as unique in *Early Snow* which were not included in *Sunflowers*. The first of these is the way Laitman begins “Blue Iris” and “Early Snow,” the second and third songs of the cycle. Though there is not an “attacca” written in, these last two songs begin within the same key and specifically with the same
notes as were used to end the previous song. So, the opening measure of songs two
and three forge a connection between each preceding song, thereby binding the song
cycle together with a musical element.

Another element that sets the *Early Snow* songs apart is Laitman’s use of the *acoustic
scale* (the *Lydian-Mixolydian scale*), which was so loved by Claude Debussy. The
acoustic scale uses the combined attributes of the Lydian and Mixolydian scales, thereby
using both the ♯4 and ♭7 scale degrees at the same time (*fig. 22*). This can be observed
in “Blue Iris” in mm. 7 – 9 (*fig. 23*) and in “Last Night The Rain Spoke to Me” in mm. 46 –
51. This variability of a single scale degree within one mode implicates the simultaneous
use of two modes.

![Figure 22: The Acoustic Scale](image-url)
Laitman also expands on her previous idea in *Sunflowers* of playing around with major and minor modes within the same measure. Here, in “Blue Iris,” she extends the idea into a couple of bars of “F Major/Minor,” repeatedly using opposing half-steps against each other in mm. 10 – 11. This combination of Ionian and Aeolian leads to the last distinctive compositional element used in *Early Snow*. Laitman’s use of the acoustic scale, playing on the variability of a single scale degree, becomes broadened and changed into a technique that is reminiscent of Bartók’s *polymodal chromaticism*. Bartók would intentionally fuse two modes together, allowing for the variability of scale degrees 3, 6, and 7, which allows for 10 distinct pitches (as opposed to the 7 distinct pitches of the acoustic scale). So, $b2$ and $#4$ are the only scale degrees missing from Bartók’s scale (rendering it highly chromatic). Intentional or not, this is what Laitman
has done in mm. 10 – 11, as the G♭ (m. 10) may be considered a non-chord tone (fig. 24).

Bartók said of this technique:

As the result of superimposing a Lydian and a Phrygian pentachord with a common fundamental tone, we get a diatonic pentachord filled out with all the possible flattened and sharpened degrees. These seemingly chromatic flat and sharp degrees, however, are totally different in their function from the altered chord degrees of the chromatic styles of the previous periods. A chromatically altered note of a chord is in strict relation to its non-altered form; it is a transition leading to the respective tone of the following chord. In our polymodal chromaticism, however, the flat and sharp tones are not altered degrees at all; they are diatonic ingredients of a diatonic modal scale . . . They are not altered degrees of a certain chord leading to a degree of a following chord. They can only be interpreted as the ingredients of the various modes used simultaneously – a certain number of these seemingly chromaticized degrees belonging to one mode, others to another mode . . . But not only different modes can be superimposed; the same can be done with the common major and minor scale, or to be more exact, with a major and minor pentachord. As a result we will get a triad with a double third, one a minor third, the other a major. 57

Figure 24: “Blue Iris,” mm. 10 – 11, Polymodal Chromaticism
In summary, the dissection of *Sunflowers* and *Early Snow* really brings to light the core of Laitman’s compositional technique with regards to the Mary Oliver settings (and I suspect many of her other works as well). As previously mentioned, she admits that her use of constantly changing tonal centers negates the practicality of a key signature in her music as a whole, which is a compositional element seen in these Oliver song cycles. In these six songs alone, which comprise two of her more lengthy song cycles (a combined 24 minutes, approximately), a commonality of language exists. This melodic and harmonic language is part of what defines the Laitman *flavor*, giving rise to the sensation, once again, of the “free color associations” which have worked their way into the hearts of many performers.
END NOTES

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APPENDIX A - LAITMAN INTERVIEW (12/15/2011)

Helen: Most of your works are for the voice. Why did you choose the voice to write for over other instruments? What was the impetus for this decision?

Lori: She forced me to (friend, Lauren Wagner). I didn't want to. Had no idea how to begin, but she was insistent that I compose for her. I flew by the seat of my pants and then wrote that first song and it was terrific! (Metropolitan Tower). Then I realized that, and for me, everything before was ok, but somewhat mediocre, I'd say, but from the first song, I felt as if everything was on a totally different level and that I obviously had this undiscovered "gift" in setting words to music. It wasn't hard for me. It was easy, so I wanted to keep doing it, which I did!

Helen: How was the reception for Metropolitan Tower?

Lori: Reception from the start was wonderful.

Helen: I read in your biography that The Metropolitan Tower was praised by composer Richard Hundley.

Lori: That was a great compliment, and very exciting for me [praised by Richard Hundley for Metropolitan Tower] because I was a mommy driving kids and also at that point I felt very worried because my degree was in flute composition and also because I was so intuitive and because my music was "beautiful" and that was certainly not the accepted style. In fact, one of my professors, Jonathan Kramer, would say it was "beautiful" but it was almost like it wasn't a compliment, but a "diss."

I was not confident at all in the beginning, but I gained confidence (sometimes too much so, perhaps).

Helen: I know of a composer who feels he can tell the difference between his male students' writing and his female students' writing. Do you believe this has any merit?

Lori: That sounds ridiculous. I think there's only good writing and bad writing and often the best composers are those who are intuitive, rather than mathematical.

Helen: My feeling as well.
Lori: Absolutely. I just finished the Puccini bio and he said the same things a century ago, which made me feel good. In fact, the bio, by Mary Jane Phillips Matz, was very inspiring to me (and she’s going to be writing an article about my Scarlet Letter [opera]), which will be premiered May 2013!

Helen: So, The Scarlet Letter is going to be premiered by Opera Colorado in May 2013. What else do you have coming up?

Lori: Well, I have a workshop of Act 1 of Ludlow [opera], but it hasn’t been commissioned yet but I am hoping it will be after the commission. It’s a Colorado story and of course, Opera Colorado (the company doing Scarlet Letter) has expressed some interest. But, I think they, understandably, want to see how Scarlet Letter will go first. The opera world is very different!

Helen: So how does it work, getting your works out? Do you usually write whatever you want and then present your compositions to someone, hoping to have them performed/published?

Lori: No, usually everything is commissioned song wise, choral wise. The opera Scarlet Letter was commissioned by the University of Central Arkansas.

Helen Allen: So you don’t wait for a commission, but usually receive an offer first.

Lori: And honestly (although this might not look good in print), I felt that I had written a masterpiece. I had the same feeling that I did when I composed The Metropolitan Tower: wow - this is really good and it's not that hard for me!

Helen Allen: Is that often the case . . . that you’ll feel insecure about something as you’re doing it, then feel much better upon completion?

Lori: Not often. Most of the time (these days) I am pretty confident. Sometimes I am super sure that it is absolutely perfect. Sometimes I have a lack of confidence, particularly with the larger forms like opera, but then I regain my confidence (although I am surer of the arias than anything else).

It was very difficult for me to compose the choral work that is premiering this Sunday - an a cappella cycle, setting 3 Dickinson works – and I know exactly why. It is because I am so attuned to the words themselves - and then to have 90 people all saying the same words, how do you make use of the different colors and have them interact so that people can still understand the words (if you don't want everyone singing the same rhythms, etc.) It’s a big challenge, but I finally figured it out (but it was very hard for me). But again, I heard it for the first time and I was SO pleased! Another masterpiece:)
Helen: So it’s easy to write songs for solo voice and piano, but, understandably, more difficult to write in more expanded forms.

Lori: Yes. Yes, it’s hard for me to stretch myself, and so easy to write songs, particularly now after the opera. It’s like settling into a Jacuzzi.

Helen: Going back to the questions here: How would you describe your compositional style? I know ragtime was something you mentioned as being an easy form to start with back in your college years. . . any remnants of that at this time?

Lori: Yes, only one song.

Helen: You began writing first for film/theater. Does that style still have any bearing on your style/compositional technique?

Lori: Ah - the film and theatre absolutely, because I treat the poems as baby films. So, I am still writing film music in a way. Every inspiration comes from the words and my desire to not only set them right for the singer and my desire to create a beautiful melody, but also to create the right dramatic underpinning for the emotions behind the words. So, that is my technique, whether it be artsong, opera, chorus, whatever. I always start with the vocal line, and I emphasize what I consider to be the most important words in the line, and then use music to emphasize those important words (they are important to me, perhaps not to another composer). This is so because all my music is my interpretation of the text.

Helen: How do you go about composing? Do you hear whole pieces in your head then write down ideas? Do you think through basic form, harmonies/melodies first, and get those down? Do you start with a certain singer/voice type in mind or certain poet/poem? What kind of progression do you follow?

Lori: No, never. They [the melodies] are always custom constructed to fit the words.

Helen: Do you sit at the piano to compose melodies?

Lori: I sing it to myself as I create it. I think: How would those words sound best sung? I try different melodies to see what is best. Every phrase is custom crafted, again, to bring out the important lines in the text. So I never, never get a melody and squish words into it.

Helen: So you begin with words/poetry you like then find a suitable melody.

Lori: Yes, and I think that is the difference between many composers and me.

Helen: How do you find text?
Lori: I keep a list of poems that I like and would like to set. But more often than not, it is being commissioned, and the commissioner has an idea. But generally, I like to keep my options open. Sometimes they will commission a particular poem and I have to say no. But, I do prefer to have a bunch of poems at hand that perhaps deal with a particular subject, and then shape it [the songs] from there. Often I don't pick the next poem in a cycle until the first of the songs is done. Then I can judge what might be effective for the second song or third song.

Helen: Seems like it would be hard to take any poem given to you and have an emotional connection to it.

Lori: I've always had a good dramatic sense. Here's something that I figured out just a few years ago: Everything stems from the fact that I was an accident. My parents were older (ancient in those days 36, and 38) young by today's standards, but my sisters were older - 8 and 13 years older - and my parents were tired. They used to plop me in front of the record player. There were kiddie records then, and I used to listen constantly to Peter and the Wolf, Tubby the Tuba, Bongo the Bear, and Peewee the Piccolo.

Helen: So your parents were not going for the Mozart effect.

Lori: Nope. But these (which I found on the internet and bought on cd a few years ago) were terrific compositions, full of story and drama. So I think this was a great influence. I always liked stories and music. My mom was a musician (still is).

Helen: A Singer?

Lori: Yes, my mom is a singer, violinist and pianist. She sang all the time, and at 93, still remembers all of the words to all of the songs she's every sung.

Helen: Wow.

Lori: So that had a big influence, I think, though it was probably subliminal.

Helen: Your mom was a classically trained singer?

Lori: Yes, classically trained; although honestly, I couldn't stand her voice and always asked her to stop singing - too much vibrato.

Helen: Have you asked for less or no vibrato in your own works?

Lori: Sure, but they can't always accomplish it. It depends on how good they are. Sometimes I will write it into the music as an effect.

Helen: Vibrato is a big issue.
Lori: Well, as a flutist, I learned of course, that vibrato should be an expressive tool, and sometimes it is not (which is bothersome). I have found that the greater the artist, the greater the amount of colors that are used. The greatest artists that I have worked with have taught me about my music, rather than my teaching them. I found in the Puccini bio that he had similar experiences.

Helen: So, let’s get back to compositional style. You said you begin by choosing the text then go about finding a suitable melody.

Lori: Compositional style: I always compose the vocal line first but I always have a sense of the harmonies, which I use to color the emotions behind the text.

Helen: In discussing music or certain composers, we often equate a composer/time period with a particular style – with a label – according to the style of the era. How would you describe your music? Is there a particular label you would/could give yourself?

Lori: When people ask me what my music is like, I like to say “beautiful and timeless” (hopefully).

Helen: Good answer.

Lori: I think I am unique, so I don’t tend to give myself a label. But of course, I am melodic. I am a melodist, first and foremost. I feel that the “DNA” of my music is contained in the melody (which of course, incorporates rhythm) and even the basic harmonies, combined with the melody, say much about the words and the poem itself. But the melodies, even without the harmonies, can tell you how I feel about the poem.

Helen: I definitely hear your imprint in your songs.

Lori: I know how to write a good melody, and I feel like the stream can be endless - as endless as the amount of poetry that is out there - because all the works are responding to the words. So as long as there are words, I can respond.

Helen: Are there any particular composers who have had an influence on your style?

Lori: Yes. I try to steal from anything good :) In a way, all music is an influence. The good teaches me the good stuff, the bad inspires me even more because I think I can do better.

Helen: Who did you admire when you first began composing?

Lori: Well, when I first started writing songs, I listened to everything Lauren was singing and I loved the music of Paul Bowles. So, I patterned the first song [of Metropolitan Tower] after his "Secret Words." I thought I would be so happy if I could ever write something as beautiful as that. I also love Bernstein. One of my very first musical memories was when West Side Story
came out. I think I was 8. I remember getting the sheet music and playing it on the piano and singing. I also remember singing the songs to Oklahoma and My Fair Lady, etc. So popular tunes were things I grew up with... but of course, Bach, Mozart, Barber, etc. also.

_Helen:_ Have you ever written anything that you feel you could point to and go "that incorporates some of so-and-so's compositional elements?"

_Lori:_ No, not at all. I'm trying to think. My response is so individual. I think I sort of sprang full blown when I wrote the first song of _Metropolitan Tower_, and that's why I don't have problems setting poems that others have set. It has no effect on me because it is my interpretation. Of course, Puccini, Verdi - all the great melodists - teach me about drama, etc.

_Helen:_ How would you say your style &/or technique has changed over the years? Do you/could you divide your compositions into periods - early, (middle,) current – based on what you see as definite shifts in your style or technique?

_Lori:_ Ah. Not that much. I think what has changed is that I am able to better articulate why I made the choices that I made intuitively. I did learn a few things over the years, but I try to forget them and basically just use the same technique over and over. It is all about the words - respecting them and respecting the singers and musicians - and trying to create something of beauty. I am still learning of course, as I branch into other forms, how to be effective dramatically in those forms (we talked about the choral work). I am learning about the opera and how to pace things; but, generally all I need to know is there in the words for me to find. That's how I find my structure - always go back to the meaning of the words. But, sometimes I find a structure in the poems that the poets haven't seen, so it is very individual.

_Helen:_ Are there any changes/revisions you'd like to make for piano or vocal lines/ Settings/ prosody changes?

_Lori:_ That's a great question. There are a few spots, [like at] the end of _Sunflowers_, "happiness." I worry that it's too much "penis" [too much emphasis on the second and third syllables of the word rhythmically, as can be seen in Figure 18]. Also, in _The Love Poems of Marichiko_, there's a phrase - I forget exactly what - but sometimes it can sound like "nazi" instead of what it's supposed to be. Also, the prosody for the word "branches" in _Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me_ -well that could have been better, I think, if I went down on the second syllable instead of up. There are certainly other instances, and I have thought about making some revisions; but, for the most part, I am very pleased. Sometimes I do make revisions. Have you seen the "errata" page on my website?

_Helen:_ So, _The Metropolitan Tower_ was a turning point for you.

_Lori:_ Yes, _Metro Tower_ was a turning point, and _Scarlet Letter_ was a great accomplishment. So, back to the technique. The harmonies, for me, express the emotions behind the words. All the
musical aspects are there to add different layers of interpretation. Sometimes I worry that I will [not] be able to add more interpretation, like when I composed the vocal line to *Holocaust 1944* (which took me about 9 months). The vocal line alone could be solo, and I worried how I would add anything else. But I did find a way, and feel that the bass (or cello) part does add to the understanding of the poem.

**Helen: What about musical form?**

**Lori:** Never decided in advance. It is purely from the poem. Of course you have to shape the song, and sometimes I repeat the beginning to close the song. Also, there are musical cells that I use to tie everything together. I view the songs as baby operas - there are always leitmotifs (or as one person described them,” Laitmotifs”).

**Helen: Would you give some examples of these leitmotifs?**

**Lori:** Well, they are sometimes word paintings, and I find a way to use them. Like in *Pentecost* (from *Becoming a Redwood*), there is one melismatic figure, and each time it is used, it is perfect for the meaning, even though the meaning is different. This happened in *Stella Remembered* (from *Daughters*) and also in *Early Snow* [the melismatic figure]. But these cells are not always melismas, but just whatever repeated figure they happen to be. They unify the song. They are threads throughout the song - it's almost in every one of my songs. There is also another overarching architectural sense to my songs - where there is a sense of balance that I have in terms of, let's say, high notes that connect over the course of the song - so that everything just feels right to me when it is right. When it is wrong, I keep going until it feels right (and that's why I don't sleep a lot)!

**Helen: How do you feel about theoretical forms/styles?** My younger brother, a composer himself, has always had a certain amount of contempt for music theory, or at least for the way it is taught at the college/university level. He feels that it is wrong to try to analyze everything – to tell the students that their writing must conform to a certain set of rules. Rather, a composer should write freely – write whatever fits his fancy – without a care for analyzable form/trying to fit into a box of sorts.

**Lori:** I agree with him. Absolutely. I hate theory. I do whatever I want. I am a free agent. The forms are irrelevant to me. I am not sitting around thinking about what harmonies to use in a technical sense, but more in a coloristic sense. That, in a way, is also like a film because I often think in a visual, dramatic sense. That's how everything is unified. It's a bit hard to explain in words.

**Helen: How much time to you spend composing? What is your routine like?**

**Lori:** It depends upon whether I am in "remission" or not. It is sort of like being mentally ill, I'd say. It's constant - constant when I am awake and almost constant when I am sleeping.
(particularly if I am in the throes of composing the melody, and so it's hard to turn it off). Then, the only thing that can get the music out of my head is other music (or bad TV)

**Helen:** So, this keeps you up nights?

Lori: Yes, I have a lot of trouble sleeping, particularly when I am composing a new work. That's when I solve all the problems. I can fall asleep quickly, but I am up again 30 minutes later, working, spinning the things in my head until I feel it is right. Then, maybe I scribble it down on the tissue box next to the bed. But as I get older, and perhaps with so much experience, I am able to create the melodies even easier than I used to (which is good). Sometimes (and this happened with *Metro Tower*) the melody comes so quickly that I wonder if it's any good. This generally happens to me with Dickinson. I was going to throw the *Metro Tower* out. I felt it couldn't be good because it was too easy; but, my husband (a former musician) convinced me not to. So now, when it's too easy, I write it down anyway (because I can always throw it out later).

**Helen:** Do you find yourself up at the piano in the middle of the night at times getting ideas down?

Lori: No, it's in my head or I sing it. I use the piano to do the accompaniment. But often when I am composing I could be doing the dishes or walking the dog. I remember composing one of the *Holocaust 1944* songs when I was on a bus to the archery display at the Atlanta Olympics.

**Helen:** You keep ALL of the parts in your head (even for a choral work/opera)?

Lori: No, talking about the melody . . . although last night (because I am re-orchestrating scene 1) everything was in my head.

**Helen:** But you go to the piano to put things together.

Lori: Yes, at the piano for working it out. As I said before, I have a bare bones idea of the harmonies. The trick is to then figure out an interesting way to present it that adds to the interpretation.

**Helen:** More power to you! I can't imagine putting so many pieces together. Not a talent of mine.

Lori: I bet you could. I didn't think I could, and yet I did. I didn't think I could be a composer; but, as you probably read, all my friends were [composers/musicians] at Yale, and then my competitive streak came out.
Helen: Do you have any quirks or conditions that must be met in order to compose?

Lori: Sure. Not really (although when my children are sick, obviously it's more difficult). I am a pretty quick writer (with everything else I have to do, thank goodness for that)!

Helen: What is the longest time it's taken to write a work? What is the shortest time? Which piece?

Lori: It really depends. Sometimes I can do a song in about 10 minutes, literally - although a draft sometimes it can take a month - sometimes 3 months. Sometimes, when times have been tough with some health problems with my kids, it takes longer. It took me about 9 months to write *Sunflowers*, whereas had things been ok with my family, it probably would have taken about 3 months. *The Seed of Dream* took 9 months. It was very long. Yet, *The Scarlet Letter* took about 11 months to do the piano/vocal, and then about 4 months to orchestrate (after I took some time to study orchestration). Now, I am re-orchestrating a bit to make it the best it can be. Orchestration is ok, but it is not my forte (yet). The melodies are what I am surest about.

Helen: How long did it take to write *Early Snow*?

Lori: *Early Snow* was difficult. I'd have to go back and look at the dates (I usually put dates at the end of the songs, otherwise I can't remember when I wrote anything). But the last of the pieces, the *Early Snow* itself, was a very difficult birth. I didn't know how I would get through it at all, because of its length, and I was writing it specifically for Jennifer Check to sing at her Masters recital. Usually, I'd have the luxury of hearing her sing it (or hearing someone sing it) before it was done, but here I didn't. But, I had worked with Jennifer for so long I knew she would do a great job.

Helen: Remind me how you met Jennifer Check.

Lori: I met Jennifer when she invited me to her graduation recital at Westminster Choir College in Princeton. Typically, I wouldn't go to an undergrad recital. But at the time, my oldest was looking at colleges and at Princeton, so I went up - and boy, was I surprised to hear her! She was terrific! So, when it was time to make the 2nd CD, I asked if she would sing for it, and she said yes. She's got such a beautiful voice!

Helen: She happened to be performing some of your music, I assume, and invited you to come hear it?

Lori: Yes. She was performing the *Metro Tower* songs, and I was still a bit self-conscious at that point - and even more so at the end, when one of the composition teachers turned to me and the only thing he said was that he liked the "endings" of the songs. :(
Helen: Let's turn now to *Early Snow* and *Sunflowers* – get into more detail. Let's discuss *Sunflowers* first.

Lori: Diving into *Early Snow* and *Sunflowers* . . . that's your topic. :) So, Adelaide Whitaker commissioned the work. I met Adelaide following a Midori concert and sent her some of my music on cassette. She loved it so much that she sent me a check in the mail and said to use the money to promote my work. I was astonished and didn't want to keep her money; But, she wouldn't take it back. So I wrote *Between the Bliss and Me* for her. Since then, she's continued to commission me, always searching for projects. In fact, she's the one that put up the money for the Washington Master Chorale to commission the choral work (because she loved that chorus and thought I would do a great job).

Helen: Does Adelaide W. hold a college/university position?

Lori: No. She had a PhD in musicology and had become a singer after her kids were grown when she was 45. But, she stopped when she was 65, after she sang (or tried to sing) *Sunflowers* for its premiere!

Helen: Did Adelaide W. ask for the specific poet?

Lori: So, she was the one who introduced me to Mary Oliver. I had not known about her poetry before, and Adelaide always would like me to set women poets (although sometimes I have not). So, she loved the *Sunflowers* poem, and I chose the others. But it was interesting with Mary Oliver. I wrote for permission [to set the poems], and they granted it to me. But, it took me a long time to write that song cycle. After a year, Mary and Mollie wrote again, saying that I was supposed to let them hear what I had written. I had just finished writing it and it hadn't been sung. I wrote back saying the only way that they could hear it was for me to sing it (which I did, and I sent them a cassette - and I am no singer). They wrote back and said that they admired my spunk. But I have never once heard whether they liked the music, or had any response to any of the recordings, which makes me sad (because I love to be friends with my poets). Every year, I always ask if I can come and meet her - and there's no response. But, I have heard from many other composers that she won't even give permission anymore. So, I should be grateful. I still have permission for several of her other poems should I choose to set them. I got a very different response from a poet like Dana Gioia or David Mason. Anyway, it took me a long time to compose *Sunflowers*, and it is very different than many of my songs - very atmospheric. I didn't know if it was any good. But now, with time, when I hear it, I think it is very good. Adelaide loved it from the start. In fact, there was another poem that she had requested - *One or Two Things* which was originally the first of the songs for Sunflowers but I had misunderstood Adelaide's request. She was really only asking for me to set *One or Two Things*. But that poem has 7 sections and the song was too long and had structural problems, so I removed it from the set. After a year went by, I felt that I could finally tackle it. I removed
some of the sections and constructed a very short 4-5 minute song cycle for mezzo-soprano. So Sunflowers was hard to write.

Helen: Was there anything unusual going on at the time you wrote Sunflowers? Why did you choose the other poems you did (any special meaning to you/to time of life)?

Lori: I loved the Dreams song. I felt that it was just perfect for the words and particularly liked the "drag through the mud" section. No special meaning for life. I was always just looking for dramatic contrast from what went before. You're asking good questions. You're getting a lot of information that I don't think I have told other people. :)

Helen: What are the meanings of the poems to you? Is that different than the poet's intentions at all?

Lori: That's certainly a possibility. But then again, the song is my interpretation so it doesn't really matter (and there's no way to know). But for me, all poems are interesting because you get to see the world through the poet's lens, and that's the excitement. So for me, to read of her descriptions of sunflowers is just so gorgeous. Her language . . . it makes you think about the beauty of the world, and that's what they mean to me. So, it's really the same for all poems: you see the world differently. It's a great honor to then filter those thoughts through my own lens.

Helen: Was there any particular goal (feelings, hopes for the audience)?

Lori: Yes, always to tell the story of the poem through beautiful music - same goal as every song. It is really simple, the goal: that they [the audience] would think that the music was beautiful, and be touched by the words and music combined (and that they might also think of the astonishing beauty of the world - the miracle of everything that exists - and I am not religious in the least, but full of wonder and awe at everything).

Helen: How do the two song cycles compare? What's similar/different about them?

Lori: Well, I think that my Oliver songs are the most complex musically of all my songs. I don't know why, but that is just the way that I respond to her texts. I have found that my Dickinson songs sound like my other Dickinson songs in a way; but, my Lux songs sound like my Lux songs. Yet, they all sound like me so musically, I'd say they are among the most difficult things I have ever written for a singer (and that is due to the length and the intervals).

Helen: Yes, complex musically. I agree.

Lori: So just technically, they are very challenging.

Helen: I had the experience of hearing the song cycles and thinking "I REALLY want to sing these," then getting the music and thinking "Whoa. Much more complex than I thought!"
Lori: Ah. I think that is true of all my songs. I need good musicians to take the music off the page. Because I was writing Early Snow for Jennifer, I knew her capabilities. Otherwise, I would not have ended the piece on a high soft Bb.

Helen: Meter shifts make for interest . . . and a lot of counting!

Lori: Well, the thing about that is when I am writing it, I don't know what the meters are. I don't always write with bar lines, and then I have to figure out the best way to notate it - and there are so many choices. The piano parts always come afterwards and I try to integrate everything. It was a shock for me when I first recorded with William Sharp. For me, the last song of the Mystery cycle, “The Rose,” was just so simple. But, he had all these markings in his score - I was surprised - for counting. I thought, “he’s William Sharp. Why does he have to count!” :) I was surprised that it was hard.

Lori: So back to the Oliver [Sunflowers]. I think the harmonies are perhaps more complex than many of my other cycles, too. So, I think that there is a similarity between the two in those regards.

Helen: You mentioned the use of leitmotifs in your works. Are there any themes (melodically/harmonically) that you bring back throughout the Sunflowers cycle?

Lori: Let me look . . . . There aren't so many leitmotifs in Sunflowers itself, except the "come with me" at the beginning and end. But in this song, it's divided more into sections that have distinct melodic characteristics. It all seems to flow from one to another, almost as if music represents the sunflowers swaying in the wind.

Helen: Is there anything in Sunflowers you'd like to revise?

Lori: I am looking. The only thing I would consider changing is m. 98 in Sunrise. I think it might be better if the first note were a dotted quarter so as to address the "penis" question. 😊 I might put that on my errata as an option.

Helen: For whatever it's worth, the syllables of the word “happiness” have never stood out to me in a negative way! I love that song. I'd say it's my favorite.

Lori: Thanks so much. I love all the songs. For me, they all seem pretty perfect (and I think it's ok to say that, as the creator).

Helen: What do you like best about the songs of the Sunflowers cycle?

Lori: I think they are all so beautiful. I am just very proud of them and the fact that I created them. The songs are like children. I really do love them all. Well, there is one song that I don't love as much. I will just tell you that name of the not so beloved song: “Along with Me,” the
first of the *Days and Nights* songs - and it's a perfectly good song. But, for whatever reason, I don't love it that much. It may not be as pretty as the others.

**Helen:** About which aspects of the songs are you most proud?

Lori: Is there an aspect of the Oliver songs?

**Helen:** Yes.

Lori: Well, the sheer construction - the sheer feat of constructing songs as long as *Early Snow* and *Sunflowers*. It is a great accomplishment for me, finding the right musical material to tie it all together.

**Helen:** So these are your favorites cycles because of their complexity?

Lori: Yes. But then again, I really love everything I have done :) (but I am very proud of these in particular). Sometimes, I guess, because the Dickinson [settings] are so easy, perhaps I am not quite as proud. I also love the word painting that I thought of for these (Oliver settings) - like in "Dreams", with the drag section, it sounds so draggy . . . and all of the word painting . . . I am very proud and excited when I can think of something special to paint.

**Helen:** Is there one song you like the most/consider the prettiest?

Lori: That's a hard question. I think they are all gorgeous. I used to love “Dreams” the most, but then “Sunflowers” is so endearing - and of course, “Sunrise” is thrilling because of the vocal writing. I really love the word painting with the twinkling in “Last Night,” and I love the conversational style of “Blue Iris” (and the explosion of the words "Blue Iris" at the end). Then, “Early Snow” was such a hard song to write, and such a hard song to pull off vocally, that I especially love it.

**Helen:** If one day some aliens from outer space came to Earth and requested a sample of what we had to offer from the musical realm: If you had to pick some songs to show to the aliens that you’d consider the most representative of your work, your style, what would they be? What would these songs show about your writing, about you as a composer? What message would these send to the aliens?

Lori: Top ten. I think about this a lot. I try to keep a top ten of favorites . . . *The Metropolitan Tower* always, although it embarrassed me for so many years because of its simplicity. I love *Over the Fence*, and I love *The Butterfly*. The “Old House” and “Pentecost” and “To My Child” are my saddest and most powerful songs. *Vedem* from *Vedem* is so beautiful, and *Echo* from the early days. Also, *The Apple Orchard* and “If I....” Did I reach ten yet? (Also “Dreaming.”) I had a complex about those Dickinson songs (*4 Dickinson Songs*, which includes “If I . . . ”) for quite some time, because Theodore Presser was my publisher at that point and I was in their family.
They told me they’d publish everything of mine . . . and then I wrote and sent them *Four Dickinson Songs* and my *Butterfly* cycle. They wrote back rejecting them, saying that they weren't as high a quality as my other song cycles. I wrote back asking them to reconsider. I couldn't believe it actually, and they still didn't want them. Eventually, I took everything back and became my own publisher (except Arsis Press took the *Butterfly*).

**Helen:** *Everyone has an opinion, that’s for sure.*

**Lori:** And it pleases me to no end that these 2 song cycles are my best sellers:) It wasn’t until we recorded it with Warren Jones that he said “If I . . .” was maybe the most beautiful song I ever wrote (whereas my husband questioned whether it was too “pop-like”). That’s when I got over my complex. So, I was very unsure of it, but not anymore. My dad is still alive - he’s 95 - and this was for his 80th [birthday]. I have written other birthday songs for him, but don’t think I have ever topped this one.

**Helen:** *With the styles of Jake Heggie and Richard P. Thomas, I can't imagine your things standing out as too pop-like.*

**Lori:** I guess they are more pop like . . . and Ricky Ian Gordon as well. I know them all. They’re all very lovely people, and very talented. I try to be friends with all my contemporaries.

**Helen:** *So, which of your songs would you deem most accessible for undergraduates?*

**Lori:** *The Metro Tower,* “If I . . .”, “The Apple Orchard,” “The Mystery.” They have fewer meter changes/less difficult vocal lines. These are all simpler. “The Night Has a Thousand Eyes” has one very difficult spot, but in general is easier. The *Four Dickinson Songs* all aren’t that hard.

**Helen:** *I’ve had a senior sing Between the Bliss and Me,* which is how I learned it. She went listening, at my suggestion, and fell in love with it.

**Lori:** Thanks. Yes, any of the Dickinson settings sort of sing themselves in a way. They sound, to me, at least, like they always have existed.

**Helen:** *If you could use one word per song cycle to describe them, what would those words be?*

**Lori:** Interesting question . . . not “penis.” For *Sunflowers,* I think “atmospheric,” and for the other (*Early Snow*), “twinkling.” Just the twinkling of the stars, the extraordinary description of the snowflakes, all bring a lightness of color to mind. Or, just “lyrical” — always lyrical.

**Helen:** *Is there any particular meaning these hold for you because of circumstances of the time you composed them?*

**Lori:** No meaning again.
Helen: Anything else about *Early Snow*?

Lori: I just wanted to write something nice for Jennifer. But, here's the thing: I did not hear them before her recital (which was on an April 7), and it was a late snow in NYC, actually. 😊 She started singing and I hadn't thought of this before, but I immediately realized that I had not written an introduction for the singer to get the pitch (which I normally do). Had we rehearsed, I would have noticed this. So, I changed the opening of each song, essentially to give the singer the pitch. For the 2nd and 3rd, I incorporated the last of the previous song I think (I'd have to look), and that solved that problem. But, when I wanted to open my cd with it, I didn't want to open the cd with the piano playing one solo Bb. So, we recorded it, and then cut it off for the recording (which made for a better opening). With these cycles, as with all the cycles, I am always looking for a dramatic balance. This is also how I structure the CDS (and how I structure any recitals), so that there's a good flow - so that one flows well into another. [There needs to be] a good balance between emotions, contrasts between fast and slow, etc. I look for this balance in each song as well

Helen: I have perfect pitch (hate the way that sounds), and I still get nervous having to put it to the test in front of an audience.

Lori: I also have perfect pitch. I didn't write my first song until I was 36 by the way... (just mentioning the age thing because you were telling me about yourself). Not too late at all.

Helen: On another note, I read that you will be entered into the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*.

Lori: Yes, that is true. The entry is written.

Helen: I imagine you had to submit a complete list of your songs for the *New Grove* entry. Could you send me a list of your compositions?

Lori: A complete list of the songs?

Helen: Certainly a complete list of your songs - individual songs from song cycles too – as well as a complete list of everything you've written in every genre.

Lori: I don't really have that.

Helen: Ok. How about just a complete list of your vocal works?

Lori: Ah. Yes, I can put that together. Could you send me an email reminder?

Helen: Absolutely.
Lori: Thanks. That's really all there is. I don't really consider the other things that worthwhile. As I always say, I found my voice composing for voice. I used to just count manually looking at my web site. About a year ago, I finally made a spreadsheet, but it's somewhere on my computer. I will have to find it and update it. I think it was like 208 or 210.

Helen: So, your first “big break” was The Metropolitan Tower?

Lori: A big break, yes. Also, having Lauren teach me how to write for voice, and writing all the early works for her when she was still singing and when people heard her [was a breakthrough time as well]. But, it was really an accidental "career." One thing flowed from another, and I found that she knew people and then they wrote to me (or I wrote to them). Now, with all the articles in the NATS Journal of Singing and elsewhere, I find that I have to turn down work. People are always asking me to write songs. I have to learn how to say “no.” I am waiting for the final yes on a new commission for a children's opera for April 2014 (which I hesitated to take). But, you feel like you don't want to turn down an opera commission.

Helen: Your experience is a young composer's dream! What advice would you give a young composer trying to get his name out there?

Lori: I am 56 - not that old. But, I consider my compositional "birth" to be 1991. As for advice: If you’re a songwriter, respect the words and respect the singers and instrumentalists. Do something that you feel. Find your voice and express it to the world. Be true to yourself and be willing to make changes and to listen to people.

Helen: . . . and make connections.

Lori: Connections are definitely good. I always went to singers' recitals and went backstage afterwards and introduced myself and asked if I could send music. People generally said yes, but then never listened or looked. But there are rare exceptions, and that is how I began working with Warren Jones and Wolfgang Holzmair.

Helen: Do you feel that things took off for you as a result of your relationship with Lauren via her connections somewhat?

Lori: Yes, but more so than Lauren, I feel that I was producing a great product, as it were. So, once a singer heard the song, they also wanted to sing it. The work, I feel, speaks for itself. But also, I guess I have the right personality to promote myself in a way - to not be afraid to ask people after a concert, to not be hurt when they don't have time to listen, and also to keep writing a huge body of work. My own feeling is that I don't have to be writing for a "famous" person. The worth for me is writing the song. I also do not feel a need to try to do everything, and to do things that don't particularly interest me (or for which I may not have the same extent of talent). I know what I am good at and I am happy doing it. I don't need to write a symphony.
I don’t think that’s where my talents necessarily lie. For me, I think the major talent is “translating” words to music.

Helen: How many compositions, on average, would you say you complete in a year?

Lori: It really depends. Some years were more prolific than others, again, depending upon life. 2005-2008 were much less prolific. I still wrote, but it took more time.

Helen: Working around children and family.

Lori: Yes, working around children and their needs.

Helen: Have you ever been affiliated with a college/university?

Lori: No, never. What I do do, however, is go and do mini residencies, so I’ve been all over SDSU. I just did a master class at USC, University of Las Vegas, Colorado College, U of Southern Georgia . . . everywhere (but usually in weird places that no one has heard of). But, it’s great.

Helen: Do you currently reside in MD?

Lori: Yes, in Potomac, MD, for the past 30 years or so.

Helen: Did you grow up around there?

Lori: Nope. I lived in Long Beach until I was 7, and then New Rochelle until I went to Yale when I was 16. (I don’t know what my parents were thinking. My class had 200 women and 1000 men. I had a lot of fun.)

Helen: Wow. Easy pickings for the gals!

Lori: The men were quite wanting.

Helen: Do you have any students?

Lori: No. But, I always take time to look at songs of others if anyone asks me. Sometimes that happens when I go to the universities.

Helen: What is your most current project?

Lori: Ludlow. Scarlet Letter is done, but I am rethinking some of the orchestration. I have a draft for Act I of Ludlow and am fleshing it out. The piano/vocal score is due Feb 1, 2012, because we are workshopping it at U of Colorado in June, so that’s got to be done. But my traveling has gotten out of hand (and between work, and family, I was only home about 5 days in November, which was ridiculous). I am so happy to be home for even a week now.

Helen: Forgive my ignorance, but did you compose the parts with particular singers in mind?
Lori: Well, certainly if a singer has commissioned something, it's with them in mind. In the early days, when everything was for Lauren, I absolutely tailored things for her. She was very vocal in telling me what she wanted (e.g. “I want to go down or up at the end of that phrase”). Plus, she didn't like E naturals, so there are very few of them in the songs for her.

Helen: Are there particular professional singers for whom you would like to write?

Lori: Well, there are so many great singers. I would be happy writing for so many people. But again, while it's thrilling to work with great singers, the best thrill is writing the music itself. So in a way, the singer is kind of beside the point, if that makes sense. I am more interested in creating a work of art to be sung by anyone than having a certain singer sing something.

Helen: Any art song projects coming up?

Lori: Ah, art song projects . . . . no. I have a waiting list of people who have been patiently waiting. But when something big comes up, the waiting list waits longer because I don't want to turn something down that is important. Some people have been waiting for 4 years. I feel badly about that. But, I finally knocked off a song last summer for Cynthia Vaughn, and she's happy and I'm happy and I'm happy it's done!

Helen: Wow. A 4-year waiting list. So in other words, you are able to completely support yourself through your compositions?

Lori: Not at all. Misconception. First of all, I spend more than I take in because everything I make goes back into hiring singers for the cds, etc. which are very expensive. Then I am very reasonable, because I can afford to be and I like singers, so I don't charge as much as perhaps I should. I think the real money to be made, it seems, will be if the operas take off. But I am in a most fortunate position in that I don't have to rely on my music. My husband makes enough for us, but I want to "earn my keep" as well (that's very non-PC). So, I try to do my best to make everyone proud of me, which goes back to the fact that I am an accident. They [my parents] were very pleased with me and continue to be – I was the best accident. But, I do think that knowledge factors into my desire to try to please people -singers, poets, etc.

Helen: Who would you say is the most influential composer of the day/farthest reaching?

Lori: Hard to say - Jake Heggie is having tremendous success with his operas, which is great. For me -and I will probably misspell his name - Osvaldo Golijov is an amazing genius, because his music is so different than mine that I know I could never write something like it. His Passion of St. Mark brought me to tears, whereas with other songwriters, of course, I understand what they are doing and because I do the same thing, perhaps feel that we are all in the same boat (in terms of other contemporary composers).
Helen: Where do you see music going in the next 20 years (more toward melody/Will we keep our different factions of composers/style)?

Lori: I do not listen to enough music to really answer intelligently (and I do not want to sound stupid either). My kids know a lot more than I do. Of course, I’m probably forgetting a lot of people. Ah, there’s Jennifer Higdon. She is an amazing composer for orchestra. I think there’s really a divide between "vocal" composers and other composers - people who understand the voice don’t necessarily have the best orchestral techniques and vice versa. That is why I believe to sticking to what you do best. I’m just very inspired by the Puccini bio. So, I feel that I have it in me to really write some great operas that will stand the test of time (and more songs, of course, and perhaps more choral works, even though they are difficult for me). But, I always need to have voice. So, just more of the same. But, each is new because each text has its own challenges. I am excited about the potential new children’s opera commission. I feel like I will really do a great job with that.

Helen: Are you at liberty to say what this new opera is called?

Lori: It cannot come out yet, and I can’t even say who is commissioning it since it’s not totally okayed yet. But, I should know in a week or so. I got a Face Book message asking if I were interested (and then I had to present them with a budget, which was hard to present). But, I gave them my lowest and my librettist’s lowest figure because we are so reasonable. They have to present it to a committee who has to ok it, and then they have to agree to it. After that, they have to look for funds (but by that point, our fee would be guaranteed). So, we are awaiting the word of the committee. That’s why I can’t really talk more about it yet.

Helen: Well, this seems like a good place to stop. Lori Laitman, thank you so much for talking with me. I really appreciate it.

Lori: You are welcome. I will call you to say goodbye.
APPENDIX B – SONGS CATEGORIZED BY VOICE TYPE

I. Soprano

I Never Saw Another Butterfly - accompanied by alto saxophone, clarinet or bassoon.

- 6 settings of poems by children who were killed in the Holocaust

The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs - with piano.

- 6 settings of Sara Teasdale: poems of love and life

Dreaming - with piano.

- humorous encore song about getting a good review, lyrics by Lori Laitman. Available in several versions: solo, duo, and quartet.

The Love Poems of Marichiko - with cello accompaniment.

- six settings of Kenneth Rexroth: poems about a love affair, with the poems supposedly written by a Japanese woman poet named "Marichiko" (although it is thought that Rexroth was the poet)
**Days and Nights** - with piano.

- six songs, settings of Browning, Dickinson, Rossetti, Bourdillon. Songs about love and life, including some very playful Dickinson settings ("They Might Not Need Me," "Over the Fence," "Wild Nights").

**Echo** - with piano.

- setting of Christina Rossetti poem in which the narrator yearns for his/her dead lover.

**Thumbelina Songs** - with piano.

- part of a set with mezzo and baritone, songs imagined from the fairy tale "Thumbelina." The songs have more resemblance to songs from musicals than my typical art songs. Lyrics by Lori Laitman and Wendy-Marie Goodman.

**Plums** - with piano.

- a very short (2 minute total) song cycle which sets two poems by William Carlos Williams. Plums are involved.

**Four Dickinson Songs** - with piano.

- these four Dickinson songs offer a range of moods.

**Between the Bliss and Me** - with piano.

- three Dickinson settings, various topics - attaining goals, hope, the passage of time.

**Sunflowers** - with piano.

- three settings of Pulitzer prize winning poet Mary Oliver. The poems focus on the natural world.

**Armgart** - with piano.

Round and Round - with piano.
- six settings of Anne Spencer Lindbergh. The poems cover several topics including love, depression, and alienation.

The Years - with piano.
- five settings of Sara Teasdale poems which speak of love over the course of years. Composed as a 50th anniversary present for my in-laws.

Living in the Body - with saxophone
- Poems by Joyce Sutphen. 15 minutes.

Within These Spaces - with piano.
- five settings of three Nebraskan women poets, Marjorie Saiser, Janet Coleman and Judith Sornberger. Themes of mother-daughter relationships.

Little Elegy - with piano.
- setting of Pulitzer Prize and Nobel Prize winning poet Elinor Wylie poem. Beautiful song of remembrance.

Two Dickinson Songs - with piano.
- two contrasting settings, one humorous, one contemplative.

Lines Written at The Falls - with piano.
- setting of Thomas Moore, about the falls in Cohoes, NY. Featured in the upcoming novel, "The Voice I Just Heard."

Captivity - with trumpet.
- settings of Toi Derricotte, about black/white identity.
**Early Snow** - with piano.

- settings of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mary Oliver, about the beauty of nature.

**One Bee and Revery** - with piano.

- settings of Emily Dickinson with hope and nature as themes.

**Fresh Patterns** - for 2 sopranos and piano

- settings of Emily Dickinson and Annie Finch. One generation of poet influences another, and in the final song, both poems are combined in a duet.

**Becoming a Redwood** - with piano

- settings of Dana Gioia. Songs deal with life, love, loss and healing.

**Money** - with piano; other versions available

- setting of Dana Gioia. The song takes a humorous look at money.

**On A Photograph** - with piano; other versions available

- setting of John Wood. The poem is a beautiful contemplation of an old photograph of two men.

**Five Lovers** - with piano

- settings of Jama Jandrokovic comparing the virtues of five different lovers.

**Equations of the Light** - with piano. solo version (duet version also available)

- Dana Gioia setting, poem about two people who love each other yet lead parallel lives.
My Garden - with piano

- setting of Adelaide Ayer Kelley. Sweet contemplation: life as a garden.

The Perfected Life - with piano.

- Emily Dickinson settings, various moods, celebrating a life well lived.

River of Horses - with piano.

- settings of Baudelaire, James Wright, James Dickey, and a traditional Navajo poem. The cycle tells of the wonder of horses.

Orange Afternoon Lover - with piano. (also in mezzo version)

- settings of Margaret Atwood. Songs about the course of an affair.

Eloise at Yaddo - with piano.

- setting of David Yezzi. Humorous description of what Eloise's life might be like at the artist colony Yaddo.

The Blood Jet - with piano.

- settings of Sylvia Plath (the first poet to win a Pulitzer Prize posthumously). The songs focus somewhat on her children, but also on jealousy and depression.

On The Green Trail - with piano.

- settings of Jeff Gundy. Poems by this Mennonite poet which deal with the love and awe of nature.

A Wild Sostenuto - with piano.

- Richard Wilbur setting, about the power of long lasting love. Commissioned by the West Chester University Poetry Conference, 2008.
II. **Mezzo-soprano**

**Echo** - with piano.

- setting of Christina Rossetti. The song deals with the memory of a deceased lover.

**Four Dickinson Songs** - with piano.

- four settings of Emily Dickinson, covering a wide range of moods.

**Mystery** - with piano.

- settings of Sara Teasdale: themes of love.

**Daughters** - with violin, cello and piano.

- settings of Anne Ranasinghe and Karen Gershon. Both poets escaped from the Nazis as teenagers, but lost their entire families. These poems were written years later, to their own daughters.

**Homeless** - with piano.

- setting of Michael Flack (who survived 3 concentration camps).

**Men with Small Heads** - with piano.

- Thomas Lux settings. Very humorous poems, all true tales. The title song won "Best Song" in the 2004 American Art Song competition.

**This Space** - with piano.

- single Thomas Lux setting about the poet's job of putting words to paper.
One or Two Things - with piano.

- settings of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mary Oliver. Nature-inspired.

Round and Round - with piano.

- settings of Anne Spencer Lindbergh. Works equally well for soprano or mezzo-soprano. The poems cover several topics including love, depression, and alienation.

The Years - with piano.

- settings of Sara Teasdale. A tribute to long-lasting love.

Living in the Body - with saxophone

- Poems by Joyce Sutphen. 15 minutes.

Money - with piano.

- setting of Dana Gioia. A humorous take on money.

On A Photograph - with piano.

- setting of John Wood. The poem is a beautiful contemplation of an old photograph of two men.

The Seed of Dream - with cello and piano.

- settings of Vilna Ghetto survivor Abraham Sutzkever with translations by C.K. Williams and Leonard Wolf. Power first person accounts of hiding from the Nazis during WW II. Hailed as "a masterpiece that should not be missed" by Dr. Sharon Mabry of The Journal of Singing.
The Perfected Life - with piano.

- Emily Dickinson settings, various moods, celebrating a life well lived.

Orange Afternoon Lover - with piano.

- settings of Margaret Atwood. Songs about the course of an affair.

The Silver Swan - two version, one voice with piano, the other voice, with flute and piano.

- settings of Orlando Gibbons poem.

III. Counter-tenor

Men with Small Heads - with piano

- humorous, off-beat, but all true stories by poet Thomas Lux. The song "Men with Small Heads" won "Best American Art Song" in the 2004 American Art Song Competition sponsored by the San Francisco Song Festival.

And Music Will Not End - composed to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr and Robert Kennedy. Commissioned by The Lyrica Society for Word-Music Relations. – settings of Anne Ranasinghe and John Wood.
IV. **Tenor**

**The Apple Orchard** - with piano.

- setting of Dana Gioia. Beautiful poem about a love not pursued and the lesson learned.

**On A Photograph** - with piano.

- setting of John Wood. The poem is a beautiful contemplation of an old photograph of two men.

**Full Moon and Light Hearted William: Two William Carlos Williams Songs** - with piano.

- settings of Pulitzer Prize winning poet William Carlos Williams.

**On The Green Trail** - with piano.

- settings of Jeff Gundy. Poems by this Mennonite poet which deal with the love and awe of nature.

*In addition, many of my soprano songs can work well for tenor.*
V. **Baritone**

- **Echo** - with piano.
  
  - setting of Christina Rossetti poem in which the narrator yearns for his/her dead lover.

- **The Ballad Singer** - with piano.
  
  - setting of Thomas Hardy poem about a lost love

- **Mystery** - with piano.
  
  - settings of Sara Teasdale: themes of love.

- **Holocaust 1944** - with double bass.
  
  - Holocaust themed cycle, featuring the poetry of Ficowski, Vogetl, Rosewicz, Gershon and Ranasinghe. (28 minutes)

- **Men with Small Heads** - with piano
  
  - humorous, off-beat, but all true stories by poet Thomas Lux. The song "Men with Small Heads" won "Best American Art Song" in the 2004 American Art Song Competition sponsored by the San Francisco Song Festival.

- **Long Pond Revisited** - with cello
  
  - settings of Maine poet C.G.R. Shepard. Focus on death of a lover, and subsequent acceptance.

- **Fathers** - with piano trio
  
  - another Holocaust themed cycle, premiered by Music of Remembrance in 2003. Poems by Ranasinghe and Vogel. (not yet published)

- **The Throwback** - with piano
- settings of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Paul Muldoon.

**Money** - with piano.

- setting of Dana Gioia. A humorous take on money.

**Being Happy** - with piano

- a cabaret setting of a Dana Gioia poem, about an affair in Seattle.

**Swimmers on the Shore** - with piano

- setting of David Mason poem, about his father’s battle with Alzheimer’s. Commissioned by The West Chester University Poetry Conference in 2004

**On A Photograph** - for all voice types, with piano. duet versions as well.

- setting of poem by John Wood, imagining the life of two men in an old photograph.

**The Seed of Dream** - with cello and piano.

- settings of Vilna Ghetto survivor Abraham Sutzkever with translations by C.K. Williams and Leonard Wolf. Power first person accounts of hiding from the Nazis during WW II. . Hailed as "a masterpiece that should not be missed" by Dr. Sharon Mabry of The Journal of Singing.

**The Perfected Life** - with piano

- Emily Dickinson settings, various moods, celebrating a life well lived.

**A Wild Sostenuto** - with piano.

- Richard Wilbur setting, about the power of long lasting love. Commissioned by the West Chester University Poetry Conference, 2008.
VI. **Bass**

*This Space* - with piano

- setting of Thomas Lux poem, about creating a poem.

*Also well suited for a Bass-baritone: Echo and The Ballad Singer (see Songs for Baritone).*

VII. **Duets**

*Dreaming* - with piano.

- humorous encore song about getting a good review, lyrics by Lori Laitman. Duet versions: soprano/baritone or soprano/mezzo-soprano

*I am in Need of Music* - with piano

- setting of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Elizabeth Bishop's "Sonnet." Available for either soprano and baritone, soprano/mezzo-soprano, or mezzo-soprano and bass.

*Fresh Patterns* - with piano

- settings of Emily Dickinson and American poet Annie Finch. For two sopranos.

*On A Photograph* - with piano.

- setting of poem by John Wood, imagining the life of two men in an old photograph. Duet version for mezzo-soprano with either baritone or bass.
**Equations of the Light** - with piano

- setting of Dana Gioia poem about two potential lovers who do not have an affair. For soprano with baritone, or soprano with tenor.

Commissioned by The West Chester University Poetry Conference 2005.

VIII. **Orchestrated Songs**

**Echo and The Ballad Singer** - for baritone and chamber orchestra

**Becoming a Redwood** - for soprano or tenor, with chamber orchestra

And after November 2008, selected arias from my opera “The Scarlet Letter” - soprano, tenor, or baritone, with chamber orchestra.
Dear Helen,

Thank you so much for your email. I'd be delighted if you were to write your dissertation on my music. I don't know if this makes a difference to you, but Andrea Mueller had written about my Teasdale settings for her 2009 DMA - and included "The Years" - to date, nobody has focused on "Sunflowers" -- And I would be perfectly happy to speak with you about my creative process and my music. Skype would be fine, although I might also initially prefer answering some of your questions in writing, so that I can refer to my own notes about various songs. Just let me know how you'd like to proceed.

All best,

Lori
Dear Ms. Laitman,

I am at the point in my writing where I would like to insert excerpts from Sunflowers and Early Snow. Though we’ve done our interview and you granted permission for this subject matter, I’m not certain that we actually discussed the reprinting of excerpts. So, I am asking for your permission to include printed excerpts from the two song cycles to be included in my document as examples of your writing (to show samples of bitonality, word painting, particularly difficult leaps/intervals, shifts in tonal center, etc.).

If this is fine with you, will I need to also contact the publisher for permission, or do you have the final say there?

Thank you so much,

Helen T. Allen
Senior Lecturer, Voice Area
Otterbein University
Department of Music
1 S. Grove St.
Westerville, OH 43081
(614)823-3175
From: LORI LAITMAN <lori@artsongs.com>

Date: October 4, 2012 2:19:29 PM EDT

To: Helen Allen <bradley4611@att.net>

Subject: Re: Music Excerpts for DMA Document

Dear Helen,

You have my permission and I am the publisher, so I grant that permission too. Only thing is that I have learned much more about notation and look at some of my earlier scores in disbelief at how sloppy looking they are - so if you have particular excerpts, I might like to "approve" them or make them look better for your paper. Ok?

Glad all is progressing well! When it is done, please give me all the info (title, school, degree, etc.) and I will post your work on the art songs site:)

Thanks.

All best,

Lori
APPENDIX D - COMPLETE VITA

EDUCATION

April 2013  The Ohio State University - Columbus, OH
Doctor of Musical Arts
with Singing Health Specialization Certificate

2001  The Ohio State University - Columbus, OH
Master of Music

1998 - 1999  Indiana University - Bloomington, IN
(Work on Master of Music)

1998  The Ohio State University - Columbus, OH
Bachelor of Music, magna cum laude

1993  Yellow Springs High School - Yellow Springs, OH
High School Diploma

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2001 - Present:  Senior Lecturer, Voice Area, Otterbein University
Courses Taught:
- Applied Voice
- Class Voice
- German & French Diction

2009 – 2012:  Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University
Courses Taught:
- Applied Voice
- German Diction
- Italian Diction
- Introduction to the IPA (English Diction)
- First-year Seminar
- Class Voice

1999 - 2001: Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

Courses Taught:
- Applied Voice
- French Diction
- Class Voice

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Complete Roles
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<td>Parasha</td>
<td>Mavra</td>
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<td>Don Giovanni</td>
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<td>Gianni Schicchi</td>
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<td>Die Zauberflöte</td>
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<td>The Old Maid &amp; the Thief</td>
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<td>Clorinda</td>
<td>La Cenerentola</td>
<td>Indiana University</td>
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<td>Don Giovanni (Gazzaniga)</td>
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Chorus
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<td>Le Nozze di Figaro</td>
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Solos/Concerts

2012
Ridván Festival, Yellow Springs, OH: *Soprano Soloist*, "Zefiro Torna" (Monteverdi)

2012
*Guest Recitalist*: Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2012
*Guest Recitalist*: *Presenting the Works of Allen T. McCullough*,

2011
*Faculty Recital* - Otterbein University, Westerville, OH

2011
*Mass in B Minor (Bach)*, Soprano soloist - Bach Festival, Bluffton University, Bluffton, OH

2011
DMA Chamber Recital, The Ohio State University (Sop/Mezzo Duet Recital)

2010
Recital (Rachmaninoff Song Selections)

2010
DMA Voice Recital, The Ohio State University

2010
*Marzelline* - (Beethoven's *Fidelio*) - The Ohio State University Concert Version

2008
Opera, Art Song & Musical Theater Recital, Worthington, OH - Hired by Opera Columbus Outreach Program

2007
*Messiah* (Handel), soprano soloist - Bluffton University, Bluffton, OH

2007 & 2001
Selected Arias (Puccini, Mozart & Moore)

2006
*Common Book Author*: *Music of the Holocaust* - soloist

2005
Faculty Voice Recital, Otterbein College (Purcell, Strauss - Op. 10, Liszt & Rachmaninoff - Op. 38)

2003
Faculty Voice Recital, Otterbein College (*Les Soirées Musicales - G. Rossini*)
2002  *Benedicite* *(Vaughan Williams)*, soprano soloist - Denison University, Granville, OH

2002  *Carmina Burana*, soprano soloist - Westerville Symphony Orchestra and combined Otterbein College choirs

2001  Art Song Recital with Phil Everingham,


2001 & 1998  Selected Arias (G. Verdi) - *The Ohio State University Concerto Competition*, 1st Place, Winner's Concert


2000  Selected Art Songs (J. Marx, S. Rachmaninoff, F. Liszt) - Cleveland, OH

2000  *Gloria* *(Poulenc)* - The Ohio State University Orchestra & Choirs

2000  *Dido's Lament* - The Ohio State University Chorale, Halloween Concert

1999  *Laud to the Nativity* *(Respighi)* - Yellow Springs Chorus, Yellow Springs, OH

1998  *Litaniae Lauretanae* *(Mozart)* - Yellow Springs Chorus

1998  Selected Arias/Art Songs (D. Moore, R. Quilter, F. Schubert

1993  *Exsultate Jubilate* *(Mozart)* - Yellow Springs Orchestra
**COMPETITIONS, AWARDS, MEMBERSHIPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Graduate Teaching Award, The Ohio State University SOM</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The Society of Alumni &amp; Friends of the School of Music Scholarship Fund, The Ohio State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005 - Present</td>
<td>Member, National Association of Teachers of Singing (<em>NATS</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Finalist, Palm Beach Opera Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2nd Place &amp; Audience Choice Award, Opera Columbus Vocal Competition, Senior Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001 &amp; 1998</td>
<td>1st Place, The Ohio State University Concerto Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Encouragement Award, Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Southern Ohio District</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Margaret Speaks Graduate Vocal Music Scholarship</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1st Place, Women in Music Columbus Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3rd Place, Advanced Women, NATS Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997 &amp; 1996</td>
<td>Summer Research Opportunity Grant (Subject: Vocal Vibrato and Creating the Habit) - The Ohio State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Excellence Award (Full Tuition, 4 yrs. of undergraduate study) - The Ohio State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993 &amp; 1992</td>
<td>1st &amp; 2nd Place, respectively, Dayton Opera Guild Competition, Dayton, OH</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1st Place, Xenia Music Society Competition, Xenia, OH</td>
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WORKSHOPS/COMMITTEES

2012  Judge, All-State Choir Selection Committee

2012  Master Class Instructor: Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

2012  Vocal Division Judge - Olentangy Schools Solo & Ensemble Competition

2011  Judge, All-State Choir Selection Committee

2011  Vocal Health Workshop, presenter - Otterbein University

2011  Guest Instructor, Otterbein University High School Choral Workshop

TRAINING

Voice Teachers
Robin Rice  The Ohio State University
Shirlee Emmons  NY, NY
Patricia Stiles  Indiana University

Coaches
Steven Crawford  The Metropolitan Opera
Russell Miller  The Cleveland Institute of Music
Ed Bak  The Ohio State University
Phillip Everingham  St. Joseph's School of Music, MN
Anne Christopherson  University of North Dakota
Barbara Brenton Sahr  The Ohio State University

MASTER CLASSES

George Shirley  The Ohio State University
Barbara Daniels  The Ohio State University
Willie Waters  Artistic Director, Connecticut Opera
Mark Rucker  OSU & American Singers' Opera Project
Nancy Stokes Milnes  American Singers' Opera Project, NY, NY
Warren Jones  The Cleveland Art Song Festival
Julius Drake  The Cleveland Art Song Festival  Stanford Olsen  The Cleveland Art Song Festival  Lorenzo Malfatti  Opera Theatre of Lucca, Italy & OSU  Kay Griffel  The Ohio State University  Håkan Hagegård  The Cleveland Art Song Festival  Edoardo Müller  Opera Theatre of Lucca, Italy

**ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

1978 - Present  Pianist

2000  Piano Faculty, *The Conservatory of Piano*, Columbus, OH

1982 - 1994  Violinist

1990 - 1993  Violin Instructor, *Summer Strings Music Program*, Yellow Springs, OH

1988 - 1991  Violin (3rd Chair, 1991) & Piano (each by audition), -Dayton Philharmonic Junior String Orchestra

1990  Violin - Southwest Regional Orchestra (by audition)

1986 - 1993  National Piano Guild Competition