

**COLLABORATION AND THE CREATION OF A NEW PIECE OF MUSIC: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE ROLES PLAYED BY COMPOSER, POET, AND SINGER IN
WILLIAM BOLCOM'S *BRIEFLY IT ENTERS* FOR SOPRANO AND PIANO.**

**Rachel Sinnott
Bachelor of Music, University of Lethbridge, 2010**

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
Of the University of Lethbridge
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

Department of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

©Rachel Sinnott, 2012

DEDICATION

For Barbara Sinnott and Jane Frebold.

ABSTRACT

This document looks at American composer William Bolcom's song cycle *Briefly It Enters*, from a collaborative standpoint. The cycle was written with soprano Benita Valente in mind and the poetry is taken from the work of American poet Jane Kenyon. Chapter one of the thesis offers a brief history of the practice of writing for specific singers among composers in Europe and the United States. Chapter two provides biographical information about the participants involved in the project. The third chapter narrates a timeline of events leading up to the work's premiere; chapter four is a musical analysis of the cycle from a singer's standpoint. Included within chapter four are ideas about the poetry, vocal considerations for Valente, and the effect of Kenyon's death upon the creation of this work. The fifth chapter provides insight for performers who wish to learn and perform this cycle in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to Dr. William Bolcom, Benita Valente, Dr. Janet Youngdahl, Dr. Carolyn Herrington, Dr. Katherine Baber, Dr. Anthony Suter, Dr. Blaine Hendsbee, Dr. Ed Jurkowski, Dr. Deanna Oye, Joseph Bulman, Sean Guist, Dagny Sinnott, Thomas Sinnott, Rebecca Sinnott, Patrick Sinnott, Jana Holesworth, Shannon Booth, Chris Morris, and Sara Johansen.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Trend of Composing for a Specific Singer in Contemporary Classical Music	6
A. Historical Tradition of European Composers Writing for Specific Singers	6
B. Twentieth Century American Song Cycles Written for Specific Singers	8
C. William Bolcom and Specific Singers	10
Chapter Two: Artists' Backgrounds	11
A. William Bolcom	11
B. Benita Valente	17
C. Jane Kenyon	20
Chapter Three: A Narrative Telling of the Creation of <i>Briefly It Enters</i>	24
A. <i>Let Evening Come</i> : the Initial Collaboration	24
B. <i>Briefly It Enters</i> : Proposal and Funding	25
C. <i>Briefly It Enters</i> : The Selection of Poetry	26
D. <i>Briefly It Enters</i> : The Illness and Death of Jane Kenyon	27
Chapter Four: Musical Analysis from a Collaborative Perspective	28
A. How does Bolcom interpret the spiritual elements in Kenyon's poems?	28
• <i>Who</i>	29
• <i>The Clearing</i>	32
• <i>Twilight: After Haying</i>	35
• <i>Man Eating</i>	38
• <i>Briefly It Enter, and Briefly Speaks</i>	40
B. How does Bolcom make meaningful musical divisions within the poems?	43
C. How does Bolcom speak to Kenyon's illness? How does he express suffering?	46
• <i>Otherwise</i>	46
• <i>The Sick Wife</i>	55
D. What is the role of nature within the cycle?	63
• <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i>	63
• <i>Peonies at Dusk</i>	69
E. What are the practical considerations taken for the singer and the audience?	
How does Bolcom arrange the cycle in a comprehensive way?	77
• Vocal Considerations for Valente	77
• Consideration for the Audience	82
• Structure of the Cycle	84
Chapter Five: Notes to Future Performers of the Cycle	87
Appendix A: The Poems	91
Appendix B: Interview with Benita Valente	96
Appendix C: Interview with William Bolcom	104
Bibliography	115

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Bolcom's Vocal Compositions by Style and Date	13
Table 2: The Locations of the Poems within Kenyon's Publications	21
Table 3: Textual Separations in <i>The Clearing</i>	44
Table 4: Textual Separations in <i>Otherwise</i>	50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: <i>Who</i> , m. 1-3	30
Figure 2: <i>Who</i> , m. 20-25	32
Figure 3: <i>The Clearing</i> , m. 78-83	34
Figure 4: <i>The Clearing</i> , m. 48-55	35
Figure 5: <i>Twilight: After Haying</i> , m. 1-5	36
Figure 6: <i>Twilight: After Haying</i> , m. 48-57	37
Figure 7: <i>Twilight: After Haying</i> , m. 32-37	38
Figure 8: <i>Man Eating</i> , m. 17-20	39
Figure 9: <i>Man Eating</i> , m. 16-19	39
Figure 10: <i>Man Eating</i> , m. 30-31	40
Figure 11: <i>Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks</i> , m. 36-38	42
Figure 12: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 10-11	47
Figure 13: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 3-5	48
Figure 14: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 24-26	49
Figure 15: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 6-7	51
Figure 16: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 10-11	52
Figure 17: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 18-19	52
Figure 18: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 22-23	52
Figure 19: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 29-31	53
Figure 20: <i>Otherwise</i> , m. 1-3	54
Figure 21: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 1-4	57
Figure 22: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 12-13	58
Figure 23: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 16-17	59
Figure 24: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 14-17	60
Figure 25: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 29-30	61
Figure 26: <i>The Sick Wife</i> , m. 22	61
Figure 27: <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> , m. 1-4	65
Figure 28: <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> , m. 11-14	66
Figure 29: <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> , m. 24-32	67
Figure 30: <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> , m. 5-7	68
Figure 31: <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> , m. 31-33	69
Figure 32: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 43-47	70
Figure 33: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 1-6	71
Figure 34: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 22-26	72
Figure 35: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 27-34	73
Figure 36: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 39-42	74
Figure 37: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 59-69	75
Figure 38: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 80-84	76
Figure 39: <i>Who</i> , m. 17-20	78
Figure 40: <i>The Clearing</i> , m. 75	79
Figure 41: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 18-20	79
Figure 42: <i>Peonies at Dusk</i> , m. 29-34	80
Figure 43: <i>Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks</i> , m. 18-20	81
Figure 44: <i>Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks</i> , m. 33-35	82

**COLLABORATION AND THE CREATION OF A NEW PIECE OF MUSIC: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE ROLES PLAYED BY COMPOSER, POET, AND SINGER IN
WILLIAM BOLCOM'S *BRIEFLY IT ENTERS* FOR SOPRANO AND PIANO.**

Introduction

Collaboration is the fundamental thread of creativity and community that exists below the surface of contemporary classical music. In order to study musical works both old and new, it is beneficial to analyze the modes of collaboration that permeate the different stages of the creative process. Who suggested the project? How did the collaborators meet? How did the artistic personalities interact with one another and how did the strengths and weaknesses of each collaborator influence the resulting piece of music? In his doctoral thesis, Raymond Stanley Harris elaborates on the role of collaboration:

The art of collaboration might be described as a negotiated necessity. It is a necessity because of the multi-faceted nature of creating, producing and presenting any fully-formed work of art. The composer needs the librettist/poet; the singer needs the composer and usually a performing collaborator; and, in a broader sense, the creative task requires the support of finances, promotion and numerous logistics to be co-related and cooperatively considered. Collaboration in music, while a necessity, is also a negotiated and often evolving relationship.¹

In short, Harris puts proposes that a piece of music, the product of collaboration, is greater than the sum of its parts.

American composer William Bolcom's *Briefly It Enters: A Song Cycle from Poems of Jane Kenyon* provides an excellent example of the collaborative model that exists as a framework

¹ Raymond Stanley Harris, "Songs of Ascents: A collaboration of singer, composer and ancient text." (D.M.A. Diss., University of British Columbia 2005), 1, ProQuest (NR10400)

for new music. Here we can examine a living composer writing for a living singer with the support of a living poet. William Bolcom wrote this set for acclaimed soprano Benita Valente, and the text was chosen from the poetry of his long-time friend, Jane Kenyon.²

While this study is primarily taken from a singer's perspective and began as a critical look at Bolcom's setting for Valente's voice, the resulting document describes the different levels at which interaction from all parties involved contributed to the success of the work.

From an outsider's perspective, it might appear that the two artistic personalities of Bolcom and Kenyon were not initially well suited to one another. Bolcom has written for almost every combination of musicians imaginable, utilizing a range of methods and styles from serialism to ragtime. Perusing his works list, the variety is profound, however, his many cabaret songs are primarily rooted in humour; they are invective satires filled with caustic wit. In contrast with Bolcom, Kenyon's style is focussed and direct. To combat her depression, she often meditated upon a single object, such as a peony, and this meditative practice is reflected in her poetry. Perhaps it was this very difference in their artistic temperaments that contributed to the unique quality and tone of the cycle. The finished product occupies an interesting niche in the context of the greater body of Bolcom's work for voice and piano. Placed next to the vast output of humorous songs by Bolcom, it becomes abundantly clear that it is a smaller group that is rooted in the world of serious art song. *Briefly It Enters* is subtle and understated and yet it requires an interpreter of deep dramatic strength.

Kenyon and Valente shared similar struggles throughout their careers. Kenyon was initially over-shadowed by her husband's achievements in the field of literature. Her small lyrics were praised for their femininity and sweetness. Valente too was type-cast. She possessed a small, sweet, and agile sound, and specialized in Baroque music and in the operatic roles of

² The accompanist was Cynthia Raim, a longtime collaborator and friend of Benita Valente.

Mozart. Her fiery personality perhaps matched the more dramatic operatic roles but her voice did not.³ By becoming a true master of her instrument, she was able to branch out into twentieth-century music and find a niche for herself there. Likewise, Kenyon honed her craft until she was able to stand on her own. The two voices make an ideal match for each other and it is not difficult to see why Valente was so drawn to the poems of Kenyon.

Another valuable comparison might be made between Valente and Bolcom's wife, Joan Morris. Although Morris is relatively unconnected to this work, she is still the voice for whom Bolcom wrote the majority of his vocal compositions. It is her voice that first tempted his foray into the world of song. Valente and Morris, while both performers of great intelligence and drama, could not reflect more opposite talents. Morris has a low and sultry voice, capable of creating a variety of colours, and her attitude inflects the mundane with humour and vitality. Conversely, Valente is a singer of seamless precision, dazzling upper tessitura, and regal presence. Bolcom's work for each of these singers is tailored incredibly well to their individual abilities.

Given that the focus of this project has been to take a detailed look at the nature of collaboration in the creation of Bolcom's song cycle, it was initially daunting to decide how to map out the analysis portion of this document. A traditional method might be to lay the songs out in order and submit each one to a thorough textual and theoretical analysis. However, this examination is concerned with the manner in which the different parties involved worked together; how each contributed their own musical layer to this fine cycle of songs. With this topic in mind, it seems more prudent to examine the songs using less orthodox methods. A thematic examination is also problematic. Kenyon managed to define her work in such a way that her style became highly consistent and especially recognizable. She used a small framework, but within that structure incorporated many different ideas. She was able to draw a wide variety of topics,

³ Cori Ellison, "Team Player," *Opera News* 57. no. 17: 16.

colours and textures into a few short and succinct lines. These poems blur the lines drawn between poetic types; we are left with questions about what is a spiritual poem, what is a nature poem, and what is a poem that deals with the aspects of everyday life. Given that the poems themselves are not easily sorted into one type, it follows that their settings are also difficult to define.

To keep collaboration at the forefront of the discussion and to avoid the redundancy of examining each piece as an individual island of sound, the songs will be studied under several different lenses. By examining them this way, it will be easier to pull separate pieces in and out of the light and extract key moments from each of them.⁴ As traditional examination methods provide a clumsy model for this discussion, perhaps by presenting this investigation as a series of questions, we will begin to find some answers. The following sections will be laid out thus:

- A. How does Bolcom interpret the spiritual elements in Kenyon's poems?
- B. How does Bolcom make meaningful musical divisions within the poems?
- C. How does Bolcom speak to Kenyon's illness? How does he express suffering?
- D. What is the role of nature within the cycle?
- E. What are the practical considerations taken for the singer and the audience? How does Bolcom arrange the set in a comprehensive way?

This method is based upon questions that arose from my research. Rather than imposing a structure upon the information as it was garnered, it seemed more beneficial to let the research

⁴ In addition to this document there is in existence a dissertation by Nancy E. Jennings Jantsch that effectively dissects each song and provides an excellent musical analysis of each piece in addition to some interesting ideas about the structure of the set. The dissertation is entitled "'Briefly It Enters': A Song Cycle by William Bolcom from Poems by Jane Kenyon." Nancy Elaine Jennings Jantsch, "Briefly It Enters: A Song Cycle by William Bolcom from Poems by Jane Kenyon." (Ph.D. Diss., Ohio State University, 2001), ProQuest (3022425)

guide the format of the paper. By taking a qualitative approach, this paper seeks to highlight the inherently collaborative aspects of Bolcom's song cycle, *Briefly It Enters*.

CHAPTER 1

The Trend of Composing for a Specific Singer in Contemporary Classical Music.

A. Historical Tradition of European Composers writing for Specific Singers

There exists within vocal music a long tradition of composers writing art songs and operatic roles for specific singers. In fact, I would argue that a composer is rarely moved to write a particular work for the voice without a specific singer in mind. Subsequently, many of the great singers throughout history did not perform music that had not been tailored exclusively to their strengths. In her discussion of Mozart's writing for two outstanding sopranos, Patricia Lewy Gidwitz provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which Mozart incorporated the vocal demands and forces of his performers into his operas.⁵ Gidwitz also discusses the notion that many singers were unwilling to perform something that had not been written deliberately for them. Gidwitz states that, "to venture onto the stage unarmed with a piece expressly written for oneself to sing was a risk. When a singer fell into the hands of an unskilled composer or was miscast, the results could be disastrous."⁶

It is not only within the context of opera that we discover the phenomenon of singer and composer working together. The composers of Romantic art song also were interested in collaboration on many different levels. The role of the piano in art song, as a conveyor of emotional content, became emphasized and utilized to its greatest degree. There was a focus upon different ways to set a particular language, how best to articulate its nuances and idiosyncrasies, while maintaining a musical line. In addition, the intimate nature of the art form allowed singers to access a variety of colours and dynamics within their own instrument to further articulate the mood or the character of a song.

⁵Patricia Lewy Gidwitz, 1991, " 'Ich bin die erste Sangerin' Vocal profiles of two Mozart sopranos," *Early Music* XIX: 565-579.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 565.

The history of art song contains many considerable examples of composer and singer teams. These partnerships are noteworthy because by working together both members could better understand the expressive capabilities of the voice. These collaborations led to better and more interesting vocal writing. For instance, Franz Schubert worked intimately with Michael Vogl, a famous operatic singer.⁷ Not only did Vogl premiere a great many of Schubert's lieder, he also helped promote the genius of the young composer.⁸ Mary Garden, a Scottish-born singer who became the leading soprano of the *Opera Comique* where she made her debut in 1900, worked closely with Jules Massenet and Claude Debussy.⁹ The composer and singer duo of Francis Poulenc and Pierre Bernac lasted for 25 years.¹⁰ In addition to the work they did together in the development of the art form itself, their collaboration has left us with a rich and detailed insight as to how the pieces should ideally be performed. Bernac's writing as well as the recordings that he made with Poulenc have helped future generations of singers to interpret the art songs of this French composer. Poulenc also composed extensively for soprano Denise Duval, who acted as his muse; and in addition to the creation of several operatic roles, she accompanied him on his first international tour singing his *melodies*.¹¹

In addition to the professional relationships listed above, there are also examples where composer and singer have established a romantic relationship, providing for them an ideal context for artistic collaboration. For example, Richard Strauss married his former student, soprano Pauline de Ahna and was inspired to create many operatic roles for her as well as an abundance of lieder. They performed internationally together and Strauss' loss of interest in the art song genre

⁷ Ewan West, "Vogl, Johann Michael," *In Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/29603> (accessed July 5, 2012)

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Jon Tolansky, "Garden, Mary," *In The Oxford Companion to Music, edited by Alison Latham. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2786> (accessed July 5, 2012)

¹⁰ Alan, Blyth, "Bernac, Pierre," *In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02837> (accessed July 5, 2012).

¹¹ Myriam Chimènes and Roger Nichols, "Poulenc, Francis," *In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/22202> (accessed July 5, 2012).

seems linked to his wife's eventual retirement from singing.¹² Later he would be moved to orchestrate some of his previously composed songs for specific singers like Elisabeth Schumann.¹³ British composer Benjamin Britten wrote a wealth of tenor repertoire for his partner, Peter Pears. Pears not only served as a model for Britten's operatic characters, he also premiered Britten's art song and assisted with the libretto for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Britten and Pears were introduced by a mutual friend, poet W. H. Auden: the composer also worked extensively with Auden and set many of his poems to music.¹⁴

B. Twentieth Century American Song Cycles Written for Specific Singers

It is evident that the compositional trends present in Europe influenced the creation of serious song in America. In her study, *American Art Song and American Poets*, Friedberg points out that the dominant American composers at the turn of the century – MacDowell, Loeffler and Griffes¹⁵ - all pursued studies in Germany and brought back with them a musical style that was reminiscent of the German Lied.

Samuel Barber, and his compositions for Leontyne Price, stand out as an early example in American music, of the practice of writing for a particular singer. Barber wrote two major song cycles for Price in addition to the operatic repertoire that he composed for her, for example the role of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. *Hermit Songs* was premiered in 1953 and *Despite and Still* in 1969. Dominick Argento wrote *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* for Janet Baker in 1974, and *Casa Guidi* for Frederica von Stade in 1983. Like Bolcom, Argento also composed for his

¹²Bryan Gilliam and Charles Youmans, "Strauss, Richard," *In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/40117pg8> (accessed July 5, 2012).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Phillip Brett, et al., "Britten, Benjamin," *In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg5> (accessed July 5, 2012)

¹⁵ Ruth C. Friedberg, *American Art Song and American poetry*, (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1981)

wife. His *Songs About Spring* (1980) were written for his wife, soprano Carolyn Bailey.¹⁶ André Previn is noteworthy for the inspiration he has taken from particular voices and often writes with specific singers in mind. His credits include *Five Songs* (1977) for Janet Baker, *Honey and Rue* (1992) for Kathleen Battle, as well as *Sallie Chisum Remembers Billie the Kid* (1994) and *Four Songs with Cello Obligato* (1994) for Sylvia McNair.¹⁷ John Corigliano was also commissioned to write a piece for Sylvia McNair, who expressed that she wanted the text to come from an American poet. Thus, Corigliano chose seven texts from the lyrics of Bob Dylan, and using said lyrics, Corigliano created *Mr. Tambourine Man* (2003).¹⁸ Ricky Ian Gordon similarly has used the voice of René Fleming, among others, as inspiration for numerous compositions such as *Night Flight to San Francisco* premiered in 2000.¹⁹

Like their European counterparts, composers such as Ives, Copland and Thompson became preoccupied with setting poetry in a manner that would reflect the natural declamation of their vernacular language.²⁰ This approach, wherein the language is examined first, has dominated much of the scholarship centred around American art song, and with good reason. As Friedberg points out: “In order to trace the rise of any song tradition, we must begin with the poetry, for it is a fact well known to music historians that the great ages of song composition in all countries always follow, with a variable time lag, the great periods of lyric poetry.”²¹

Making poetry the primary investigative feature is a productive way to begin any study of vocal music. To supplement this approach, it is valuable to examine song writing from the perspective of the voice for which it is being written. By taking a specific voice, and

¹⁶ Sarah Elizabeth Snyder, “The new American song: A catalog of published songs by 25 living American composers,” (PhD. Diss., University of Iowa, 2011.) 15.

¹⁷ Edward Greenfield, “Previn, Sir André,” In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/22327> (accessed July 6, 2012).

¹⁸ John Corigliano, *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan for voice and piano*, (Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, Inc., 2003)

¹⁹ Ricky Ian Gordon, Composer, Ricky Ian Gordon, Last modified 2007. <http://www.rickyiangordon.com/>

²⁰ Friedberg, *American art song and American poetry*, 5

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5

subsequently a specific person into account, we can unlock some of the mysteries surrounding the composition of song. For example, vocal writing that may seem awkward or strange may have been tailored to fit the express needs of an individual singer. The voice is a unique instrument and while uniformities do exist, the strengths and weaknesses of each performer should ideally contribute to the manner in which a composer writes for them. By following this path of study, we should come out with a richer and fuller understanding of vocal music in general.

C. William Bolcom and Specific Singers

In addition to the composers that preceded him, Bolcom is no stranger to writing with a specific voice in mind. He did not compose solely for voice and piano until he met and began working with his future wife, Joan Morris. In addition to the monumental amount of work that the two produced together, Bolcom has frequently composed with a specific singer in mind. In addition to Benita Valente, Bolcom has worked with many of the great singers of the twentieth-century, including Marilyn Horne, Catherine Malfitano and Thomas Hampson.

CHAPTER 2

Artists' Backgrounds

A. William Bolcom

William Elden Bolcom was born in Seattle, Washington in 1938. Hoping to give him something of a normal childhood, his parents decided not to push him in the direction of the child-prodigy lifestyle. His parents were not particularly musical but encouraged his interest in the piano and by age eleven he was studying the instrument with Berthe Poncy Jacobson²² and was pursuing composition with John Verrall at the University of Washington. The time that Bolcom spent studying with Verrall had an important influence on his compositional ideals. Feingold elaborates on the manner in which Verrall shaped the ideas of the budding composer by discussing two important concepts that he would pass on to his student, "one was the notion that artists need what Bolcom calls 'a mystical overview,' a sense of all human actions, however great or small, having a function within the larger mystery of the universe."²³ In addition to this idea, Verrall refused to confine Bolcom to a particular style or method of composition.²⁴ His open approach to a variety of musical styles has played a very important role in Bolcom's musical output. Feingold further suggests that the influence of Bolcom's teachers and parents led him to believe that one style of music was not superior to another, but rather that the music just had to be good in and of itself.²⁵

Bolcom graduated in 1958 from the University of Washington with a Bachelor of Arts in Composition. He was twenty years old. Although he was offered a full scholarship to study at Yale with Paul Hindemith, Bolcom instead decided to work with Darius Milhaud (1892-1974),

²²Marlene Titus Bateman, "The "Cabaret Songs," volume one of William Bolcom and Arnold Weinstein: An exploration and analysis," (Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001.) 5, ProQuest (3008241)

²³Michael Feingold, (Author). "A team with a view," *Opera News* 67, no. 6 (December 1, 2002): 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

whom he had met during a summer in Aspen.²⁶ Bolcom completed his Master of Arts in 1961 from Mills College in Oakland California. In addition to his study with the Milhaud in California, Bolcom also followed the composer to Paris, where he was additionally able to study with Olivier Messiaen. Much like the influence of Verrall, Milhaud seems to have encouraged and enhanced Bolcom's willingness to experiment with a variety of musical styles and to not be confined to a particular sound or mode of expression.

It was in Paris that Bolcom met and developed a friendship with poet and lyricist Arnold Weinstein. They were introduced through Milhaud, who had been considering setting a libretto by Weinstein entitled *Comedy of Horrors*. Ultimately deciding that the aforementioned libretto was too American for him, Milhaud passed it on to Bolcom,²⁷ and it is this work that was the basis for Bolcom's first operatic work entitled *Dynamite Tonite*. It could be described as a "cabaret opera" or as Bolcom called it, "an opera for actors." The show combined a variety of light music styles with adventurous harmonies and musical theatre inspired singing techniques. This early obsession with character and text over vocal pyrotechnics would later transfer into the majority of Bolcom's works for the voice. Bolcom and Weinstein would go on to work on an extraordinary amount of compositions together.

After earning his PhD in 1964 from Stanford, Bolcom took a teaching position at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and it was here that he began a partnership with mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. During this time, Bolcom was hard at work on what would become one of his greatest achievements, his large-scale, multi-movement setting of the 46 texts of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Morris' voice would ultimately become the inspiration for one of the vocal soloists.

²⁶Bateman, "The "Cabaret Songs," volume one of William Bolcom and Arnold Weinstein," 6

²⁷Bateman, "The "Cabaret Songs," volume one of William Bolcom and Arnold Weinstein." 8.

As a side project, the two of them began researching parlour songs from the 1920s and gave concerts tailored specifically to this repertoire. Bolcom and Morris have made 24 recordings together and their initial collaboration, *After the Ball* (1974) was nominated for a Grammy Award.²⁸

Bolcom and his long-time collaborator, Arnold Weinstein, began working on cabaret songs for Morris in the late 1970s. Feingold describes the role that Morris played as muse for these creations:

Morris's crystalline diction, bittersweet vocal timbre and subtle interpretive sense made (and still make) her an ideal exponent of Bolcom's vernacular style. Her madcap comic streak, when added to these qualities, makes her equally perfect at conveying Weinsteinian humor.²⁹

Table 1: Bolcom's Vocal Compositions by Style and Date

Date	Opera and Chamber Works with Voice	Cabaret	Classical Art Songs
1963		<u>Dynamite Tonite</u> Actor's Opera in two acts Premiere: The Actor's Studio Theater, Dec 21, 1963	
1966	<u>Morning and Evening Poems</u> For Contralto or Tenor or Counter-tenor, Al. Fl., Hp., Pno, Via., Perc. Text by William Blake Premiere: 1966		
1967-69		<u>Greatshot</u> Cabaret/theatre opera for 2 actors 1967-69	
1975	<u>Open House</u> A Song Cycle for Tenor and Chamber Orchestra Text by Theodore Roethke Premiere: Paul Sperry, tenor, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, October 18, 1975	<u>Lime Jello Marshmallow</u> <u>Cottage Cheese Surprise</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Joan Morris and William Bolcom Premiere: Joan Morris, mezzo-soprano, William Bolcom, piano, November 28, 1975	

²⁸William Bolcom and Joan Morris, www.bolcomandmorris.com

²⁹ Feingold, "A team with a View," 29

Date	Opera and Chamber Works with Voice	Cabaret	Classical Art Songs
1978	<u>Three Irish Songs</u> For Medium Voice , Fl., Vln., Via., Vcl., Pno. Text by Thomas Moore Premiere: Joan Morris, mezzo- soprano, William Bolcom, piano, Mohawk Trail Festival musicians, August 1978		
1979	<u>Three Donald Hall Songs</u> For Medium Voice, Fl., Cl., Hn., Vcl., Pno. Text by Donald Hall Premiere: Joan Morris, mezzo- soprano, William Bolcom, piano, Mohawk Trail Festival musicians, July 27, 1979		
1984	<u>Songs of Innocence and Experience</u>		
1985		<u>Cabaret Songs Vol. 1 and 2</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Arnold Weinstein Written for Joan Morris (1977- 85)	
1988	<u>On the Beach at Night</u> For Tenor voice and 4 Timpani Poem by Walt Whitman (1978, rev. 1988)		
1988	<u>Chorale on St. Anne's Hymn</u>		
1989	For Soprano Soloist, SATB Chorus, and Org. 1988		<u>Villanelle</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Richard Tillinghast (1989)
1986-90	<u>Casino Paradise</u> Musical theatre opera 13 singers and 7 instrumentalists	<u>Casino Paradise</u> Cabaret version 3-4 singers and 2 keyboard players	
1991			
1991-92	<u>McTeague</u> Opera in two acts Libretto: Arnold Weinstein and Robert Altman Premiere: Lyric Opera of Chicago, 1992	<u>Songs to Dance</u> Eleven short poems set to music for Singer (medium voice), Dancer and Piano Text by George Montgomery Premiere: Joan Morris, mezzo- soprano, William Bolcom, piano, Dan Wagoner, dancer, October 1991	<u>I Will Breathe a Mountain</u> For Medium Voice and Piano: A Cycle from American Women Poets Premiere: Marilyn Horne, mezzo-soprano, Martin Katz, piano, March 26, 1991
1992			<u>Vaslav's Song</u> For Baritone and Piano Text by Ethyl Eichelberger Premiere: William Sharp, baritone, Steven Blier, piano, June 4, 1992
1993			<u>Tillinghast Duo</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Richard Tillinghast Premiere: Marni Nixon, soprano, Leonard Stein, piano, April 19, 1993

Date	Opera and Chamber Works with Voice	Cabaret	Classical Art Songs
1993			<u>Camp Shadywillow</u> For Baritone Voice and Piano Text by Richard Tillinghast Premiere: Christopher Trakas, baritone, John Musto, piano, November 16, 1993
1994	<u>Let Evening Come</u> For Soprano, Viola and Piano Poems by Maya Angelou, Emily Dickinson, Jane Kenyon Premiere: Benita Valente, soprano, Michael Tree, viola, Cynthia Raim, piano, March 24, 1994		
1995	<u>A Whitman Triptych</u> Song Cycle for Mezzo-soprano and Orchestra Text by Walt Whitman Premiere: Marilyn Horne, mezzo-soprano, San Francisco Opera Orchestra, June 24, 1995		
1996		<u>Cabaret Songs Vol. 3 and 4</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Arnold Weinstein Written for Joan Morris (1993-96)	<u>Briefly It Enters</u> For soprano and piano Poems by Jane Kenyon Premiere: Benita Valente, soprano, Cynthia Raim, piano, 1996
1997			<u>Turbulence: A Romance</u> For Soprano and Baritone and Piano Text by Alice Fulton Premiere: Marsha Hunter, soprano, Brian Kent, baritone, Thomas Linker, piano, April 27, 1997
1998-99	<u>A View from the Bridge</u> Opera in two acts World Premiere: Lyric Opera of Chicago, October 9, 1999		<u>The Last Days of Mankind</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Frank McGuinness, 1997
2001		<u>Ancient Cabaret</u> Medium Voice and Piano Translations from Greek and Latin texts by Arnold Weinstein Premiere: Joan Morris, mezzo-soprano and William Bolcom, piano Premiere: France, November 18, 2001	<u>From the Diary of Sally Hemmings</u> For Voice and Piano Text by Sandra Seaton Premiere: Florence Quivar, mezzo-soprano, J. J. Penna, piano, March 16, 2001

Date	Opera and Chamber Works with Voice	Cabaret	Classical Art Songs
2002		<u>Minicabs</u> For Medium Voice and Piano Text by Arnold Weinstein <u>The Same Thing (The Office Girl's Lament)</u> For Voice and Piano and Guitar <u>Tears at the Happy Hour</u> For Voice, Piano and Guitar	<u>Rhyme</u> Baritone and Piano Text by Richard Tillinghast Premiere: March 22, 2001 <u>Sept. 1, 1939</u> Text by W. H. Auden For Tenor and Piano Premiere: Robert White, tenor, Brian Zeger, piano, November 17, 2001 <u>Old Addresses</u> For Baritone and Piano Poems by Winans, Cavafy, Pound, Hughes, Doty, Weinstein and Koch Premiere: Stephen Salters, baritone and David Zobel, piano, April 19, 2002
2003	<u>Medusa</u> For Dramatic Soprano and String Orchestra Text by Arnold Weinstein Premiere: Catherine Malfitano, soprano, Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, March 5, 2003		
2002-04	<u>A Wedding</u> Opera in two acts Libretto: Arnold Weinstein and Robert Altman Premiere: Lyric Opera of Chicago, December 11, 2004		
2006	<u>Canciones de Lorca</u> For Tenor and Orchestra Poems by Federico Garcia Lorca Premiere: Placido Domingo, tenor, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, September 15, 2006		
2007			<u>Sonnet 29</u> Text by William Shakespeare Premiere: Monica Yunus, soprano, Vlad Iftinca, piano, March 18, 2007
2008	<u>Lucrezia</u> 5 singers and 2 pianos Premiere: March 11, 2008		
2010	<u>The Hawthorn Tree</u> For Mezzo-soprano, Piano, Flute, Oboe, Viola, Contrabass Premiere: Joyce Castle and the Orchestra of St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, October 20, 2010		
2011			<u>Laura Sonnets</u> For Baritone Voice and Piano A Cycle of Five Settings of Sonnets by Petrarch Premiere: Thomas Hampson, baritone, Craig Rutenberg, piano, February 18, 2011

Table 1 is a timeline of Bolcom's vocal works can lead us to several useful conclusions. First, Bolcom's interest in chamber music and operatic music has been a longstanding passion of his throughout his career. It is in this realm that he has access to the greatest variety of colours and different voice types. The appeal is obvious: Bolcom is a composer of great scope and variety, therefore this medium is ideal. Second, Bolcom's earliest work for voice and piano is *Lime Jello Marshmallow Surprise* dating from 1975. It was written for Morris, who happens to be its co-author. It does not seem surprising that his first work within this genre should be collaborative, nor that it was written for someone with whom he was romantically involved. Morris clearly inspired him in this instance. Bolcom's interest in art song does not emerge until much later. The first appearance in Bolcom's works list of serious art song form is in 1986. It is notable that his interest in true cabaret music began to wane as Joan Morris aged, finding that her vocal facilities had changed with time.

B. Benita Valente

Acclaimed soprano Benita Valente was born in 1934 and is best known for her interpretations of Bach, Handel and Mozart. An exemplary musician, her vocal technique is lauded as one of the best in the country and her repertoire spans a variety of musical eras and styles.

Valente grew up on her uncle's farm in Delano, California. Her parents divorced when she was young, and she lived primarily with her mother, a high soprano of Swiss descent. A child of the outdoors, she also enjoyed music and art. Her high school music teacher, Chester Hayden, recognized her vocal talents and took a particular interest in furthering her musical pursuits. When Valente took a year off after high school to nurse her mother through cancer, Hayden set up a tuition free program that included voice, piano, languages, stage department, dress, and

reading assignments.³⁰ He also drove her to her audition for Lotte Lehmann at Santa Barbara's Music Academy of the West. She was accepted on scholarship and worked with Lehmann for five summers. Lehmann focussed mainly on interpretation and expression, emphasizing an attention to text as opposed to music.³¹

Valente went on to study with Martial Singher at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, graduating in 1960, the same year that she won the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She met her husband, Anthony Checchia, at the Marlboro Music Festival, where he continues to serve as a major figure in administration. Valente and Checchia married in 1959. In 1962 she accepted a seasonal contract with the Freiburg Opera and went on to sing with the Nuremburg Opera in 1964. She toured with Sarah Caldwell's American National Opera Company singing such roles as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Euridice in *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress*.³² It was in 1973 that she made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Pamina, a role for which she is particularly celebrated. Other roles at the Metropolitan Opera include Nannetta in *Falstaff*, Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Ilia in *Idomeneo* and Almirena in Handel's *Rinaldo*.³³

Valente credits her teacher, soprano Margaret Harshaw, a Wagnerian soprano, for her impeccable technique. Valente met Harshaw about a decade after winning the Metropolitan Council Auditions. Valente's career had begun and she had spent some time employed abroad in Germany, yet she did not feel comfortable with her vocal technique until working with Harshaw. Reflecting upon her studies with Harshaw, Valente has stated:

³⁰ Cori Ellison, "Team Player," *Opera News* Vol. 57, no. 17, 1993. 17

³¹ Valente recalls Lehmann's reaction to Mozart: "She couldn't cut loose in it and she wanted to because she was free and expressive, without boundaries. She also learned music through the poetry first, so it was possible for her to forget the music – as opposed to the rest of us, who tend to forget the words, because we learn the music first. She always emphasized individuality, singing with feeling, using the words. It was interpretation, because she was not a voice teacher." – Ibid.

³² Ibid., 19

³³ Not only was this the Metropolitan Opera's first production of a Handel opera, but Valente received the longest applause of the show for her flawless rendition of "Lascia ch'io pianga" in an impressive cast that included Marilyn Horne as well as Samuel Ramey.

I liked the way her students talked about voice. They knew I needed a teacher, that I was looking for someone. I told her I didn't want to spend hours by myself in the studio and shred my voice, because I had gone through that, and it didn't work for me. She said, 'if you're willing to do three concentrated periods of ten minutes a day, you're all right.' That's fine – that makes sense to me. But to go into a practice room and go over something and then say, 'that wasn't what I thought anyhow' – it had been that way, and I didn't want that. Her way pulled me out. It was such a turn-on to be able to concentrate when I felt like it, to get in there and do what felt right, to work, to investigate.³⁴

In addition to her work within baroque and classical music Valente is credited with having a steady career in twentieth-century music. She has specialized in singing with string quartets and has had numerous pieces written for her. Among these are: *Songs from Letters from Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey* and *Songs of Light and Love* by Libby Larsen, *The Rewaking* by John Harbison, String Quartet no. 3 by Alberto Ginastera, and String Quartet no. 5 by Richard Wernick. In addition to these works, Valente has mentioned that one of her most exciting moments in new music was working with Earl Kim.³⁵ She has said that the piece he wrote for her had a palindromic effect: it began very simply, almost from nothing, with a chime and ended in the same fashion.

Valente's voice possessed many of the qualities desired by twentieth century composers. Her intelligence and accuracy made her an ideal candidate for difficult or unusual harmonies; her pure tone and slender vibrato were surely coveted attributes among composers who attempted to treat the voice in non-traditional ways. Beyond the tone and quality of Valente's instrument, her fiery personality tempered by her calculated approach to musical study caused her to execute new music with ingenuity and brilliance. She was particularly adept at presenting new music in a convincing way that included instead of alienating her audience.

³⁴ Robert Jacobson, "Its Own Reward," *Opera News* Vol. 50 no. 11, 1986. 13.

³⁵ The name of this piece is *Dead Calm*. It is the first selection from a larger work entitled *Exercises en Route: Songs for Voice and Ensemble*. Recording information can be found at allmusic.com.

C. Jane Kenyon (1947-1995)

American poet, Jane Kenyon, was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her family was made up of musicians and while Kenyon did not show any particular musical talent, music played an important role in her childhood. She studied at the University of Michigan, where she initially enrolled as a French major. Remembering that she used to enjoy writing poetry in her teens, Kenyon decided to take a chance and in addition to her regular course load, sign up for a poetry seminar taught by Donald Hall. Finding her old interests in this literary form reawakened, she opted to switch majors to English, and continued to study at the University of Michigan until 1972 when she received her master's degree.

Kenyon and Hall were friends for several years before embarking on a romantic relationship. The two eventually married and relocated to Hall's family farmhouse in New Hampshire. Kenyon spent her time at Eagle Pond Farm in New Hampshire developing her poetic style and finding her voice as an artist.

While it was clear that Kenyon had suffered from depression for many years, it was not until later in her adult life that she was diagnosed with bi-polar depression. She would experience manic emotional episodes followed by devastating crashes. These cycles were debilitating. She looked to medication for help, but she also had her own methods of coping. Nature and the changing seasons at Eagle Pond Farm played an important role in relationship to Kenyon's mental state. Winter was something to be endured, and Spring and Summer really infused her with joy. Kenyon used gardening and hiking to ward off depression, and also found respite in the completion of domestic tasks like baking. She enjoyed the act of creating something with her hands that was nourishing and beautiful.

Religion became a focal point in Kenyon's life when she relocated to New Hampshire. Even though she had renounced all forms of religion in her teens, she attended the local church

with Hall and came to form a friendship with the pastor. Although she began to adopt Christianity into her life, she was troubled by the lack of a female presence in the Holy Trinity. Her exploration of the works of certain mystics would lead her in her own pursuit of what she deemed the “luminous particular.”

It was at the farmhouse that Kenyon really began to find her own voice as a poet. She worked intimately with the poetry of Anna Akhmatova, something that would ultimately shape Kenyon’s own poetry. She was preoccupied with creating the short lyric poem and her thematic material generally came from the elements of life that were important to her or that affected her most greatly. Her publications include *From Room to Room* (1978), *The Boat of Quiet Hours* (1986), *Let Evening Come* (1990), *Constance* (1993), and *Otherwise* (1996). *Otherwise* is a mixture of new and previously published poems that Hall and Kenyon began putting together toward the end of her life. In addition to her own work, Kenyon published *Twenty Poems of Anna Akhmatova* (1985).

The poems that were eventually selected for the song cycle *Briefly It Enters* come from several different publications by Kenyon. They represent her at different times throughout her life. Table 2 gives a brief overview of the publication origin of each poem.

Table 2: The Locations of the Poems within Kenyon’s Publications

From Room to Room (1978)	Twenty Poems of Anna Akhmatova (1985)	The Boat of Quiet Hours (1986)
		1. <i>Who</i> 4. <i>February: Thinking of Flowers</i> 5. <i>Twilight: After Haying</i> 9. <i>Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks</i>
Let Evening Come (1990)	Constance (1993)	Otherwise: New and Selected Poems (1996)
2. <i>The Clearing</i>	3. <i>Otherwise</i> 8. <i>Peonies at Dusk</i>	6. <i>Man Eating</i> 7. <i>The Sick Wife</i>

It is interesting to note that none of the poems come from her first collection *From Room to Room*. It is also interesting that between this initial publication and her next volume of poetry, she edited poems of Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. Her style seems to have changed over the course of this project. A few other interesting facts can be drawn from viewing the poetry in this order. Here we can see that the most religious or spiritual moments in the cycle all come from an earlier publication *The Boat of Quiet Hours*. In my opinion, she was the most experimental or radical towards the end of her life.

Kenyon was diagnosed with leukemia in 1994 and died 15 months later. This quote from Mike Pride illustrates the devastation her death caused:

Jane's leukemia seemed doubly cruel because it came just as she had received national renown as a poet. Not two months before she was diagnosed, Bill Moyer's documentary on the two poets of Eagle Pond was broadcast on PBS nationwide. Jane and Don had begun reading publicly together, and the belittling comparisons had ended. People came to hear her as much as they came to hear him. By this time Jane had perfected a short lyric poem in which she invested objects and actions with emotion, and her readers made and cherished the connections.³⁶

Donald Hall has written many times about Kenyon since her death. Perhaps most notably is a multi-page poem entitled *The After Life* first published in 2000.³⁷ The poem chronicles Kenyon's illness and Hall's stages of grieving after her death. The first lines read:

During the eleven days
it took to die, they lived
past their anniversary:

Later he writes:

He could not play her Messiaen,
nor Mendelssohn, nor *Black and*

³⁶Mike Pride, "The Abiding Presence of Jane Kenyon," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Summer 2005): 460.

³⁷Donald Hall, "The after Life," *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2000): 123-131.

Blue, nor Benita Valente
singing “Let Evening Come.”

Kenyon’s legacy lives on in many ways. For instance, American composer Ricky Ian Gordon has set two of Kenyon’s poems for mezzo-soprano and piano: *Otherwise* and *Let Evening Come*.³⁸ Academic interest in her work is also growing; the first Jane Kenyon Conference occurred in April of 1998.

³⁸ rickyangordon.com

CHAPTER 3

A Narrative Telling of the Creation of *Briefly It Enters*

A. *Let Evening Come*: The Initial Collaboration

While one might intuit that the creation of *Briefly It Enters* was a product of Kenyon and Bolcom's longstanding friendship, it was actually soprano Benita Valente who is credited with the initial proposal. To properly understand why the collaborators were ready for such a project we must briefly examine the work that preceded this song cycle.

Bolcom and Valente met in Philadelphia when Bolcom was performing with his wife, Morris, at a newly opened cabaret space. When I interviewed Bolcom in March of 2012, he explained how the possibility of a future collaboration was put forward.³⁹ Valente liked the idea of a potential duet involving her colleague, mezzo-soprano Tatiana Troyanos, with whom she had worked on many occasions. A commission came forward from Gloria Narramore Moody⁴⁰ who wished to have a song cycle to commemorate her late husband; however, before the project could get underway, Troyanos died after suffering from breast cancer. The project was delayed until Bolcom received a telephone call from Valente suggesting violist Michael Tree take the place of Troyanos.

The resulting cantata consists of three poems and an interlude before the closing piece. The texts are taken from the work of Maya Angelou, Emily Dickinson and Kenyon⁴¹. It is Kenyon's elegiac poem *Let Evening Come* that closes the set and is also the title of the overall work. This was Valente's initial introduction to the poetry of Kenyon, and upon doing some

³⁹ Valente and Checchia first approached Bolcom about performing with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and once a relationship had been established Valente put forward the idea of a commission.

⁴⁰ A wealthy widow from Alabama.

⁴¹ The poems were "Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens And Mayfield" by Angelou, "'Tis Not That Dying Hurts Us So" by Dickinson and "Let Evening Come" by Kenyon

further investigation into her body of work, Valente wished to have an entire cycle set to the poems of Kenyon.

B. *Briefly It Enters: Proposal and Funding*

While doing some background research, Valente read through a volume of Kenyon's poetry and fell in love with the mood and tone of the poet's work. She approached Bolcom about writing the cycle. When I spoke to her, Valente mentioned her inherent love of the outdoors. Though Benita Valente and Jane Kenyon never met, they did manage to have one phone conversation, during which they bonded over their farm backgrounds. Valente's favourite poem was *Peonies at Dusk*. When I interviewed Valente in March of 2012 she said laughingly that she had attempted to grow peonies many times but had never succeeded.⁴² This was the only poem that she specifically requested for the new cycle. Beyond this selection, she left Bolcom and Kenyon to choose the remaining poems.

The project was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional commissioning grants were sought out from the University Musical Society of the University of Michigan, San Francisco Performances, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dartmouth College Hopkins Center and the University of New Hampshire Series.⁴³ For this cycle, there would be a series of performances associated with each place that brought forward funding. When I spoke with Valente she emphasized these grants as an important collaborative element when she discussed the creation of *Briefly It Enters*. Perhaps as an independent singer, Valente recognized how vital these grants can be to the creation of new art. Specifically, she believed the granting agencies that had provided them funding as well as performance venues also had to be defined as collaborators. In other words, Valente widens the circle of collaboration and demonstrates just how fundamental cooperation is at all levels.

⁴² Valente interview Appendix B

⁴³ William Bolcom, *Briefly It Enters: A Song Cycle from poems of Jane Kenyon for Voice and Piano*, Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corp., 1997

C. *Briefly It Enters*: The Selection of Poetry

Kenyon initially sent Bolcom 16 poems. Bolcom remarked to her later that she had grouped them together in sets of 4, 6, and 6, almost like a symphony.⁴⁴ Bolcom made a joke that he might come down with a sort of, “Schubertitis, and do a sort of 20th c. Winterreise (here a Jahreszeitreise?).”⁴⁵ His selection of certain poems over others moved forward from this point.

During my March 2012 interview, I asked Bolcom about the process of setting the poetry to music. Bolcom elaborated, “there are poems that give you the distinct feeling that there is a tune hidden in there.” As an example, he discussed some poems by Garcia Lorca that from the beginning held an inherent musicality for him. Turning his attention to *Briefly It Enters*, Bolcom clarified stating that, “some of Benita’s poems liked being set, some had a song-like quality [about them]. If you look back on them yourself you’ll notice that some of them have a song-like lyric and some have more of a poetry-set-to music-type-feeling.”⁴⁶ This description, however strangely worded, is actually a perfect evocation of the finished product. It is also interesting that he calls them “Benita’s poems.” The poetry came from Kenyon, but when Bolcom discusses them, he can’t help but call them Valente’s.

While Bolcom valued the thought that Kenyon had given to the selection of poems for this project, he found that his love of variety would not be so easily expressed amidst Kenyon’s monochromatic elegance. He specifically requested the inclusion of *Man Eating* and *The Sick Wife*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Jantsch, “Briefly It Enters,” 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bolcom interview Appendix C

⁴⁷ Ibid.

D. *Briefly It Enters*: The Illness and Death of Jane Kenyon

Kenyon's health seriously declined in 1994 and she could not attend the premiere of *Let Evening Come* on April 19th, 1994. Those involved in the performance knew that Kenyon's illness was critical and the news had a profound effect on Valente's performance. Originally slotted to perform a set of Wolf lieder after Bolcom's cantata, Valente found that she was unable to go back onstage. The performance was cut short, and as Bolcom recalled, performers and audience filed out quietly in the manner of a funeral procession.

During the final year of her life, Kenyon enjoyed listening to the recording made of this performance and looked forward to hearing an entire cycle of her poems. Bolcom had begun work on the cycle *Briefly It Enters* in 1994 and hoped that Kenyon would be able to hear at least a portion of the music. Kenyon died in April of 1995 while Bolcom was still in the process of composing the work. He was working on *Twilight: After Haying*, when he received the news of her death.

CHAPTER 4

Musical Analysis from a Collaborative Perspective

A. How does Bolcom interpret the spiritual elements in Kenyon's poems?

Kenyon's preoccupation with spirituality would affect her in many ways throughout her life. It would also have a major impact upon her work. The role that religion played in her life was never static. Kenyon's paternal grandmother, Dora Baldwin Kenyon, took a heavy handed, apocalyptic and judgement-fuelled approach to religion.⁴⁸ This was unappealing to Kenyon, and by her teens she had rejected anything to do with religious pursuits. Kenyon only began attending church again once she and her husband, Donald Hall, moved to New Hampshire. Yet while she seemed to have been enthused by the poetry of religious mystics, Kenyon was affronted by the sexism of the church. Her spiritual pursuits became a search for a feminine presence in the holy trinity.

She seemed to be searching for something she described as the "luminous particular." In an interview, she spoke about a 1980 experience, where she seemed to engage with a spiritual presence:

I really had a vision of that once. It was like a waking dream. My eyes were open and I saw these rooms, this house, but in my mind's eye, or whatever language you can find to say these things, I also saw a great ribbon of light and every human life was suspended. There was no struggle. There was only this buoyant shimmering, undulating stream of light. I took my place in this stream and after that my life changed fundamentally. I relaxed into existence in a way that I never had before.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Janstch, "Briefly It Enters," 13.

⁴⁹Jane Kenyon, *A Hundred White Daffodils*, (Graywolf Press, 2000.) 160

She goes on to discuss that this may have been a manic period, followed by a depressive crash, but nonetheless the experience resonated with her for the rest of her life. Within *Briefly It Enters*, there exist many moments or references to spirituality or Kenyon's particular light-driven slant upon Christianity within the texts. The poems that contain either an overarching theme of spirituality or just a few brief moments of it are *Who*, *The Clearing*, *Twilight: After Haying*, *Man Eating*, and, *Briefly It Enters*, and *Briefly Speaks*.

Who

The text of *Who* illuminates on a grander scale the phenomenon that is 'writer's block.' Kenyon's musings upon where her inspiration comes from, in combination with her innate need to express these sounds and feelings, provide us with a rich picture of the role that the divine played in her life. Kenyon had cited that the Holy Spirit often acted as her "muse."⁵⁰ The images are full of contrasts, for example, "animal", "angel" and, "stranger," and Jantsch brilliantly points out that Bolcom highlights these juxtapositions through a series of jagged jumps, leaps, and bounds between the vocal registers. Kenyon seems to be represented somewhere in between the ordinary and the ethereal, perhaps in the ambiguous accompaniment. Throughout the piece Bolcom challenges the vocalist to navigate wild register shifts and awkward word placement. Kenyon represents a middle ground; something between the divine and the mundane. Like the introductory bars of this song, Kenyon too is ambiguous. She remains undefined until this presence, voice, or inspiration visits her and gives her a purpose.

The introductory bars of the piece are delicate and highly chromatic. Bolcom creates a perfect landscape for Kenyon's words by giving them an introduction that is understated, yet highly complex. This is an exact evocation of Kenyon's personality and style. When the voice enters it is unsupported by the piano. The ambiguous nature of the introduction gives the listener

⁵⁰Jantsch, "Briefly It Enters," 22.

the feeling that it is coming out of thin air, much like Kenyon's divine inspiration. The singer's initial E5 is well-hidden within the cluster of notes that Bolcom uses to introduce the song.

Bolcom uses the initial two eighth-notes of the first measure, to line up a D5 in the left hand and a C#6 in the right hand. The next pairing is slightly more open. Bolcom pairs an E5 in the left with a C6 in the right. The first interval is a minor second. The following interval is a major third.

Slowly the notes drift apart. When the voice enters it emulates this cramped piano introduction.

The first entrance is high and uncomfortable but slowly it begins to unravel and unfold. The piano introduction sits in a high register. It is a lofty, crystalline, cluster of notes. The initial vocal pitch, E5, while clearly present within the context of the introduction, is blurred and marred by the inclusion of almost every other note in the scale. The D5 is held heavily in the piano throughout these two bars, so the singer may feel inclined to move toward this note. This pedal tone is topped with an E diminished chord. There is no evident tonal centre; therefore the singer must train herself to hear the note as an independent statement. Perhaps for Kenyon, finding the voice of inspiration is a similar process. She picks the right idea out of a conglomeration of impostors as is displayed in Fig. 1.

The musical score for the first three measures of the song 'Who' is presented in two systems. The top system is for the Voice, marked 'Moderately slow' and 'freely but not unrhythmic'. The bottom system is for the Piano, marked 'p delicate'. The piano part features a complex, high-register cluster of notes in the right hand and a sustained D5 pedal point in the left hand. The voice part begins with a high E5 note, which is partially obscured by the piano's introduction. The lyrics 'These lines are' are written under the voice staff in the third measure.

Fig. 1: *Who*, mm. 1-3

The voice is uncomfortable when it enters, much like the initial semitone pairing of the first eighth-note. The E5 is a high start for any soprano and occurs in the midst of the singer's

passagio. The words, “these lines are written,” are not easy to sing clearly at this pitch level. The resulting sound may be grabbed or forced. Bolcom is expressly choosing to position these words in an area of the voice where they might be strident or uncomfortable. It is later that the voice is given room to breathe and relax.

The colour palate of the opening is emulated as the piece draws to a close. Kenyon’s closing utterance, “and who speaks the words which are my food?” materializes out of the same structure that is presented in the opening bars. Here the voice enters on a D4 as opposed to its original appearance on an E5, further shrouding the audience in ambiguity. Why does the voice now enter on a D4 after being given an identical introduction as in the beginning of the song? The transposition down a 9th provides the voice with a settled feeling, as it now has a firm grounding from which to launch itself from. At the beginning of the piece the voice enters hanging. At the end it grows from the ground up as seen in Fig. 2.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Who' by John Bolcom, covering measures 20 to 25. It features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'makes when it strikes a stone?' and 'And who speaks the words which are my'. Performance markings include 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'rit. slower' (ritardando, slower). The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature.

Fig. 2: *Who*, mm. 20-25

As a rule, and perhaps as a unifying device for the set as a whole, Bolcom sets certain sections that contain particularly luminous meaning by suspending the voice over a sparse accompaniment. This openness creates a feeling of awe, tempered by fragility.

The Clearing

Although at first glance *The Clearing* appears to be a poem about Kenyon walking her dog, her shifts in mood, and likewise Bolcom's shifts in the music, create interesting yet understated moments of contrast. In order to include this poem in the discussion of spirituality, we must zero in on the end of the piece. Kenyon, after going through her journey while walking her dog Gus, takes a moment to express these words: "Do you know-/since you went away/all I can do/is wait for you to come back to me." Looking at the poem we do not know immediately if

Kenyon is addressing God, her husband, or even her dog. Bolcom, however, highlights the spirituality present in this moment. Kenyon is waiting for the voice of inspiration to come back to her, and Bolcom provides these phrases with a particular stillness and quiet that is not present throughout the majority of the piece.

In a device that will become a common focus of this discussion, Bolcom suspends the voice at great height over a strange and undulating triplet motif, exposing the frailty of the human voice in the face of such deep questions. Through mm. 78-83 he continuously sends the voice up to the G5, exposing the major seventh interval. Bolcom likes to use this interval at questioning moments. Similarly, there are several examples in *Who* where he employs a major seventh at the end of a questioning phrase. The piano writing beginning at m. 78 of *The Clearing* is all situated in the bass clef providing the singer with a stable grounding. The questions in *The Clearing* are more supported than the queries presented in *Who*. Fig. 3 illustrates this support.

78 **Even slower**

Do you know— since you went a-

pp *much* *R.H.*

81 **free**

-way all I can do is wait for you to come back to

sempre pp *colla voce*

Fig. 3: *The Clearing*, mm. 78-83

When Kenyon is without the voice that speaks to her in *Who*, she asks questions that will help her to form a more clear picture of the presence that visited her. In *Who*, Kenyon seeks to understand the true nature of her divine inspiration. *The Clearing* demonstrates that she felt as if the artistic muse really came and went as it pleased and that it was indefinably related to her spiritual beliefs. The other moment in the piece that is imbued with the same sense of calm occurs at m. 48, where the text reads, “all night a soaking rain, and now the hill/exhales relief”. The personification of the inanimate object the hill, intimates another level of spirituality in this scene as displayed in Fig. 4.

48 **Much slower (Tempo II)** ♩ = c. 50

All night a soak-ing rain, and now the hill

with much *tratt.*

52 ex-hales re-lief, and the fra-grance of warm earth . . .

dim. *pp*

Fig. 4: *The Clearing*, mm. 48-55

Twilight: After Haying

The fifth song, *Twilight: After Haying* demonstrates how Bolcom uses his own brand of musicality to honour the structure of the text. In his book, *Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life*, John Timmerman gives an astute description of this poem. He describes the “stoic inevitability” of the first stanza, the exhaustion of the second, the eerie nature of the moon coming out to “count the bales” in the third stanza and the strange declaration that comprises the fourth – “These things happen...the soul’s bliss/and suffering are bound together/like the grasses....”

This quick overview of the literary tone of the poem actually sets out a very accurate template for the manner in which Bolcom set this particular poem. A slow sense of inertia is

created by the lilting waltz, first introduced in the introduction and continued into the body of the song. This pulsing lifeline carries us through the bulk of the text. Fig. 5 showcases this pulse.

Stately ♩ = 80 (in 1)

Yes, _____ long

p very spare *pp*

Fig. 5: *Twilight: After Haying*, mm. 1-5

Kenyon makes several observations that associate the everyday actions occurring during the haying process with the otherworldly. For instance, she likens the shadows cast by the bales to the departure of the soul from the body. She makes a strange statement in brackets: “(It arrived/and settled among them/ before they were aware.)” Does this refer to the twilight or to some other presence? Bolcom uses Kenyon’s outburst, “These things happen...”, to again suspend the voice over a sparse accompaniment in Fig. 6.

48 freely

These things hap - pen . . . the soul's bliss and

pp

53 as before

suf - fer - ing are bound to - geth - er like the grass - es . . .

ppp p pp

Fig. 6: *Twilight*, mm. 48-57

Bolcom uses the same plodding half note/quarter note accompaniment to lead us through the piece, but assists in creating an eerie atmosphere when he insists on the grating A \sharp 4 in m. 35 “the moon comes.” Fig. 7 highlights this moment where the presence of the moon creeps in like the unexpected A \sharp 4, giving this corner of the piece a piquant flavour.

32

- ware.) The moon comes to count the bales, and the

fp *fp* *pp* *cresc.*

Fig. 7: *Twilight*, mm. 32-37

The end of the piece contains a direct quote from a piece entitled *Ice* by one of Bolcom's earliest mentors, John Verrall, the song's dedicatee.

Man Eating

While *Man Eating* is not a highly religious poem, Kenyon decides to introduce some interesting moments of theology. The line, "Time,/and the world with all its principalities,/might come to an end as prophesied/by the apostle John," brings in an interesting correlation to her particular beliefs. Bolcom sets this in a way that is reminiscent of the other moments of spirituality throughout the set. Specifically, the voice is not suspended at any great height, but the same feeling of elevation is created by the reiteration of C5. The piano exists in a configuration of half-note chords that really are just a play on thirds. Each one outlines a different major third. The pattern, beginning at m. 17, follows thus (left hand is always the first pair): CE + E b G, EG# + EG#, m. 18: FA + A b C, AC# + AC#, m. 19: CE+E b G, EG#+EG#, m. 20: FA+A b C, AC#+AC#. Fig. 7 provides a visual representation.



Fig. 8: *Man Eating*, mm. 17-20

The fact that Bolcom has paused his busy and disjunct accompaniment to highlight this text with a set of regular thirds that occur at regular intervals slows down the piece on every level.

Fig. 9 displays the aforementioned pattern with the added context of the vocal line.

Musical score for Man Eating, mm. 16-19. The score includes a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef and includes the lyrics: "might come to an end as prophesied by the apostle John,". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and includes a 'pp' dynamic marking. The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. A dashed line labeled '8ba' is at the bottom of the piano part.

Fig. 9: *Man Eating*, mm. 16-19

Interestingly enough, the last line of the poem, while not really containing the same level of religiosity, is set in a similar manner. Bolcom sets “pearl-white plastic spoon” similar to “as prophesied etc.” Here the C is maintained, but it has been transposed up a minor second. This is noteworthy: the spoon is otherworldly and virginal. The purity of the “pearl white plastic spoon” is a remarkable phenomenon. Is this a sacred but sterile object? It certainly would not have been an object with which Kenyon would have felt at home.

rit.

pearl- white plas - tic spoon. —

pp

8ba

Fig. 10: *Man Eating*, mm. 30-31

Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks

Kenyon was an avid gardener. The following quote from her collection of essays gives us some insight into her views about the relationship between gardening and spirituality. Here, we see Kenyon step into the role of creator. We experience her questions, her agony, and her firm resolutions:

The balance of power in a garden is never the same from year to year. You never grow the same garden twice, try as you may. The feverfew gets weedy and greedy and overtakes a quarter of the bed under the kitchen window. A flower gardener must be ruthless. Sometimes you must pull invaders out of the ground not to replace them, but to throw them on the compost pile. It is troubling to decide what shall live and what shall die – to do your best for some flower and to yank another summarily out of the ground.⁵¹

This quote is illuminating because it places Kenyon in the role of God. Like the director of a marionette, she decides what actions are to be taken. *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks* places her in a similar position, where she descends into each new situation providing guidance, support and instruction. This poem resembles her inner monologue while gardening. She knew that difficult decisions sometimes are made for the good of the other plants.

⁵¹ Kenyon, *A Hundred White Daffodils*, 48.

Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks is hymn-like in nature. This is Bolcom's true homage to Romantic art song. Perhaps more than any other, this poem provides us with insight into Kenyon's true image of herself within her own spiritual context.

Like the poems *Who* and *Otherwise*, the objects of importance in Kenyon's life are highlighted, and in turn, take on their own luminosity. As I have commented on above, Kenyon's own spiritual beliefs, although rooted in Christianity, had their own unorthodox slant. *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks* is almost a picture of what God or the "luminous particular" must have looked like to Kenyon. The images are comforting, helping and loving. The speaker becomes that which will provide solace in each scenario as it is presented. She is someone who sits beside the starving girl who finally eats, she is food for the prisoner, she is a patient gardener to a dry and weedy garden, she is a gift of condolence to a widow. Each scenario does not present a means to an end. She could have said that she would free the prisoner or feed the starving girl, but she doesn't, thereby showing us that Kenyon's sense of spirituality was that of comfort and support, but never solution.

Bolcom's instructions to the performing forces reads thus; "Stately but not dragging; ecstatic." Although the time signature is 4/4, the emphasis is on the eighth note. Stately is a good word for the overall feeling created by the musical writing here. The impression is not quite march-like, but perhaps more evocative of a processional. One might imagine a funeral, while at the same time picturing a wedding. Perhaps this is Bolcom's processional music for Kenyon. Bolcom intimated that he generally wrote songs within a cycle, in their numerical order, although he occasionally might rearrange songs. He would have done the majority of the work on this piece after Kenyon's death. He gave her a tribute that was both elegant yet practical; an ideal combination of the elements that comprised Kenyon's personality. The voice in *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks*, operates at a level that is perhaps more normative within the art song genre. The colour of the voice is unique within this piece, as Bolcom's exploitation of the middle

register creates warmth and richness. Many of the songs throughout the cycle tend to favour the upper half of the soprano voice. *Otherwise*, the third song, dips more frequently into the depths of the voice but the overall tessitura still remains on the high side. Within *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks*, the writing is appropriate for a heavier soprano, something that Valente was not. Perhaps in his own way, Bolcom could give both Valente and Kenyon something that they always sought in their own careers, but could not seem to achieve so readily on their own. In this final piece we see Valente functioning in the realm of dramatic soprano and Kenyon is removed from her role as a small, quiet, female poet. The music is rich and robust. Bolcom ingeniously crafts some opposition here, and works to strengthen the natural attributes of both Valente and Kenyon.

Bolcom highlights the spirituality present in the verses at mm. 33-37 by suspending the voice above a sparse, atmospheric and generally unresponsive piano part. The words here are “I am the one whose love/overcomes you,” however, at “already with you/when you think to call my name” we find that the piano gently doubles and supports the voice, easing the singer down, out of the high tessitura, and into a subtle and calm conclusion as illustrated by Fig 11.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks" from measures 36 to 38. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo markings are "Slightly faster (♩ = ♩)" and "molto rit.". The lyrics are "comes you, al-read-y with you when you think to call my". The piano part features a sparse, atmospheric texture with a "mp" dynamic marking.

Fig. 11: *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks*, mm. 36-38

B. How does Bolcom make meaningful musical divisions within the poems?

Kenyon seems to have been particularly fond of a poetic device called ‘enjambment’. French in origin, the word means, “to straddle or encroach on.”⁵² Poetically speaking, a sentence or thought will be broken up over two lines. The thought will be carried into the second line, but the reader experiences a jarring moment where they are left hanging, perhaps to make their own decision about the direction in which the poet is taking them. The momentum is propelled forward and the reader has no choice but to follow.

In the case of *Briefly It Enters*, Bolcom picks certain moments to highlight this ‘enjambment’ and chooses other times to disregard it. The first song in the cycle provides an excellent example of Bolcom’s discernment. His intelligent deployment of rhythm and vocal register effectively breaks each line at exactly the right moment to hone in on the ‘enjambment’ so loved by Kenyon. The only moment in the entire text where Bolcom has completely disregarded her structure comes at the end of the song: “And who speaks the/words which are my food.” Bolcom sets this line as a sloping vocal ascent, ignoring the break between “speaks” and “the words.”

Bolcom’s setting of the second song, *The Clearing*, demonstrates the opposite effect. Bolcom takes liberties, inserting his own starts and stops where he feels that the lines should break. By doing this, he is able to convey a sense of breathlessness not so readily apparent in Kenyon’s smooth and controlled verses. To examine this further, Table 3 illustrates the two versions of the text side by side. On the left is Kenyon’s poem in its original form and, on the right, appears the text with Bolcom’s own textual separations created by breaths and rests. In this way, Bolcom adds his own musical commas, creating space and intention.

⁵² Encyclopedia Britannica, Merriam-Webster, last modified 2004, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enjambment>

Table 3: Textual Separations in *The Clearing*

Kenyon's Original Poem	Bolcom's Textual Separations
<p>The dog and I pushed through the ring of dripping junipers to enter the open space high on the hill where I let him off the leash</p> <p>He vaults, snuffling, between tufts of moss; twigs snap beneath his weight; he rolls and rubs his jowls on the aromatic earth; his pink tongue lolls.</p> <p>I look for sticks of proper heft to throw for him, while he sits, prim and earnest in his love, if it is love.</p> <p>All night a soaking rain, and now the hill exhales relief, and the fragrance of warm earth... The sedges have grown an inch since yesterday, and ferns unfurled, and even if they try the lilacs by the barn can't keep from opening today.</p> <p>I longed for spring's thousand tender greens, and the white-throated sparrows call that borders on rudeness. Do you know- since you went away all I can do is wait for you to come back to me</p>	<p>The dog and I push through the ring of dripping junipers to enter the open space high on the hill where I let him off the leash</p> <p>He vaults, snuffling, between tufts of moss; twigs snap beneath his weight he rolls and rubs his jowls on the aromatic earth his pink tongue lolls</p> <p>I look for sticks of proper heft to throw for him while he sits prim and earnest in his love, if it is love.</p> <p>All night a soaking rain, and now the hill exhales relief and the fragrance of warm earth...</p> <p>The sedges have grown an inch since yesterday, and ferns unfurled, and even if they try the lilacs by the barn can't keep from opening today.</p> <p>I longed for spring's thousand tender greens, and the white-throated sparrows call that borders on rudeness</p> <p>Do you know- since you went away all I can do is wait for you to come back to me.</p>

It is interesting to note that the only moment where the two versions line up is at the final telling and very vulnerable outburst, "Do you know-/since you went away/all I can do/is wait for you to come back to me." Kenyon's poem lines up "Do you know," with the previous phrase, whereas Bolcom inserts space. Following this instance the two representations resemble each other. What does this comparison tell us about Bolcom and his treatment of text? He certainly takes full advantage of the boisterous energy supplied by Kenyon, the dog, and the vibrant

scenery. However, by adding extra commas through rests, breaths and leaps, Bolcom capitalizes on the expressive nature of this poem. Nowhere else in the cycle are we given this feeling. Nothing else is playful. This buoyancy does not repeat itself within the context of the cycle. The nearest we come to these sentiments again is in *Peonies at Dusk*, however, even here the joy is more focussed, more placid. Kenyon by nature is not a diffuse artist whereas Bolcom is. It is in this piece that Bolcom has a chance to channel this unique talent of his and he does so to great effect.

C. How does Bolcom speak to Kenyon's illness? How does he express suffering?

Otherwise

The poem *Otherwise*, has become one of Kenyon's most beloved poems and is a superb example of the culmination of her style and values. The name was also used as the title of her final collection of poems, giving us an indication that this poem held importance and poignancy for her. Timmerman illuminates the events unfolding in Kenyon's life as she penned these lyrics. He illustrates the fact that when she wrote this poem, Hall had just undergone surgery.⁵³ While waiting for Hall to recover, Kenyon found a new poignancy in the actions that she underwent everyday:

The precariousness of one's life emerges as the underlying pattern of the poem. It might have been otherwise – precisely because life so often is. That understanding, in and of itself, grants the day, with all its routine activities, its preciousness.⁵⁴

While reading through this poem, it is reasonable for the reader to assume that Kenyon is discussing her own illness. Her wonder and appreciation of the daily activities in which she is able to indulge, all products of her life at the farmhouse with Hall, are further deepened by her admission that someday everything will change irreparably. The fact that this poem was actually written while her husband was ill, suggesting that Kenyon may have to face life alone, gives the poem a different slant, one whose poignancy has gained resonance with the passing of time. The reality is that Hall has had to learn how to go on living without Kenyon. Her words echo almost hauntingly as the speaker of the poem utters, "It might have been otherwise."

Otherwise provides the reader with details of the things that truly held meaning in Kenyon's life. Listed are her strength, wholesome foods, her dog, exercise, her work, her

⁵³John H. Timmerman, *Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life*, (W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) 208

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 208

relationship with Hall, her home and her surroundings. Like the first song, *Who*, we are again given a record of the topics that will reaffirm in our ear the role of Kenyon as speaker. With care, Kenyon hands us each item, one after the other, constantly reminding us that things will not always remain as they are. Each subject seems commonplace out of context, but Kenyon infuses each object with luminosity. These are the things we all innately value: we just don't know it yet.

With *Otherwise*, Bolcom provides the listener with the first recognizable melody and the first audible structure. Never a composer to repeat himself or conform dogmatically to any standard framework, Bolcom nonetheless creates the feeling of refrains and an overarching melody. Jantsch states, "*Otherwise* is structured as a litany, a prayer with a repetitive response, 'It might have been otherwise.' One wonders if this is a prayer that Kenyon prayed to sustain herself through Hall's uncertain recovery."⁵⁵

Bolcom uses this structure to his advantage. As Jantsch mentions, the poem exhibits a mantra-like quality. Fig. 12 displays how Bolcom uses a rhythmic pattern on each repetition of the phrase, "It might have been otherwise."

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line starts at measure 10 with the lyrics "It might have been oth-er-wise. ___ I _ tc". A triplet of eighth notes is marked above the first three notes of the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line with some rests and notes in the left hand.

Fig. 12: *Otherwise*, mm. 10-11

⁵⁵ Jantsch, "Briefly It Enters," 48.

The doubling of textual speed at “otherwise” creates a cautionary irony to the end of each refrain. The repetition of the text is meditative, but the speed and quick ascent of the line reveal an underlying anger or simmering frustration. While the notes are different with each manipulation, the rhythmic structure remains the same and the word “otherwise” is always given an upper-rising motive. In addition to these refrains, Bolcom begins both “I got out of bed” and “I slept in a bed” in a similar way, creating the feeling of a return to the familiar when the pattern begins again. By doing this the listener is granted a revisit to common ground and the cycle perpetuates. Fig. 13 and 14 trace this similarity.

The musical score for "Otherwise" (mm. 3-5) is presented in three systems. The first system shows a vocal line starting with a rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4, with a dynamic marking of *mp* and a rehearsal mark "I". The second system shows the piano accompaniment, consisting of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The third system shows the vocal line with lyrics "got out of bed" and "on two strong legs." and a dynamic marking of *p*. The score includes a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature.

Fig. 13: *Otherwise*, mm. 3-5

mp 25
I
slept in a bed ___ in a room with paint-ings on the walls,
dim.
p
p

Fig. 14: *Otherwise*, mm. 24-26

Bolcom's manipulation of the text in *Otherwise* is unlike the examples of *Who*, and *The Clearing* where it is easy to highlight the moments in which the composer stays true to Kenyon's structure. When composing *Otherwise*, it seems likely that he laid out the text in a way that it would map itself more easily, to a traditional song-like structure. The result is both provocative and profound. Table 4 demonstrates the difference between Kenyon's original poem and Bolcom's version which adapts so well to its musical setting.

Table 4: Textual Separations in *Otherwise*

Kenyon's Original Text	Bolcom's Textual Separations
<p>I got out of bed on two strong legs It might have been otherwise. I ate cereal, sweet milk, ripe flawless peach. It might have been otherwise. I took the dog uphill to the birch wood. All morning I did the work I love.</p> <p>At noon I lay down with my mate. It might have been otherwise. We ate dinner together at a table with silver candlesticks. It might have been otherwise. I slept in a bed in a room with paintings on the walls, and planned another day just like this day. But one day, I know, it will be otherwise.</p>	<p>I got out of bed on two strong legs. It might have been otherwise. I ate cereal, sweet milk, ripe, flawless peach. It might have been otherwise. I took the dog uphill to the birch wood. All morning I did the work I love.</p> <p>At noon I lay down with my mate. It might have been otherwise. We ate dinner together at a table with silver candlesticks. It might have been otherwise.</p> <p>I slept in a bed in a room with paintings on the walls, and planned another day just like this day. But one day, I know, It will be otherwise.</p>

Kenyon introduces the phrase “It might have been otherwise” in a certain manner. The first time she presents it to the reader, the enjambment happens between the words “been” and “otherwise”. This isolates the word “otherwise” and effectively reiterates the fact that this is the most important word in the line. It is the title of the poem, and the very thing that she dreads. After this introduction, the phrase seems to unfold more easily. The next three repetitions have the same structure. We are given the sense that the person who is meditating has suddenly hit a stride, and has attained a certain goal. The structure here provides the enjambment between the words “might” and “have”. The emphasis is now on the word “might”. This shadows the piece with a strange, dark, optimism. The line reads thus: “It might/have been otherwise.” Lastly, Kenyon, in a very musical sense provides a variation on her mantra, “I know,/it will be otherwise.” Finally, the last line could be a full sentence that stands on its own. The finality of the

statement “it will be otherwise” provides a hushed inevitability that is in direct contrast to the questioning nature of, “it could have been otherwise.” The audience is aware that the piece is also over. Bolcom, in contrast to Kenyon’s delicate splicing, opts to present the line in its entirety. This gives the song a strong feeling of structure.

The phrase “It might have been otherwise” is used very differently by poet and composer. Kenyon uses this utterance to evoke instability by forcing it to straddle two lines, often at an awkward place in the sentence. This gives us a clear picture of the precarious nature of Kenyon’s existence. Bolcom, in direct contrast, uses this line as a stabilizing force throughout the piece. The constant return to the same melodic and rhythmic motif that he uses to colour this phrase gives the piece its innate sense of coherence. The rhythm always begins slowly on a triplet, and then increases in speed on the word “otherwise”. Does he mean to comfort us or to emphasize the inevitability of change? The sequence of Figs. 15-19 provides Bolcom’s variations of this statement.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains the vocal line. It begins with a triplet of quarter notes on the words "It might have been". At measure 7, the tempo and dynamics change, and the melody becomes more active, with a triplet of eighth notes on the words "oth-er-wise. I ate". The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains the piano accompaniment, featuring a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand and a more active right hand.

Fig. 15: *Otherwise*, mm. 6-7

10

It might have been oth-er-wise. — I to

Fig. 16: *Otherwise*, mm. 10-11

cresc.

mate. It might have been oth-er-wise. —

f

Fig. 17: *Otherwise*, mm. 18-19

22

can-dle-sticks. It might have been oth-er-wise. —

cresc. *mf*

Fig. 18: *Otherwise*, mm. 22-23

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Otherwise" by Bolcom, covering measures 29-31. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "rit." (ritardando) for measures 29-30 and "a tempo" for measure 31. The lyrics are "e day, I know, it will be" and "oth-er-wise." The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic refrain that weaves in and out of the vocal line.

Fig. 19: *Otherwise*, mm. 29-31

In addition to this rhythmic refrain, Bolcom employs a seamless ostinato-like accompaniment that weaves its way in and out of each emotional state with a permeable sinuousness. His instructions to the pianist are “very smooth, very controlled, very even; harpsichord-like in tone.” The fact that he denotes a different tone in this piece suggests a quality that transcends the rest of cycle. The song requires both a vocal and pianistic sound unlike the rest of the cycle because the poem’s message contains a universality that is not bound by time and space; it simply *is*. Bolcom certainly provides the pianist with a number of instructions throughout the cycle. The instructions in the opening bars of *Who*, read “delicate”, the end of *Twilight: After Haying* demands an “ethereal” sound and mid-way through *Man Eating* the indication is “misterioso”. The interesting thing in *Otherwise* is not that Bolcom has specific

requests but that he asks the piano to emulate another instrument entirely as shown by Fig. 20.

Channelling a harpsichord, a more archaic instrument, with limited dynamic range and an unmistakable, unique tone, evokes a different period of time, displaced from the rest of the cycle.

The musical score for 'Otherwise' (mm. 1-3) is presented in three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 36$ ($\text{♩} = 72$) exactly. The middle staff is the right-hand piano part in treble clef, and the bottom staff is the left-hand piano part in bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/8. The piano part features a harpsichord-like texture with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. Performance instructions include 'very smooth, very controlled, very even; harpsichord-like in tone' for the piano part, 'mp' (mezzo-piano) for both piano parts, and 'una corda throughout' for the piano. A first ending bracket labeled 'I' is shown at the end of the vocal line.

Fig. 20: *Otherwise*, mm. 1-3

The range and placement of the vocal line also provides us with interesting insight into Bolcom's ability to exploit certain vocal colours. For instance, at the time of composition, Valente was uncomfortable singing into her lower register – anything below an F4 could not always be phonated reliably. Bolcom consistently dips the voice in and out of this register. As a performer venturing in and out of this place of discomfort, Valente would have had to possess a new courage each time. She would have had to place her trust in her voice and make a brave choice to sing into each of these phrases with confidence. Her bravery is mirrored in the attitude of Kenyon. The resulting sound contains frailty infused with determination – an ideal colouration for the sentiments expressed here. The vulnerability of the voice is the final layer needed to complete this musical picture. Perhaps when Bolcom was writing this song he wished the voice to possess a slightly rough or speech-like quality. He may have made assumptions about how Valente's voice might function in this part of her voice that were contrary to the end result. Valente's voice is extremely light in this low register whereas many sopranos would have more weight here.

The Sick Wife

Kenyon was diagnosed with leukemia in January of 1994. In November of that year, she was approached about putting together a collection of new and old poems that would eventually become *Otherwise*. Around the same time, Kenyon faced a bone-marrow transplant in Seattle, as standard chemotherapy had failed to make any difference in her condition. Timmerman explains the nature of this operation:

Properly understood, the bone-marrow transplant is not a surgical procedure. First, with doses of cytotoxin and total body irradiation, every bit of a patient's bone marrow is destroyed. Then a small portion of new marrow from a donor is infused. After the transplant, one hopes to have new blood cells appear, which show that the new marrow is beginning to take over and grow. At the same time, one hopes to find no leukemic blood cells whatsoever, since they are a sign that the transplant has failed.⁵⁶

It is interesting to note that this process of total destruction, followed by regrowth from nothing, emulates the seasons. Kenyon's own attitudes about gardening, including harvest, death, recovery, and regrowth, mirror what took place during this medical process. Her own body was now subjected to the themes that she had meditated upon time and time again. Timmerman further discusses that Kenyon's early blood counts looked positive and she and Hall returned to Eagle Pond in February. The two had begun collecting poems for her last publication, *Otherwise*:

The selection process for *Otherwise* was something that Kenyon planned to undertake during her recovery. In early March, however, Kenyon developed problems with her gallbladder and had to have it removed, a setback that again drained her energy. It was during this time that she dictated "The Sick Wife," a poem that neither Kenyon nor Hall considered finished. Nonetheless, Kenyon agreed to include it in *Otherwise*.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 212

⁵⁷ Ibid., 213

The Sick Wife was written during this time of immense hardship. Generally, it is thought to be unfinished, as Kenyon did not have time to revise it as much as she would have liked before she died. The result may be coarser than most of her finessed products, but the images contain an immediacy that hits the reader almost instantly. The poem is replicated here:

7. The Sick Wife

The sick wife stayed in the car
while he bought a few groceries.
Not yet fifty,
she had learned what it's like
not to be able to button a button.

It was the middle of the day –
and so only mothers with small children
or retired couples
stepped through the muddy parking lot.

Dry cleaning swung and gleaned on hangers
in the cars of the prosperous.
How easily they moved –
with such freedom,
even the old and relatively infirm.

The windows began to steam up.
The cars on either side of her
pulled away so briskly
that it made her sick at heart.

Placing Kenyon's poem next to Bolcom's setting of it seems pointless because Bolcom does not take any liberty with the structure. He sets the words exactly as Kenyon has dictated them. It is almost as though Kenyon was singing them to us.

If the compositional elements of *Briefly It Enters* cause it to stand out amongst the works of Bolcom, so then does *The Sick Wife* ostracize itself from the rest of Kenyon's poetic output. Where is nature? Where is the spiritual presence? Here we are given a string of observations about Kenyon's final days. The descriptions of Kenyon's illness and treatment provide us with excellent insight into how immense her struggles must have been.

The indication from Bolcom is *mesto* or “sadly.” This is interesting, given that the structure of the piece does not seem to evoke sadness. Curiously, a sense of tension and resoluteness seems to permeate and colour the piece. The poem could be described as having a tone of acceptance but this too is the wrong fit. The speaker here is clearly not amenable to the situation in which she finds herself.

Bolcom puts the listener on edge by providing the piano with a stream of steady eighth notes. This begins on a single repeated E4, and then becomes more or less fleshed out as the song moves through a variety of different observations and emotional shifts on the part of the speaker. The left hand of the piano interjects by punctuating certain notes in the lower hemisphere of the piano’s range. The insistence of these notes is almost a commentary of their own. The right hand is seamless. The performance instructions from Bolcom appear thus: “without nuance, and very regular throughout”. The illness that Kenyon experienced was certainly without nuance; it was inexorable and cumulative, similar to the piano writing here. Fig. 21 exemplifies this musical metaphor.

♩ = 56, *mesto*

p

The

r.h. *sempre pp*, without nuance, and very regular throughout

pp

no *m* and u.c. throughout

p *mp*

Fig. 21: *The Sick Wife*, mm. 1-4

Staccato, especially with regard to the vocal line, is minimally used within the cycle. This is an effect that generally does not show off the strengths of Valente. Her forte lies in legato lines

and pure, seamless precision. The utter lack of lyricism in *The Sick Wife* sets it apart from the other songs in the cycle, and staccato is used to great effect to highlight certain words and moments. The following example lays out the first two lines and underlines the words that Bolcom characterizes with staccato. Displayed in this manner, the quirkiness of Bolcom's word setting boldly stands out:

The sick wife stayed in the car while he bought a few groceries. Not yet
fifty, she had learned what it's like not to be able to button a button.

In addition to this effect, Bolcom often gives a phrase the feeling that it is driving towards some goal or release. One way he creates this effect is to notate several syllables upon the same pitch, sometimes varying the rhythm. It is a quasi-monotone text declamation as displayed in m.13 shown here in Fig. 22.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a single melodic line with a series of notes on a single pitch, illustrating the quasi-monotone declamation. The lyrics 'It was the mid-dle of the' are written below the notes. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a key signature of one sharp. It features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many notes, some of which are beamed together. A dynamic marking 'pp' (pianissimo) is visible at the beginning of the piano part.

Fig. 22: *The Sick Wife*, mm. 12-13

16

stepped through the mud - dy park-ing lot. —

mp
8va.....

Fig. 23: *The Sick Wife*, m. 16-17

The phrase “and so only mothers with small children or retired couples stepped through the muddy parking lot” is coloured by an alternating movement between the pitches of A4 and C5. The feeling of being trapped between these two notes is relieved with the ending of the phrase on B4. Bolcom also emphasizes unusual syllables throughout this line, suggesting that the speaker may be saying these things involuntarily. It is unnatural for the speaker to look at the scene in this manner, but because of the horror that it happening in her everyday life, this scene too takes on its own terrifying context. The syllables that end up being landed on with force are highlighted below:

and so only mothers with small children or retired couples stepped
through the muddy parking lot.

14

day and so on - ly mo-thers with small child-ren or re-tired cou-ples

(r.h. sempre *pp*)

(sempre u.c.) *p* 8ba.....|

16

stepped through the mud - dy park-ing lot.

mp 8ba.....|

Fig. 24: *The Sick Wife*, mm. 14-17

The voice soars through the line, “How easily they moved”, conveying the speaker’s absolute envy. Bolcom demands that the singer perform an awkwardly ascending scale through “The cars on either side of her pulled away”. The lack of pattern here already sets up the listener with an unsettled feeling. This creates a situation for the next phrase in which the speaker relates that the speed of the cars pulling away causes her to feel nauseous. There is an element of frozen hysteria here. It is only relieved by the movement of the cars that finally pull away from witnessing her miniature breakdown as demonstrated in Fig. 25.

Fig. 25: *The Sick Wife*, mm. 29-30

This song contains the only real postlude in the cycle and suggests that the world still functions without Kenyon, however disjunctly.

Bolcom makes an interesting and somewhat morbid reference to Schubert within this piece. The intervals that he uses to illustrate Kenyon's phrase, "How easily they moved" in m. 22 are the same as those used by Schubert to open *Shepherd on the Rock* or *Der Hirt Hirt auf dem Felsen*. In *The Sick Wife* the notes have been transposed up a minor third as is shown by Fig. 26.

Fig. 26: *The Sick Wife*, m. 22

This reference is at once heartening and chilling. Valente sang Schubert's piece on many an occasion, and her recording of it is justly celebrated. That Bolcom should reference the

jubilant of *Shepherd* in the middle of such a somber piece is striking. The easy movement of the people around Kenyon causes her to wish for times past. Bolcom chooses this phrase to highlight a crowning achievement from Valente's past.

D. What is the role of nature within the cycle?

February: Thinking of Flowers

The fourth song, *February: Thinking of Flowers*, arguably provides the strongest image of Kenyon's depressive state during the winter season. Faced with a sea of white, and in February no less, the month when it feels as though the cold will never end, she mourns the loss of all plant life and is saddened by the desolate landscape. The first stanza sets the mood perfectly:

Now wind torments the field,
turning the white surface back
on itself, back and back on itself,
like an animal licking a wound.

The sense that winter will never end is conveyed by Kenyon's utterance, "turning the white surface back/on itself, back and back on itself," making it very easy to imagine the infinite nature of the snow. Although Kenyon was certainly a realist when it came to the cyclical nature of life and the world around her, she still struggled to accept the death of flowers as the seasons changed. Among her collection of essays it becomes apparent that she really did mourn for these plants. Isolated and alone on the farmhouse, Kenyon must have cultivated emotions towards these flowers that went beyond an ordinary fondness:

Little deaths. Somewhere in the psyche all these changes and losses register as death. What shall we do against it? One might bake a pie, as Joyce Maynard has been doing against the big kind of death – the death of her mother. "Comfort me with apples..." Just now there are many kinds: Macouns, Spartans, Gravensteins, Empires, Paula Reds, Baldwins, Northern Spies. It is a fine thing to build a pie, a bulwark against autumnal entropy.

Another defence against reality is to confront it – to admit the pervasiveness of change and loss and replacement. We are in fact like the grass that flourishes and withers, just as the psalmist says. Gardening teaches this lesson over and over, but some of us are slow to

learn. We can only acknowledge the mystery, and go on planting burgundy lilies.⁵⁸

She continues with this train of thought later in the essay:

Leaves come down around us, and the profile of the land emerges again, coming clear as a thought. Now we see ledges and stone walls that had been obscured by ferns and brush all summer. Now we see architecture; some of us see bones.⁵⁹

In addition to the hiking, gardening and other activities that helped combat her depression, Kenyon was on heavy prescription medication and she described the benefits and the downfalls of this particular area of her life. This is an intriguing area of study. The fact that she was on a variety of medications, with mixed benefits, augments our understanding of Kenyon's inconsistent health. She attempted to live with the aid of medication but this had disastrous results:

I went off everything. I tapered off and by June I was off everything. Five weeks later I crashed and it took us seven months to find the right drug in the right dose. I didn't write for seven months. I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't read. I didn't answer my mail. I didn't want to see friends.⁶⁰

The bleak nature of this quote shows us the origins of some of the sentiments present in *February: Thinking of Flowers*. To live for such an extended period in a state of helplessness, unsure of when or whether relief would come, is desolate and austere. The fragile nature of Kenyon's overall well-being, in addition to periods of non-activity, affected her poetic output. This poem is reminiscent of those times where Kenyon, helpless and feeling isolated, did her best

⁵⁸ Kenyon, *A Hundred White Daffodils*, 86.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

to look inwards and find solace in an object that was not present. In *February: Thinking of Flowers* it is a burgundy lily.

Looking at the structural elements of the cycle, this poem stands out because of its desolate quality and the glaring harshness of Kenyon's struggles. Bolcom seizes the opportunity for variety and complements the text with his musical setting, combined with the provocative colouring of the piano.

This song contains certain architectural elements that cause it to be highly effective. The meter is 10/16; it creates a flowing yet unbalanced feeling. We keep expecting the sixth beat but we are never given more than five; the result is that the sense of control is diminished. Fig. 27 shows us that the performance indication at the outset is "Calm, flowing, but not slow." The mood is calm with an undertone of unsettlement caused by the 10/16 meter. The pianist's indication is "'wet' Pedal; delicate."

Calm, flowing, but not slow .♩. = ca. 54

Now wind tor-ments the field, turn-ing the

"wet" Pedal; delicate

Fig. 27: *February: Thinking of Flowers*, mm. 1-4

In m.12 a prickly tension is created as the right hand of the piano is sent up into the stratosphere. The marking is *non legato* and there are subsequent crescendos and decrescendos as the speaker takes in the qualities of the scene around her. If the piano writing at the opening could

be described as having an arpeggiated motion, swooping up and down, at m. 12 the piano exhibits right and left hand separation. The left hand takes a supporting role as the right hand shudders high above it as illustrated by Fig. 28.

16
a tempo
11
mf
Noth-ing but white— the air, the light; on - ly one brown_
non legato 8va
pp mf

Fig. 28: *February*, mm. 11-14

At measure 18, we return to the sloping undulation of the arpeggio as the speaker ruminates on this idea; “A single green sprouting thing/would restore me.” The piano gives the voice space as the speaker begins her meditation at m. 26. However, the respite is short lived. Although the tempo indication at m. 30 is “Slower”, Bolcom creates the feeling of an accelerando by splitting the bar into five groupings of four 32nd notes in contrast to two groups of five 16th notes, a structure which earlier dominated the song. In addition to the florid nature of the piano, Bolcom adds a crescendo and the effect of spiralling out of control is complete. The voice is unaccompanied for the breathless utterance “of the burgundy lily.” Fig. 29 provides a picture of the process by which Bolcom ends the piece.

24

Then think of the tall del -

8va

p *f* *p*

28

a tempo Slower

phi-ni-um, sway-ing, or the bee

pp *mf* *pp* *cresc.*

legato

no Ped.

31

cresc. *f* *pp* a piacere

when it comes to the tongue of the bur-gun-dy li-ly.

cresc. *f* *pp*

f & pp

Fig. 29: February, mm. 24-32

The opening line, “Now wind torments the field,” is giving a taunting, jilted melody. The vocal writing at “surface back/on itself, back and back on itself,” is highly intriguing. One has to wonder if Bolcom took his inspiration for the meter from these two phrases. He maps each syllable directly onto the 16th-note pattern, exposing an inherent rhythm buried within the phrase as is shown in Fig. 30.

5
white sur-face back on it - self, back and back on it - self, like an

Fig. 30: *February*, mm. 5-7

Just as the piano becomes spiky in m. 12, the voice is held relentlessly in a high tessitura. An hysterical quality creeps in as the voice ascends and crescendos into “A single green sprouting thing/ would restore me....” The last page or the “meditation section” from m. 26 until the piece closes offers some delicious colouration. The word “swaying” is highlighted by a quick crescendo-decrescendo and the voice again struggles to overcome an ascending tessitura, emulating the struggles of the speaker at “when it comes to the tongue”. The piece ends abruptly. The voice descends but instead of feeling that the landing has been safe, Bolcom scores the last four notes as C#5, F4, C5, F#4, creating a jagged or broken halt. Fig. 30 demonstrates this disjunct ending.

31 *cresc.* *f* *pp* *a piacere* >
 when it comes to the tongue of the bur-gun-dy li-ly.

cresc. *fp pp*

Fig. 31: *February*, mm. 31-33

Peonies at Dusk

Peonies at Dusk demonstrates Bolcom's ability to evoke images within his musical writing. The voice is suspended in a high tessitura and the accompaniment below is fragile and unresponsive. This structure is highly suggestive of the physical shape of a peony flower, where the large luxurious bloom is strangely unsupported by its tall, thin stem. Kenyon's attraction to these strange and impractical plants is illuminated in one of her many essays:

Sensible people grow beans. I grow peonies, campanula, roses, lilies, astilbe, bee balm. No matter how many flowers, there are never enough, and I harbor Napoleonic tendencies toward floral expansion. When we cut some maple trees away from the barn foundation, partly to protect the sills, and partly to keep constant dripping and consequent lichen off the shingles, I saw an opportunity to expand my empire. Into the sandy loam went Siberian iris, poppies, sunflowers, flowering shrubs, daylilies, and some iris that clashed with the colours in my back border. I even put in a few tomato plants, lettuce, basil, and Italian parsley. Why didn't I just let the farmer who hays for us cut closer to the barn? I'd have saved myself hours of digging, a few encounters with poison ivy, and some nights on the heating pad.⁶¹

⁶¹Ibid., 48

As it seems palpable that Kenyon's attraction to the peony was not based on, in her words, any "sensible" basis, it seems equally evident that Bolcom chose to dismiss practicality from a performer's standpoint. Attacking the score may at first fill a prospective performer with feelings of insecurity. Indeed, when I coached the pieces with Bolcom, he turned to me half-way through and asked if we could begin this piece again because it was so difficult.

To remark that the song's tessitura is demanding for the singer is an understatement. The voice, like the flowers, is propped up at a height that does not seem realistic for its physiology. The effect, while beautiful, is only achieved after a certain amount of effort has been invested. This example highlights just one of the difficult areas that the singer is forced to navigate:

30

43

A little slower
pp subito

scent; and the moon moves a - round the barn to

mp *pp subito*

Fig. 32: *Peonies at Dusk*, mm. 43-47

This poem contrasts directly the sentiments presented in *February: Thinking of Flowers*. For instance, *February* shows us the negative effects of nature upon Kenyon's general attitude, whereas *Peonies* exhibits a sense of exaltation and revelation. Both poems introduce ideas of meditation. In *February*, Kenyon meditates upon flowers that are not there: she has to envision their existence. In *Peonies*, Kenyon is able to touch the blossom, "and bending close, search it as a woman searches/a loved one's face." She searches the flower, takes in all of its uniqueness, savours every petal, and walks away in a state of happiness.

Bolcom's accompaniments are difficult, intricate, and play a role equal to the voice in creating the drama and colouring the text. *Peonies* is a good example of his approach to the instrument. The 3/8 meter sets up Bolcom's indication "Like a leisurely waltz" nicely. It becomes abundantly clear however, that this waltz is no neat and tidy dance. The feeling created by the off-kilter rhythms of the right and left hands is almost tipsy, and musically suggests the heads of the peonies bobbing and swaying. The left hand writing plays an important role to establish this unstable feeling in particular, the dotted eighth, sixteenth, sixteenth, eighth-note pattern is elemental to painting this picture. Fig. 33 illustrates this rhythm.

Like a leisurely waltz (♩ = 152)

fp *mp* *p* *mf*

White _____

fp *mp* *p* *pp sempre*

t.c. gossamer-light, very little *rit.*

Fig. 33: *Peonies*, mm. 1-6

This format continues until the piano takes off to provide the "light" that Kenyon believes emanates from the peonies themselves. At precisely m. 14, the piano begins cascading upwards in a flurry of sixteenth notes. As the piano shimmers, the voice ascends to a high B flat, colouring the expression "Outrageous flowers" effectively. The piano slims down as Kenyon describes the scene before her; "as big as human/heads! They're staggered/by their own luxuriance." It is almost as if Bolcom has removed the presence of the flowers themselves within the accompaniment and provided space for Kenyon's thoughts to take focus.

22

as big as hu - man heads! They're stag-gered

mp *dim.* *p* *legg. more* *rit.*

Fig. 34: *Peonies*, mm. 22-26

The piano effectively props up the voice on “I had/to prop them up with stakes and twine.” The piano first gives the indication of support in an arpeggiated form in mm. 25-28 and in mm. 29-33 the movement is halted as the following chords begin to stack up. The left hand takes the form of an F minor chord in first inversion, topped by an E minor chord in first inversion in the right hand. Bolcom’s placing of two minor chords, a semi-tone apart only adds to the precarious nature of this moment. Like the peonies, the harmonies themselves are in danger of falling to one side or the next. At m. 31 an E \flat major chord in second inversion appears stratospherically atop this already wobbly stack of harmonics, and in m. 32 he supplements the left hand with a highly unstable chord consisting of an E \flat \square , A \flat , and D \flat . Bolcom’s mystery here is quickly solved as he resolves the E \flat \square stepwise to a D \flat , thereby emphasizing the open fifth between the D \flat and the A \flat in the bass. The third, the F, is added in the arpeggiated motion of the left hand shortly afterwards as shown in Fig. 35.

27

by their own lux - ur - iance: I had to prop them up with stakes and

more rit rit.

dim.

mf

pp

a tempo

33 pp

33 pp

twine.

8va

pp

pp

38 $\frac{1}{2}$ rit ppp

Fig. 35: *Peonies*, mm. 27-34

The piano interlude gives a brief respite from the wobbly waltz of the beginning. The left hand makes a strong impression through mm. 36-38 where a clear pattern of three eighth notes is emphasized – if only for a brief moment. The left hand figure from the opening of the piece is brought back as the peonies are re-introduced. Perhaps they enjoyed a brief moment of order as they were propped up but have now reverted back to their old floppy ways.

The moist air in - ten - si - fies their

poco cresc.

p

very little

Fig. 36: *Peonies*, mm. 39-42

Bolcom evokes a sense of stillness in the phrase, “and the moon moves around the barn/to find out what its coming from.” The voice is given sparse but firm support here through mm. 44-49 as the piano provides the singer’s pitches in the same register. These pitches are also the highest within the piano’s accompaniment, thereby augmenting their audibility. Again the voice is given more freedom as Kenyon introduces her own presence in this scene more permanently. For example, “In the darkening June evening/I draw a blossom near” is sung very freely. The focus here is upon Kenyon and her actions. The peonies become secondary in this moment. The piano has a hazy unfocused quality to it. The peonies, however, soon burst into full colour and presence once again, as Kenyon searches each ridge and petal of the flower. The piano bursts forth in a flurry of activity, tipsy waltz and all.

59

June eve - ning I draw a blos - som near

p *pp* *mp*

65

rit. *a tempo primo*

and bend - ing close search it as a wo - man search - es a

p *p tranquillo*

a soft wash of Ped.

Fig. 37: *Peonies*, m. 59-69

Jantsch beautifully describes the end of the piece; “After the vocal line concludes, the sixteenth-note pattern gradually closes in, like the blossom closing up for the night.”⁶² Here, like the petals of the peony flower, the piano folds in on itself, anticipating its next vibrant outburst.

⁶² Jantsch, “Briefly It Enters,” 89.

80 (non rit.)

flutter off slowly ~~~~~ to $\frac{1}{2}$ da L.v.

dim. poss.

niente

Fig. 38: *Peonies*, m. 80-84

E. What are the practical considerations taken for the singer and the audience? How does Bolcom arrange the set in a comprehensive way?

Vocal Considerations for Valente

While Valente was a singer of great technical mastery, this song cycle was written towards the end of her singing career, when Valente was in her 60s. The voice, even when cared for and treated well, will age in its own way. While many sopranos find that the top of their range becomes less and less accessible and the lower half of the voice becomes richer and fuller, Valente found that almost the opposite occurred. Bolcom commented on this when I interviewed him. He mentioned that he had written mainly for his wife and also for famed mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne, and that in both cases he had to account for a voice that was steadily lowering over time. Valente seemed to retain most of the access to her top notes. Indeed on the recording of the cycle made several years later, Valente's high notes are sparkling and clear. The lower section of her voice became more and more difficult to access however, and Bolcom clearly took this into account when he wrote for her. For instance, the majority of the songs retain a fairly high tessitura. The singer approaching them may find it initially difficult, but over time it becomes clear how well they are written for the voice. Beyond operatic roles, this cycle is one of the works by Bolcom for the soprano voice. True to art song standards, Bolcom demands a variety of colours from the vocalist. His considerations of range and texture of his piano writing help to create a landscape upon which such artistry can be built.

Despite Bolcom's careful writing for her, Valente requested that a few notes be changed, or that alternate notes be given in the event that she needed them. It is instructive to compare the revisions present in the score with the choices that Valente makes on her recording of the cycle. Sometimes she opts for the suggested note; other times she takes Bolcom's first choice; and in

some cases, sings something that is not at all indicated on the page. This latter point suggests that Bolcom had still other ideas for Valente that he never notated.

The first optional note appears in the first song *Who*. At m. 18 the voice suddenly jumps to a high B5. The approach comes from an A \flat 4 set at a dynamic of *p*. This is a demanding request of any singer. On the recording, Valente forgoes the high note and sings the E5 instead. The optional notes at “a sheep’s hoof” are thought-provoking. One approach lays out the triad from top to bottom. The optional approach is to sing the third followed by the fifth and then the root. Valente may have found it easier to begin on the same note that she had just embarked from or, perhaps, Bolcom felt that the singer might find locating the G difficult, as they had just been on an A \flat . Fig. 39 exhibits the optional pitches.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Who" from measures 17 to 20. It consists of three staves: a vocal line at the top, a piano accompaniment on the middle staff, and a bass line on the bottom staff. The vocal line includes lyrics: "lan - guage for the sound _____ a sheep's hoof makes when it strikes a". The score features dynamic markings of *mf* and *piano*. There are several optional notes indicated by brackets and alternative note heads. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a bracket. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The bass line also includes a triplet of eighth notes. The overall style is a standard musical score with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature.

Fig. 39: *Who*, mm. 17-20

The only optional note in the second piece, *The Clearing*, occurs in m. 75. Here, the singer is given the choice of a G4 instead of C4. The colouration of the lower note gives the word character, and causes it to stand out in the phrase. Valente sings the C on her recording, perhaps indicating that this note operated more as an escape route, in case the voice was not functioning at its full capacity.

Tempo II

75

rude - ness.

pp *mp*

p

Fig. 40: *The Clearing*, m. 75

Peonies at Dusk offers several alternate notes. Given the extremely demanding nature of the tessitura here, and the fact that this song is the eighth in the cycle, any performer will naturally feel fatigued by this point. Thus, the added options are not surprising. The original scorings at mm. 20 and 21 are not as difficult to achieve, given the fact that the voice bobs up and down intervallically and the high B \flat 5 is given a chance to bloom at the crescendo/decrescendo. In her recording, Valente takes the G5 instead of the high B \flat 5. She approaches it from the F# 5. Fig. 41 displays the options available to the singer at this point in the song.

Out - ra - geous flow - ers

cresc. *mf*

Fig. 41: *Peonies*, mm. 18-20

The second revision, however, makes far more sense as the voice stacks higher and higher through m. 29-33 and the dynamic of *pp* at m. 33 on the A \flat 4 is especially punishing. This difficult tessitura is exemplified in Fig. 42.

The musical score for *Peonies*, measures 29-34, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "had to prop them up with stakes and" and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *dim.* and *pp*. The piano accompaniment is marked *p*. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "twine." and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *pp*. The piano accompaniment is marked *ppp*. The tempo is marked *a tempo*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 42: *Peonies*, mm. 29-34

The final song *Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks* allows for a few moments of decision-making on the singer's part. For instance, in *Briefly It Enters*, Valente opts to sing the B \flat 4 in m. 18 three times before dipping down to the E4 on the word "patient". This option is not notated, but Jantsch mentions it in her dissertation as a viable option for someone who might be

struggling with the manner in which the voice and the piano relate to one another.⁶³ She writes, “the fugal entrance has a chromatic option if the descending triad is too difficult. The vocal entrance would be B ♭ , B ♮ , B ♭ ”. Given that there are several instances of harmonically challenging music for the singer throughout the cycle, it seems strange that this one should be given special treatment. Curiously, Valente does not sing the notated pitches so they were changed for some reason. These oddities are highlighted in Fig. 43.

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Briefly' (mm. 18-20). It consists of two systems of staves. The top system contains the vocal line, marked *pp ben misurato*, with the lyrics "I am the pa-tient gar-den-er of the dry and weed-y gar-den...". The bottom system contains the piano accompaniment, marked *pp legato, ma senza Ped.*. The piano part features a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals and chromatic movements. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4.

Fig. 43: *Briefly*, mm. 18-20

The climax of the song, mm. 35-36, provides the performer with two different paths. The recording made by Valente and the notes from Jantsch suggest that Bolcom actually preferred an altogether different approach to the high B ♭ 5. In this approach the singer lands on the D5 and sings into the B ♭ 5 all within the same word. This gives the singer a nice portamento into the high note and colours this corner with an operatic timbre. This approach also provides one of the only moments in the cycle where Bolcom allows a syllable to have more than one note.

⁶³ Jantsch, “Briefly It Enters,” 114.

33

Much slower
seraphic

bog - gy sum - mit.... I am the one whose love ___ ov - er -

slow rolls

ppp *pp*

Fig. 44: *Briefly*, mm. 33-35

Consideration for the Audience

Bolcom has intimated that *Man Eating* was one of the selections that he had specifically requested.⁶⁴ He viewed this as a moment of light and perhaps as a break for the audience from what could be construed as “heavy” material. If Bolcom’s style cannot be encapsulated under one heading, perhaps the use of humour in many of his compositions can be considered a unifying element. While Kenyon may not have viewed the man who is eating as a humorous subject, Bolcom clearly does. His setting is cheeky but never without depth.

Complimenting his natural tendencies towards humour, is his consideration of the audience. While he does not believe in pandering to an audience, he believes that they serve a purpose and that music should be written with the audience in mind. In an interview with John von Rhein from the *Chicago Tribune*, Bolcom imparts his belief about how a composer should consider his or her audience:

Of course you want and always hope to connect with your audience...
But that’s not the same as giving the public what it wants, because they

⁶⁴ Interview with Bolcom Appendix C

don't know what they want. They only know it when they see it. You [must] give the public what you want. You can't know the future of anything, let alone a work of art. And you can't write for posterity, you can only write for yourself. As a composer, I have to satisfy the "inner audience" in me. If I do that, then I've got a chance. If I don't satisfy it, it will never have a chance.⁶⁵

Bolcom's management of the poetry could be described as conversational. Each observation trips off the performer's lips as naturally and as rapidly as each thought presumably springs to mind. If any songs from the cycle could be compared to the cabaret works of Bolcom for their clever text setting, it would certainly be *Man Eating*. Consider, for instance, the word "time" is highlighted in mm. 12-13. It is the first word to be extended for any real length of time. The word-painting is effective here because it juxtaposes the chatty, wordy, style of the rest of the piece and also because he uses it judiciously. Bolcom adds extra meaning and depth to the end of the piece. The musical material here is similar to that which appears through Kenyon's moment of religion at "as prophesied by the apostle John," in mm. 17-19. Here the voice is suspended along a series of C6s which are supported by a broad chordal movement. This structure is illustrated in Figure 9. By setting the last phrase, "with a pearl-white plastic spoon" in a similar manner, this time the pitch C# is used, Bolcom provides the meditative act of eating with a spiritual context. This is no doubt Kenyon's intention, so in his own way, Bolcom preserves Kenyon's intentions while inflecting the piece with his signature character and wit, albeit in a more constrained manner.

Bolcom's own need for variety, and his ability to recognize this need in his audience, brings up an interesting topic in the world of classical music today. In his dissertation, Christian Nova discusses the attitude of many composers in the twentieth century with respect to the reception of audiences. He discusses how modern recording techniques, lack of empathy for

⁶⁵John von Rhein, "Untried but True to Lyric Opera's Vision," *Chicago Tribune*. 3 October 1999.

audiences amongst composers, and the elitist nature of many singers all served to alienate many audience members from classical music in the twentieth-century.⁶⁶

Throughout his career as a composer, Bolcom has continuously fought the dismissal of the audience. He does not cater to them, but focuses instead on challenging them.

Structure of the Cycle

Briefly It Enters may not seem to follow a particular narrative or chronological journey. Conversely, we are given snapshots of Kenyon's life. However, the set does exhibit some structural elements. For instance, it might be natural to assume that the set is built around the first, fifth and last pieces and there is a certain symmetry and cleanliness to this idea of dividing the cycle in this manner. In addition to the logic of placing the structural songs this way, these three poems are linked in terms of thematic material. Each one deals with spirituality in a different way. *Who* provides a questioning and anticipatory speaker, *Twilight: After Haying* displays a calmness in the face of death and *Briefly It Enters*, and *Briefly Speaks* is ecstatic in the presence of an otherworldly being. In addition to the linking material within the poetry itself, Bolcom creates an ethereal effect at the conclusion of each piece.

⁶⁶ "Hearing a meticulously crafted recording, and then experiencing that same sense of perfection in the live venue fits nicely with our society's fascination with technical perfection. A controllable, virtual performance now replaces the uncertain quality of a real, live one.

On top of all this, early twentieth century classical composers, promoting the creation of "art for art's sake" and shunning music as entertainment, increased the divide between high and low. In his recent publication, *Roots of the Classical: the Popular Origins of Western Music*, Peter Van der Merwe argues that classical music basically ceased to exist for the general listener in the middle of the twentieth century. At this point the effects of modernism and the influence of its major proponent Arnold Schoenberg suggested that classical musicians were no longer interested in popularity. If the audience did not understand or appreciate the music, they had only themselves to blame.

Concert singers, too, responded by creating an environment of reverence around classical vocal literature and recitals. Singing in a highly cultivated, technical manner and wearing tuxedos and evening gowns added to the sacralized quality of song recitals, and singing foreign languages rather than the vernacular (especially in America) bolstered the elitist quality of these events. This hardly seems like an attempt to gain popularity." - Christian Nova, "If You Enliven It, They Will Come: Turning the Classical Vocal Recital on its Ear," (Diss., University of California, 2008) ProQuest 3208324, 12-13.

Yet another way of examining overall structure of *Briefly It Enters* is to look at songs *Who*, *Otherwise*, and *Briefly It Enters and Briefly Speaks*, in other words, replacing the fifth song with the third. The logic of this interpretation is that each of these songs in their own way provides a list of things that Kenyon held most dear. These themes not only make up the remainder of the topics covered within the song cycle, they also represent the major elements of Kenyon's work as a poet. Within these poems, Kenyon is not merely identifying themes, but naming inanimate objects in a way that infuses them with power. Within each song these objects and actions are claimed, given meaning, and in their new context are allowed to progress, shift, and change from song to song.

Who is an effective opening to the cycle. Emblematic and questioning, it functions almost like a prologue. The singer questions who she is as an individual, who she is as an artist, and from where her voice as an artist comes. The images are rooted in Kenyon's ideology. Animal, angel, books, pots, sheep's hoof, stone, are all examined as many of the structural posts of Kenyon's day to day life. Kenyon also asks, "who speaks the words which are my food?" This engenders a realistic, practical quality to her poems.

Otherwise is contemplative and pre-emptively mournful. Kenyon goes about her day-to-day life, complete with fresh food, walking the dog outdoors, companionship with Hall and the pursuit of her literary goals. She lists the things that hold meaning and weight in her life. She knows that these things are fleeting and in this context they gain greater power. In *Otherwise* we see these themes develop from *Who* because Kenyon has added her own attachment to them. They have shifted from the first song and have become more sacred.

Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks revels in the glory of these actions, these scenarios, these artefacts. These objects, these situations, have come full circle. We have questioned them, valued them, and now we revel in them. Kenyon effectively answers the questions set out in *Who*,

“Who is it who asks me to find language for the sound a sheep’s hoof makes when it strikes a stone?” She offers the gardener, the lover, the maker and the keeper as possible solutions. Kenyon, as well as the audience, can take comfort that these questions have been answered. As we saw earlier, towards the end of Kenyon’s life, she struggled greatly with her own ideas of spirituality. She had made a trip to India that allowed her to seriously question her faith. This doubt and insecurity accompanied her well into her sickness. By choosing to end with this poem, Bolcom can give her a more resolute and peaceful send-off than she may indeed have had.

CHAPTER 5

Notes to Future Performers of the Cycle

Working towards a performance of Bolcom's *Briefly It Enters* is a rewarding and rich project. The music is often harmonically challenging and the tessitura can be difficult. In her dissertation, *The New American Song: A Catalogue of Published Songs by 25 Living American Composers*⁶⁷, Sarah Elizabeth Snyder assesses the difficulty of each piece in the cycle. Phrases that appear often in her summary include, "tessitura remains high", "both piano and vocal parts are difficult" and, "the voice has long, disjunct, phrases." The piano often supports the vocal line, but like the cabaret songs of Bolcom, sometimes the melody is so buried within a complex piano part that it is still difficult to maintain. If the piano contains the pitch needed by the singer, its audibility is relative to the type and amount of notes surrounding the desired pitch.

An excellent pianist is essential to the success of this project. Someone who can handle the technical challenges in addition to complementing the drama of the poetry is well-suited to performing music of this kind. Bolcom certainly intended for a dialogue between singer and pianist. The collaborative potential here is high.

From a vocal perspective, singers should consider that a high level of musicianship is required to approach this cycle. It demands a voice that is comfortable sitting in a high tessitura or a vocal technique that can function for extended periods at great height. That being said, Bolcom clearly wishes that performers focus upon bringing out the interpretive and communicative elements contained within the music as opposed to obsessing over the technical difficulties present in the pieces, a point made clear to me in my coaching session with Bolcom. For my own performances of the pieces, I chose mainly the original notes set by Bolcom but opted for the lower notes in two challenging places. Performers should also keep in mind that this cycle was

⁶⁷ Snyder, "The New American Song," 72-91.

written for a voice near the end of its career. The voice of a younger singer will add a different element not only to the interpretation but to the overall sound.

As is always the case with songs by Bolcom, the text is incredibly important. His text setting is almost always syllabic in nature. This means that declamation of the text takes priority over vocal quality. A good interpreter of these texts will let the poetry and music speak for itself, adding appropriate emotional cues. A good understanding of the story behind this music will help any performer comprehend what the tone and overall feeling of the music should be. While this cycle may be quieter and more classical in nature than the majority of his output for the voice, Bolcom is still a lover of drama and variety. It is important that any performer of this cycle make sure the delivery is not stiff or stilted.

As part of the completion of this project, I have performed this cycle twice and coached it with William Bolcom once. The first performance took place during a lecture/recital format. Given that the pieces are vocally demanding, I opted to sing first and discuss the topic afterwards. This provided the voice with fresh functionality and gave the listeners a musical context for the lecture that they heard afterwards. The second performance was much less formal. Hoping to create an atmosphere that was more friendly and perhaps more cabaret-esque, a good friend of mine, Joseph Bulman and I programmed a concert that placed Benjamin Britten's cycle *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* in the first half of the performance followed by Bolcom's *Briefly It Enters* in the second half. We paired the performances with projections that complimented the music. Between cycles the texts were displayed. We wanted to add another layer to the collaborative process by providing images that were visually stimulating and provocative. Further, we wanted to avoid having the audience following along with a program throughout the evening so we projected the texts onto the screen during the intermissions.

We also wanted to play with staging. While many art songs do not transfer well to the stage in a literal manner, we felt it might be possible to move the singer out of the crook of the piano and into any place that served to increase the inherent expression of the songs. We provided ourselves with a small stage, complete with a table and a chair. For me, the Kenyon songs are like snapshots, vignettes. Instead of piling movement on top of these delicately crafted songs, I found it more beneficial to create a series of tableaux. Some songs were performed standing, others while sitting, and still others while leaning on either the chair or the table. In this way, bodily tension could be relieved as it built up throughout the performance, and the audience could imagine Kenyon in different mental states or postures as she moved through subsequent motions and sentiments. The audience responded well to such a setting and the songs seemed to benefit from this form of presentation.

When Valente premiered this cycle she placed it in the middle of a program of Lieder that focussed upon women and flowers.⁶⁸ In this way *Briefly It Enters* took its place next to the masterpieces of the classical art song repertory.

⁶⁸“The Program for the Benita Valente/Cynthia Raim Recital at the Wisconsin Union Theater, Friday, Dec. 6, 1996 included:

Schumann	Du bist wie eine Blume Aus den östlichen Rosen Röslein, Röslein
Brahms	Röslein dreie in der Reine Meine Liebe ist grün
Bolcom	Briefly It Enters
Intermission	
Strauss	Ständchen Morgen Allerseelen Cäcilie
Wolf	Tretet ein hoher Krieger Singt mein Schatz wie ein Fink Du milchjunger Knabe Wand' ich in dem Morgentau Das Köhlerweib Wie glänzt der helle Mond
Wolf	Mausfallen Sprüchlein Elfenlied Der Gärtner Er ist's"

Jantsch, “Briefly It Enters,” 115-16.

From a collaborative standpoint, this cycle demonstrates the layering of several artistic personalities in a very effective way. Collaboration is the product of relationships, conversations, respect, and reverence. The people - Bolcom, Valente and Kenyon - involved in this composition were friends. They knew that each person had their own significance and their own gift to add to the creative process. *Briefly It Enters* is not only great music, it is a portrait of working relationships.

Appendix A: The Poems

1. *Who*

These lines are written
by an animal, an angel,
a stranger sitting in my chair;
by someone who already knows
how to live without trouble
among books, and pots and pans.....

Who is it who asks me to find
language for the sound
a sheep's hoof makes when it strikes
a stone? And who speaks
the words which are my food?

2. *The Clearing*

The dog and I pushed through the ring
of dripping junipers
to enter the open space high on the hill
where I let him off the leash

He vaults, snuffling, between tufts of moss;
twigs snap beneath his weight; he rolls
and rubs his jowls on the aromatic earth;
his pink tongue lolls.

I look for sticks of proper heft
to throw for him, while he sits, prim
and earnest in his love, if it is love.

All night a soaking rain, and now the hill
exhales relief, and the fragrance
of warm earth... The sedges
have grown an inch since yesterday,
and ferns unfurled, and even if they try
the lilacs by the barn can't
keep from opening today.

I longed for spring's thousand tender greens,
and the white-throated sparrows call
that borders on rudeness. Do you know-
since you went away
all I can do
is wait for you to come back to me.

3. *Otherwise*

I got out of bed
on two strong legs
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

4. February: Thinking of Flowers

Now wind torments the field,
turning the white surface back
on itself, back and back on itself,
like an animal licking a wound.

Nothing but white – the air, the light;
only one brown milkweed pod
bobbing in the gully, smallest
brown boat on the immense tide,

A single green sprouting thing
would restore me...

*Then think of the tall delphinium,
swaying, or the bee when it comes
to the tongue of the burgundy lily.*

5. Twilight: After Haying

Yes, long shadows go out
from the bales, and yes, the soul
must part from the body;
what else could it do?

The men sprawl near the baler,

too tired to leave the field,
They talk and smoke,
and the tips of their cigarettes
blaze like small roses
in the night air. (It arrived
and settled among them
before they were aware.)

The moon comes
to count the bales,
and the dispossessed –
Whip-poor-will, Whip-poor-will

sings from the dusty stubble.

These things happen...the soul's bliss
and suffering are bound together
like the grasses...

The last, sweet exhalations
of timothy and vetch
go out with the song of the bird;
the ravaged field
grows wet with dew.

6. *Man Eating*

The man at the table across from mine
is eating yogurt. His eyes, following
the progress of the spoon, cross briefly
each time it nears his face. Time,

and the world with all its principalities,
might come to an end as prophesied
by the Apostle John, but what about
this man, so completely present

to the little carton with its cool,
sweet food, which has caused no animal
to suffer, and which he is eating
with a pearl-white plastic spoon.

7. *The Sick Wife*

The sick wife stayed in the car
while he bought a few groceries.
Not yet fifty,
she had learned what it's like
not to be able to button a button.

It was the middle of the day –
and so only mothers with small children
or retired couples
stepped through the muddy parking lot.

Dry cleaning swung and gleamed on hangers
in the cars of the prosperous.
How easily they moved –
with such freedom,
even the old and relatively infirm.

The windows began to steam up.
The cars on either side of her
pulled away so briskly
that it made her sick at heart.

8. Peonies at Dusk

White peonies blooming along the porch
send out light
while the rest of the yard grows dim.

Outrageous flowers as big as human
heads! They're staggered
by their own luxuriance: I had
to prop them up with stakes and twine.

The moist air intensifies their scent,
and the moon moves around the barn
to find out what it's coming from.

In the darkening June evening
I draw a blossom near, and bending close
search it as a woman searches
a loved one's face.

9. Briefly It Enters, and Briefly It Speaks

I am the blossom pressed in a book,
found again after two hundred years...

I am the maker, the lover and the keeper...

When the young girl who starves
sits down to a table
she will sit beside me...

I am food on the prisoner's plate...

I am water rushing to the wellhead,
filling the pitcher until it spills...

I am the patient gardener
of the dry and weedy garden...

I am the stone step,
the latch, and the working hinge...

I am the heart contracted by joy...
The longest hair, white
before the rest...

I am there in the basket of fruit
presented to the widow...

I am the musk rose opening
unattended, the fern on the boggy summit...

I am the one whose love
overcomes you, already with you
when you think to call my name...

Appendix B: Interview with Benita Valente

R: Hi, Benita Valente? How are you?

B: I'm fine how are you Rachel?

R: I'm well. I'm just getting set up here to make sure I am recording this call.

B: Does it make a difference if I change phones or put it on speaker phone?

R: No I think I've got it all ready.

B: Ok I'll put it on speaker phone so I don't have to hang on to the corded phone.

R: Absolutely. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this with me. Basically I'm really interested in different levels of collaboration that exist between artists while creating a new work. "Briefly it Enters" strikes me as unique because it is a good example where the poet and composer and performer knew each other before the creation of the work and not just leading up to the performance. Having done some research on you and your career, it seems that the word collaboration comes up a lot in interviews as something that you value, especially among musicians. Maybe to begin you could tell me about why collaboration is so important and what role it has played in your career?

B: Collaboration really began when I began to work with Lotte Lehmann when I realized that the piano part in this instance was just as important as the vocal part when we did lieder. Of course then we did operatic things as well and arias. Whoever is with you is the collaborator. Without it you don't have much you just have one line. So it started with having a pianist. Also, when it came time to tell the program people that I wanted the pianist's name to be equally as large as mine because in the good old days they would put the vocalist's name in large print and the pianist's name in small print, this didn't work in my case because the pianist is just as important as I am. This continued on to the creator as well of the music and of the composer of course. Does that help?

R: Yes, thanks so much. Being the individual who really spear-headed this project...and if I'm correct you commissioned this work from Bolcom. Correct?

B: Yes. I was under management at the time with Janice Mayer and she set it up that there were 4 collaborators to do this work.

R: Absolutely. So I know that *Peonies* was a poem that you requested specifically and I was just wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what it was like to work with William Bolcom, and maybe whether you had any other requests? Maybe, what other role did you play in the composition side of things?

B: Well when he did the first piece for Tatiana called "Let Evening Come". When he did that and he had on his own included a poem by Jane Kenyon, I liked the poem so much and I began to hear about her and he told me about her and they were friends and he was also friends with her husband. I said that I really liked this poem and I bought a book of hers and then thought wouldn't it be nice if we could commission a group of her poems. She actually sent back a whole list of things that she wanted, but Bill found that some of them weren't as easy to set the music and it was going to be several songs he wanted the poems to go in and out like a cycle and not try

to force himself to compose to a poem that he didn't feel was going to set easily for his kind of music. So he figured that out. Some of the ones he suggested, and he suggested some others to her meanwhile I loved *Peonies*, I've never been able to grow them. That's the one piece that he did add for me but he said it was perfectly fine because it fit along with everything he was thinking of.

R: That's excellent. What was it like to become so attached to this poetry, and to become excited about this project, and maybe to give it over to someone else and say "you're the composer, and this is the next step in this process" and then step back and wait for these pieces to arrive. Can you tell me a bit about what that's like and maybe about what that process looks like?

B: You never know what it's going to be like, but I had done some of his music, and I knew some of the stuff that he had written by other people. He had written a cycle for Marilyn Horne and I knew him and I knew him and his wife doing concerts and I know how facile he is and how easy it is for him to write. He doesn't maybe think so, and it was just fun to have a project to work on and it was indeed a collaboration. I left it in his hands, I was not the boss of this. It was what he came up with and I was going along with.

R: I see. Maybe you could tell me a little bit about what it's like to have a composer write specifically for you and what it's like to have a piece that's a little more tailored to your voice. Do you believe that he wrote well for you? Was it something you felt fit you as a performer in the end or did it take a while to arrive at that?

B: I knew that he knew my voice well, and he had worked with several singers such as his wife that it was going to be in a good range for me. It was hard because he is very different from the other people such as Earl Kim who wrote pieces for me with my voice in mine. Even Ginastera who wrote a string quartet that had 4 songs in it...he had written the first piece and then he was asked if he would continue. They are all very different of course. It was nice to see the first draft of what Bill wrote and I went through them and there were just maybe two little spots that I thought at the time we had to consider that I was aging and my voice was starting to diminish somewhat in certain areas so I asked him if he would re-arrange maybe two spots of the pitches so I would have less of a struggle. We knew the music would be better performed if we thought people could hear the words if they were not so low in a certain spot, and he was willing to do that and that was helpful and of course you can leave it as an ossia so that others can come along and it's easy for them to do it and if this is what you really prefer then just leave it that way. It was harder for me that way, but I don't remember now what he actually did but it was so minimal that I don't think he minded doing it. At least he said he didn't mind. So we went in and out that way. I was completely confident because I knew him so it wasn't like there was a hardship in any way. It was just that it was exciting that it would be performed in so many places because of the 4 people who were working on the project to endow it and to make sure it was paid for and performed. I bet you have a list of that. (R: Of the various places that it was performed?) That it was supported by. The National Endowment for the Arts was commissioned by University of Michigan and San Francisco performances, University of Wisconsin, Dartmouth College and the University of New Hampshire. These 4 places were sponsors for the project. They supported the project and that's why it was able to be done because who would be able to pay Bill for his work? In doing this we had performances in these various places as well.

R: Absolutely. So now, I understand that you spoke frequently with Jane Kenyon over the phone... (B: Only once, actually.) Oh really? Ok, when I spoke to Bolcom he led me to believe it was more than that. It's obvious that you would gain insight into someone's poetry by talking to

them personally but maybe you can give me your spin on this, or what that was like to speak to her and then interpret her poetry.

B: It was just thrilling because I had a sense about this person from the poetry, the things that she'd wrote, and I knew that she was critically ill at that point. At the time that Tatiana and I began the project, we knew that she was ill. Bill was working on the piece, but then Tatiana died, and Jane was also critically ill. I only spoke to Jane once and we had hoped she did hear the other piece with the one song in it (Let Evening Come), and I think she did hear it. I know we were hoping to be able to do enough of it so that she could hear some of it and we were unable to. That was the sad part of this. But, I'm so happy to have her poetry set to music because it adds one more layer to people getting to know her poetry which I think is very beautiful. Did you read "Otherwise"? (R: Yes, it's gorgeous)

R: I understand that there is a video, which I am trying to get a hold of Jane Kenyon reading "Otherwise" (B: I have not seen that either that would be neat). It would. So now, you mentioned before that you have worked with several different composers and you had numerous works written for you specifically. Maybe you could tell me a few other things about working with Bolcom, but maybe working with composers in general who were working for you. Do you have specific request, or are there certain guidelines for them to follow?

B: I can tell you a little about Earl Kim who died a few years ago in his early 90s. He was asked to come to the Malboro Festival. I had spent so many summers there, my husband was the manager of the festival and has run it for over 50 years we didn't know it would go this far. We met in Malboro as two young musicians and the year after that he was asked to run the festival which he did and has been all these years. Malboro began to ask composers to come to the festival and Earl Kim was one of the composers who came and he brought one piece of his which was called "Dead Calm" for two percussionists, a few winds and maybe a string, I don't remember now. It was palindromic, and I just fell in love with it. I said to him almost joking after we had worked on the piece "I love this piece so much are there any others at home like this?" he said this is a whole evening's project worth that I'm hoping to do. I write the songs and my wife is a dancer, and there is a short film we want to put together and there's a short play by Beckett because all of the words that he was working on were by Beckett and that was also truly intriguing to me. So he over the next year or two put together these next three songs and then we spent a lot of time putting the project of putting together the whole evening. We travelled around with it a little bit, I don't know of anything else that is like it and it really can't be done like it had ever before the film got burned. His wife was gone and she was the dancer and choreographer. I asked him if we could get together and put this together again and he sort of laughed at me and said "no, the film is gone. How can we get it the way it was before?" it was just beautiful. It was done in Boston first and it got wonderful reviews and then we did it a few other places and I did parts and pieces of it, it was only maybe 4 or 5 minutes long with two percussionists playing any kind of instruments you could think of including Asian instruments that Earl went around and found. He knew exactly what the sound was, he was truly particular about what the sounds were. He found all of these instruments that all of his friends had at Harvard (that was where he was teaching at the time) and the piece starts with a tiny bell that you can hardly hear and the audience thinks they can hear something but everything is very hush and then the music starts. Then it goes through to the middle and then it goes back again and starts again and mirrors itself. That was why I fell in love with this piece...it was so unusual and fragile and it made you listen. It was a kind of music I had never been involved in before. So that began that project and it went over 2 years and we got that accomplished and then it was gone. So much of music just goes away into the air. You can't do it you can't even get that atmosphere back again. It's a whole new piece when someone tries to put the piece together again. I have a student now that is doing a recital in

a few days and she wanted to a recital on “Ophelia” and she collected all of the songs and pieces by all the composers. She even knew about one song that has a very long cadenza. She wanted to include the cadenza that is unaccompanied, and this is by Earl Kim in this program that she’s doing. She sang it for me and it was almost overwhelming to hear this piece done by somebody else. It brought up a huge memory and feeling in my insides because it reminded me again of what a beautiful piece it is. We are all in the magic of music. This is what we do and I sang for over 40 years, I’ve been singing all over. Of course when I stopped about 12 years ago, I only sang for my students if they need an example of what a phrase is. I hear that my voice is still ok but once I put it away it’s as if I had never done it. After the second or third year it made me think “gee, did I really do that? Is that what I did for 40 years?” I had the most blessed life. So Earl Kim is just part of the fabric of a closet that had been written for me. It’s such an integral thing for us musicians to consider everything about it because often it is like magic. Each piece, I compare to telling someone a secret. If you tell 5 people the secret, and ask each person what they heard, and you hear back 5 different versions...it’s the same with music. One piece of music has many versions depending on who does it. It is so intriguing to me. Have I talked long enough?

R: That is such an incredible description. Thank you for sharing so much about working with Earl Kim. Having talked about a piece that you just loved to perform, can you think of any instances where perhaps you had to perform a work that you weren’t as in love with, and what that process looks like as well?

B: I have something to tell you about that, yes. When I was in my first year of singing in German repertory theatre in Germany in 1952. I did 8 roles large and small and one of the smaller roles was rather boring and I had a duet with a mezzo in the middle of an opera and it was on an extended stage and I found myself out on the stage with her not remembering one note of that portion of the opera and I thought oh my goodness you should never do music that you are not fully involved with because otherwise this could happen to you at any time. It taught me such a lesson. I have been very careful about what I have said yes to because I want to love all the pieces, and I have been pretty successful in doing that. If you ask me about people, there are shades there of people I don’t want to work with. But that was very rare. Again, the collaboration is so important, it is what makes the piece. And, the strength of the music. For instance in doing some of my solo vocal programs with collaborators, we did a group of Faure and we did a group of Debussy and we had many programs and I put my songs in groups that I could switch around and change and I timed them all and I wrote them all out on paper and put them in an album I had where I would put in groups of repertoire that I wanted to sing at that time. Faure—I thought how beautiful. But when I thought about the music of Debussy, I thought wow this takes my breath away. Faure is beautiful but Debussy has something even deeper in it.

R: You mentioned working with accompanists and fighting to have the person working with you on the piano to have equal billing with you. I know you worked with Cynthia Raim on this project and I understand the two of you have collaborated fairly often. Could you tell me about what that relationship has been like and what the process of working with someone over and over but sometimes on different music is like, and the friendship and collaboration that is created?

B: It certainly did create a friendship, she’s quite a bit younger than I am. She’s a very fine pianist and it was such a pleasure to have the instrument played so well and it stole me away from any other pianist that wanted to work with me—they had to be as strong as Cynthia. If I changed from one pianist to another, I would find it would change my whole way of feelings of how I felt about the music in a good way because they had their own strengths. They brought out something in the piano that another person hadn’t done. It goes back and relates to what I said about different people doing the same music but in a different way. I have always tried to pick my program with the person who is going to be playing for me because I felt that it was as important for them as it was for me to love the music and feel that it was in the right order and the right keys, and what would make a really nice program for the two of us. Cynthia who lives in Philadelphia...when we get together it’s like we can’t stop talking, our reputation is very bad in that respect because when

we travel together we would be sitting in the waiting room for the next plane, and planes would come and go and we wouldn't even know it. We were in Canada at one point, and I said "Cynthia, where is everybody?" Everybody had left! The whole place had cleared out. We had been so into ourselves and talking that we didn't realize any of that we were oblivious! So instead of taking a few hours to get from Toronto to Philadelphia, it took us all day! We had to wait and take two other planes. We laugh about that type of thing and even then we almost missed the second flight! We don't see each other so often anymore, and she's a huge baseball fan and so is my husband which means I am included in this. So at baseball time we talk a lot more than the rest of the year, and sometimes I'll see her at a concert. We get together maybe two or three times a year, but she still performs, and I don't so we don't have that much time together anymore.

R: I was looking at the poetry of Jane Kenyon, and when I talked to Bolcom about them, he mentioned that the poetry itself could be described almost as monochromatic. She sort of worked in one medium and created things that were really beautiful and they were all in a similar theme, and I'm wondering if you can maybe talk about the dramatic side of things. As an interpreter of this work, was it challenging for you on a dramatic scale, or were you so captivated by the poetry that it just spoke for itself?

B: It becomes another entity when you get into it. The music stirs up how you feel about the words. You have a couple of layers, you don't just have one layer. When you read the poetry you might feel one thing, but when you hear the music you will feel something else. Perhaps something more, or something different, and then in singing it, it becomes that it is complete with the music. I know that if I ever hear any of these poems or if I read them, I will hear the music because that's where we are. Some of the other poets from Schubert and other composers...but what happens when we read that poetry, is that we hear the music. So, the same would happen here. I didn't feel it was monochromatic for me, but when you think about it, it does become one piece (with the nine songs). You went in and out of these different movements, and then you come to the end and I went through all of the papers that I have about it, and I realize that once I closed the book and put it with all of the letters and papers I had about it, I never looked at it again until you called to ask me for this interview. I got them out and looked at everything, and it brought up all the memories I had about the time that we did it. It goes by and it's gone! Ha! I have a whole library full of music and as I go through it, I give some of it to my students, or use it while the students are here...and all of the pieces bring up something else for me. In the performing of them, when it was over with, it was over with and I went to the next piece and that became the thing I loved at that moment. This is just one block of the many blocks that will take up my musical singing career. So, it's an interesting thing. Like I said before, I'd look back and say "did I really do that?" Were all these pieces my friends?

R: Looking at the set as a whole, are there pieces that strike you in particular as being very effective or moving? Did you have favorites that you were particularly attached to after everything was said and done? Or did the entire piece function as a whole for you?

B: I had different visions in my mind, especially when I get to something like the Sick Wife staying in the car. I picture her sitting in this car. I picture Jane sitting there, and I couldn't believe that was the last poem she wrote...no, Otherwise was the last poem she wrote. Her husband found it on her desk when he had gone on a trip, and when he got back she had written it, and that was the last poem that she ever wrote. So, you know it brings up these feelings about each one. I don't know if I find one...it just evokes such a feeling that it makes me almost want to weep that she is gone, because the beauty that she created is no longer. It's not like one piece sticks out. I see her in a lot of these. And, you know it's something like the first song, these lines are written by an animal...I did go through and mark how many times she would refer to animals and flowers.

R: thank you for sharing that. Looking at this piece and looking at the legacy of this piece, I understand it has been performed fairly often. (B: Yes I think so) I just wonder how often you have been contacted by new interpreters of the work. Have you been contacted often for insight into these pieces? I know there is one other dissertation written on this set, and I'm wondering if they had tried to contact you and ask you about the set, or not?

B: Yes, there have been people. There was a girl who is one of my students so it was no surprise that she had "Ophelia" amongst all the others that she had. Of course she had my recording of it, so it's not imitating me, it's just that this is what made her like this piece and want to do it. It is unusual, because she asked me about it and I said "Well, when Earl showed me this and I laughed and asked how he expected me to do this piece and stay in tune the whole way through since it is so long vocally!" and he said, "Well if you get started on the right foot.." and I said that he was right, and that I would need to be given a chord from the piece that precedes it in order to stay where he wanted me to since I didn't have perfect pitch. This young woman is going to do the same, she is going to kind of tie this to the song that precedes it (even though she is not performing it) so that she does not have to have anyone play a chord for her. Even if she's coming in from off stage, she will remember that pitch and start on the right pitch. There have been at least 3 other people who have called me and wondered if I would talk to them about this piece. It's not particularly this piece, it's the other piece by Bolcom as well. (R: Let evening come?) Yes.

R: You've tackled a lot of difficult music, and I was just wondering if you have any strategies for particularly difficult passages of music, or if there are certain ways you approach it, or if it is sort of different from piece to piece?

B: Well since I didn't have perfect pitch, I had to remember pitches and I would remember if I had a line and it had similar notes in it, I would call it "hanging a clothes line" from one upper pitch to another upper pitch. I would learn it intervallically, by the intervals, so that I could sing them in keys if I was just walking around the house. It didn't matter...an octave was an octave, a fifth was a fifth. The combination of how they all went together creates a certain feeling inside of you so that the music becomes more alive when you don't look at the page and it just comes out of you. If you just keep singing the page, it doesn't work. You have to get off of that, and I suppose it's like an actress when they are acting they have to send their voices out the way we do, and it's never the same way twice. You are thinking and feeling something the whole time, you are reacting if there are others on the stage with you...we react to the music, they react to the other words and actions that are going on around them. It takes on a lot of its own.

R: You mentioned you are teaching...

B: Out of my home, and I have just a handful of singers coming to me. I have one at 2 o'clock today when we are through, and I love that. I love being able to give back because so much was given to me and I think I really have learned it thoroughly and the craft of singing is not an easy thing. We have no buttons to push, we can't learn it like an instrument, maybe the flute, or the violin comes close to us. Piano is all separate notes and they work very hard to make anything like legato, it's miraculous what they are able to do...they fool us! It's the way they put the sound into the air that ties it together, and this is something I teach. I teach what the center of the sound is—what the lustrous beauty of the sound is, how individual it is and how we learn the craft so that we are free to do anything we want to do with it. I compare it to walking, juggling, detective work, to many things! It's a matter of how you balance it all in the air. It's not visible. I always have these visual things that they can fall back on. I only have one student that says "don't tell me any of that stuff it doesn't make sense to me!" Haha. I had to find a whole new method for that

person! But whenever I remind them what they sound like, or are not sounding like, then I try to compare it to something that is ever moving. I sometimes compare it to when you put your foot on the gas pedal. If you do this smoothly, and do it with your breath and air control, then imagine if you were in a car you would jerk along and you don't want to do that with your own singing. You have to be smooth, centered, beautiful, in tune...and it is in tune to whatever you start out with. I really believe that tuning on a piano all the time...we have to be very flexible. If I had perfect pitch I might go crazy. Other people are constantly saying that the pitch is not right. I was always told that I had excellent pitch, but it's all out there in the air somewhere. That's another thing I say. The notes are here in the air and we can take them in and understand them and use them. It really is a challenge and I am totally still totally amazed by my vocal technique and being able to teach. It is somehow magic. Do you sing at all?

R: I'll be performing these pieces in about a month. So, in completion of my Masters Degree. I was fortunate enough to coach them with William Bolcom and he was very informative and seemed happy with the direction they were going in which was very encouraging. But yes I can certainly relate to everything you've said about the process of learning how to sing and I think it's one of those never ending processes that like you said it like tight rope walking...sometimes you don't quite know how you are doing it. For your teaching is there anything that draws you to a specific student? Do you have a process for selecting students?

B: I know that each one is going to be different. If we get along it's going to be fine. If we don't get along it's better if they're not here. But usually, I get along with them. It's a challenge to work with different voices. I only have one person who is 17 years old, and he is so eager and I know he's going to go on to music school so I am giving him lessons, he has only had 3 so far. But he is so eager and improving so rapidly that it is fun to bounce the ideas to him...they are things he has never heard before! He loves it he is so excited and practically dances around my room. Then there are the others, who like to go, and just trying to keep them on the right path and knowing all the challenges they are going to have, and their career and life faces them...that's not an easy thing to do. If there is any way I can soften the way for them, or give them a heads up on things then I do my best to do that. It's not an easy thing but it's absolutely fascinating and wonderful. If you can do it I figure myself to be one of the lucky ones. What I really would like is the admiration of my colleagues, and that they respect what I am doing. I think that I can do that.

R; I think certainly! It shows in your interviews and your incredible career. What would be the thing that really drew you to your career in chamber music, and working with contemporary performers? Was it something that happened as you went along?

B: Some of each. There are certain things when we start out that we don't know what it will be like. In high school, I knew I wanted to be a singer. I wanted to take all the musical things they had in high school...all they had was choir, and I told them to put me in. They told me I would have to be selected, and I told them I would be selected so they better save the step! Haha! I was only 13 years old and the teacher that I had there was a former violinist. He was a very wise man and he put me in charge of all the things I could do. He took me to sing for Les Vas (?) drove me to L.A., I got a scholarship and went to Santa Barbra. I auditioned at Curtis and got in, I was there for 5 years and then I was in Met. Finals. He put me one foot in front of the other. If you love it and want to work on it, it happens! It's bound to happen! People say "well why are we training so many musicians and there aren't enough places to perform?" I said that they will make a place! People like music. I'm always very optimistic. I am optimistic because I grew up on a farm. I knew I was different from everyone. I sang all thorough grade school, high school and all through whatever. It had to be, there was nothing else I wanted to do! I didn't want to be a secretary, because that is what I took instead of college prep courses. I took a course in helping

myself...sitting there doing short hand and typing was not what I wanted to do. I decided I was going to either be in music or i would have to work outdoors, maybe with animals or plants and trees because I love the outdoors so much. It just happened that everyone thought my voice was good so I kept on going. I don't mean there weren't any hard spots because there were! At age 20 whatever it was when I graduated from Curtis and then I took the steps to go to Germany and auditions and what not without having been to Europe much in my life by myself... I was scared to death to contact people by phone. In the days when there was a book that said "Europe for 5 dollars a day"...you need all the hard spots to lead somewhere. You don't know what it is going to be, but things happen!

Appendix C: Interview with Bolcom

Interview with William Bolcom on March 17 2012, Redlands CA

RS: I spoke to Benita Valente on the phone before I came here and so she...I'm having an interview with her when I get back, she says to send her love to you to and Joan.

WB: Well you know we are very old and dear friends. Her husband runs a series in the Philadelphia Chambers Society, we performed there for 16 years straight, we had a wonderful time. They were very lovely to us. Of course I loved writing for Benita.

RS: Good, wonderful! That's basically what I'm interested in. I'm interested in the relationship that exists between the composer, singer, and poet and the collaborative process that occurs between each party in the creation of work, like *Briefly It Enters*. So, I would love it if you could talk about that and maybe a bit about how you met Benita Valente and came to know her a bit.

WB: Sure, no problem at all. Let me start with that. I have been for a number of years involved with the Prince Theater in Philadelphia which used to be and is still known as, well it's still the same association but it's now based on the Prince Theatre, and having already worked with them before they settled the Prince, the name of their outfit, the American Music Theater Festival. (It just came to me). I'd done something with them in the 1990s and Joan was with me, and we did a performance at one of the newly built towers in Philadelphia, which is suddenly taller than the William Penn statue. The old idea was nothing could be taller than the William Penn Statue on top of city hall but somebody got around that and built a generic sky-scraper right next to William Penn. So at the top, there was a cabaret space that was hired by the American Music Theatre Festival to do a concert for. There they were, she was there with her husband Tony Checcia. We went out for dinner and got along wonderfully well, and the next thing you know they asked us if we would like to perform with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society which we started doing. That's how we got to know each other. Then it turned out she wanted to have the possibility of a commission. The first thing that came to her was an idea of the duet for her and Tatiana Troyanos. I had met Tatiana before as a matter of fact and I would have loved to have been able to do this thing but then of course Tatiana died and I thought that was the end of the commission.

I thought that was the end of the commission further out, but then I got a call from Benita several months later and she says "Well, you know I've asked my friend Michael Tree" (who was of course the now late admitted Guarneri Quartet), "I've asked Michael to sit in for her". So here is this cycle for soprano and viola obbligato called *Let Evening Come*. That was an interesting commission. It was commissioned by a woman from Tuscalousa, Alabama. Her name was Gloria Naramore Moody, she was a real southern bell. My heavens, you know that real kind of southern lady. Anyway, well her husband had just died so she wanted to do the cycle in memory of her husband and she seemed to have enough funds to do such a thing. And that was the whole idea, the duet for her and Tatiana. So then it turned out to be that we were not going to be doing that. So it turned out that For *Let Evening Come*, Gloria had thought of using a poem by Maya Angelou, who is not my favorite poet, but my, she can read the telephone directory and bring you

to tears, she was a wonderful reader. But it happened to be a very good thing for this, but if we had just done that it would have been over in a minute and a half. And somehow, getting everybody, we already had Michael lined up, and everything, and her own wonderful pianist, Cynthia Raim, who was a wonderful pianist. And I said that's not enough, we are going to have to have more. So the Maya Angelou turned out to be a very talky, rather recitative type of poem. Have you looked through that cycle?

RS: Yes, I have.

WB: And, about people who had been her friends who had died, and I realized we were dealing with a rather death-hounded situation here. Anyway, I picked two of the poems. One of them was an Emily Dickinson, which it turned out we had to pay royalties for because it was copyrighted in the 1950s. Harvard published many of the poems that were not included in the original publication so these were copyrighted. It had earlier been put together by someone during Dickinson's life time. Turned out to be a little costly, but we still did it. That turned out to feel like an arioso so now we have a little baroque cantata, and all we needed was an aria.

I had been friends with Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon for many years. I had already set some of Donald Hall's poems. Jane was coming into quite a prominent role as a poet. I mean she became one of the great hidden poets. So I had read, I think somewhere, I can't remember where maybe the New Republic, and her was the poem Let Evening Come and I just knew that was the aria. So I put together this whole thing, this baroque cantata with a baroque aria. That was our first collaboration. Benita and Jane became phone buddies. Turned out they were both farm girls, both had come from farming, and had that sort of connection. I didn't realize Jane's father **Reuel** had anything to do with farming. **Reuel**⁶⁹, I knew is a person who is in the town of Ann Harbour, who had this wonderful collection of popular music dating from the 1920's, when he had actually been with a band, I think they were actually in Paris for awhile. There were a lot of strange cases of people who had a little band in Paris, there must have been a lot of American bands in Paris in 20's. I didn't realize how many might have been there. And he's a very quiet, charming sweet man. And then when he died, his wife invited me to take some of his music, so I have a few things. I was very discrete. I only took things that wouldn't be any problem because I think the rest of the collection might have been donated. It was a great overview of the things that would have been hits of the times, you know the best of any given year, because Ruel had very great taste. So, I knew Jane when all of this had happened.

They had moved to New Hampshire. They quit teaching at the University of Michigan. Don had asked me to help him. Do you know who the International Workers of the World were?⁷⁰ It was sometimes quite violent and people often thought they were communistic, but these were people who were fighting for rights of better workers throughout the world, known as the IWW. He put together a history play of what had been said by all these people, and the songs that had been written for the International Workers of the World. Many of these songs had been put together by a legendary guy named Joe Hill. I guess he was Norwegian. So this piece was called "Bread and Roses"; we did it all at the University. There's a play very much kind of the matrix from which he

⁶⁹ Bolcom may be referring to Kenyon's brother Reuel

⁷⁰ Referring to Industrial Workers of the World

had taken out at least the idea of how to do it, with actual quotes from everyone called "In White America" which I had seen. Which had to do with people and what they actually said. Our President Woodrow Wilson turned out to be a terrible, violent racist, something you didn't like to know about him. People are mixed bags you know. But he did wonderful things, still this racism was one of the terrible things about him. This is probably the template he may have used to put together the things. So I found a student, Michael Roth, to be the musical director, I kept my eye on him and we became good friends.

A few years later when he and Jane decamped to New Hampshire, Don found a legendary house that had been the Hall's house back in the early 19th century and was able to purchase it again, so they lived there for the rest of Jane's life and Don is still there. Highway 4 New Hampshire. So, that's how I got to know them. It was nice to have that kind of connection, because it was easier to be able to work out, Jane was able to get the rights for her own poem and that's not easy by the way, sometimes the poet has to fight with one's own publisher. I was doing a cycle for Steven Salters. Steven is a wonderful baritone and he said "i would like to see if you could do songs that were more homoerotic". He's quite openly gay. He wanted to have things that were sort of that kind of way, which I was fine with, I didn't mind, why not. One of the very best, you know now I don't say "openly gay", but making a point of being gay poets is Mark Doty. And Mark was very excited about having the poem being done. But his publisher suddenly thinks that maybe he will make lots of money from this things. People had the idea that once it's set for a song, the next second money will start rolling in, but that is because they are unrealistic. Publishers of poetry are living very hand and mouth anyway. It took quite a bit of time to get the OK from them, and Mark had a long time working with his publisher and had a long time trying to convince that we could not afford what they had asked us to pay for it, cause you know there wasn't much money. As it was I did send, the commission was magnificent enough that I sent 200 dollars to all the poets, that were still alive that could do, simply because I thought they should have something. Often, the poets are never given anything, so I gave them something anyway. But in the case of Jane it was no problem because we were already friends, and I was very struck by the poem. It was an elegiac poem, it was all in a way a memory of Tatiana. Have you looked at it? (R: I have, and I have a recording but haven't studied it intensively) Something like a *Three Kleenex cycle*. (R: It is very beautiful and very moving)

Once we were all listening to Kaitlin Lynch who was the niece of the poet Thomas Lynch. We were in the Cincinnati Conservatory and were all sitting listening to her and all of a sudden we were all blubbering. She's a very fine singer, she is involved with Seattle Opera now. Benita was just crazy about Jane's poetry. Jane had sent her some of her poems. What happened was that Benita proposed a number of poems that would go into the cycle, and they were sort of thematically connected but they were a little short in contrast. The one about the man eating the yogurt was not in there—it was probably something not thematically tied to some of the other ones. And I needed that variety, by the time I was actually working on it Jane was already in the last stages of her disease and she wasn't much of any help, but I remember that we sent her a cassette of the first performance, which here we are, I think it may have been in Philadelphia, I remember we went to do one at Tully Hall in Lincoln Center in New York, we were supposed to meet Gloria at the restaurant afterwards, well it was such a moving experience that Benita was going to do a whole Wolf cycle afterwards. But when she came off because of course Jane was

dying and they had become very close friends on the phone with her. So she came off the stage and she said I can't come back, and the manager came and said we are going to end the concert at this point. Then we filed out afterwards like it had been a funeral memorial, quietly, everybody leaving, cause I think people sensed that something had put a spin on the whole experience. I remember we all went to Fiorello's restaurant nearby, which is where everybody goes. There was Gloria eight sheets to the wind. Gloria had drunk so much, it was very funny, because it was a big emotional thing for her, and she was there already before all of us had gotten over there.

She did it a few times and I recorded it and I didn't play the piano of course. The other part of that second recording was Joan and me preparing the second set of cabaret songs, which was another part of the second recording, which we all did at centre in Queens, which is the same place where I believe the Louis Armstrong collection is held which was put together by my dear friend Phoebe Jacobs. It's a good place to record. We had a very elegant recording engineer which I believe is the nephew of the writer Paul Bolls. So it was quite an intense time, but that's when we finally got to *Briefly it Enters*, but we also recorded the other things there too.

Not a heck of a lot else to say about it, except that I worked out the list with Don's help and I needed more variety. She was a very special poet but she didn't have a huge range and that wasn't her point, she was one of the people who was not all over the place. She had a certain kind of thing she did. She wasn't someone who was all over the place, she had a very different kind of atmosphere that she deals with and it is very successful, and it is no fault that she doesn't have a wide range, she is very concentrated. So that was really what it was. So we've been friends ever since. That's pretty much all I can tell you about it.

Jane wasn't really capable physically at that point to do much. But I do remember we sent her the cassette and Don said that she played it over and over and over again. That was the end of working on the cycle *Briefly It Enters* and she asked if she would be able to hear it? I said it would take a while before we put it together, and she asked if it would be like Christmas when I have to wait. Well of course, we had to wait so long that she was gone, which is a sad thing. It's very strange how these things are so death-haunted. Its like when we performed the Masques last night which is another case of something being very death-haunted. It was commissioned for a pianist who died, her protégé actually played it, and the conductor did it almost to the end of his physical forces and it was quite a fraught experience I have to say.

RS: Can you tell me about writing for Benita Valente as a singer? What specific things you took into account when you were writing for her?

WB: It's funny that I've had a number of commissions for women who are on the last decade or so of singing. I'm dealing with my wife who doesn't have anywhere near the range she once had and with her cause since most of it is popular music I can transpose a lot for her. I seem to transpose down further and further. I remember when I wrote two cycles for Marilyn Horne. They had the same basic range but the tessitura went down. She was doing my first cycle, some numbers of it at Ravinia and she came off the stage and said she had become a contralto. That's fine, so I said I'll write it lower, no problem. The second was a set of cabaret songs, the second one, Joan's voice had changed. I don't know if she's ever to do it but Sylvia McNair would like to do it and she said can I transpose the second set. Absolutley, I told her of course! Don't worry

about something, transpose it to a comfortable range for any singer. I'd much rather have it transposed to a comfortable range for any singer. The only time it can be an issue is when it is for an opera. But even then people transpose all the time. I don't have a problem with that. Go back to the question?

RS: When you were writing specifically for Benita Valente...

WB: Yes! I took into account the fact that many women lose the top of their range and the bottom gets stronger, they seem to have more support, but for her it was the opposite. She still had the top range but the bottom fell out. This sometimes happens. But it's more rare than the other thing. So I had to be more careful, some of the alternate notes you may have noticed are in the lower part because she could manage high B flats and things like that with no trouble, but she had trouble below the staff below F. You know she didn't really have the support. She could do it, but you really had to be careful about using stuff down there. If you did so, you better do it absolutely clear or you won't hear it. Always, you're dealing with the physical properties of the singer you're working with. "You are your instrument". It may turn out to be someone else who ends up doing that. I have no problem with that, I just like to pick my own alternate notes because sometimes singers or accompanists don't always work with the ones I'd like. Its not always an octave or a fifth, sometimes another harmonic note or something like that. But as long as it makes sense as a line, no problem. Whenever I've worked with opera, I've always been perfectly happy to give alternate notes and to change for whatever anybody wants. I don't anybody sitting up there worrying about getting the note I want them to worry about getting their song out. That's more important. I don't want someone sitting and thinking "oh on page 43 I have to do "awwahn" and I don't want them to be all worried about that. That's not fair to them. That's about all I can tell you about that I think. So that was the thing with Benita, ya.

RS: We discussed this a bit already but I just wanted to touch on the role that Benita Valente played in the creation of the set. So you mentioned, basically she commissioned the set.

WB:She got it all arranged. She commissioned the set, she did have a little bit of a hand in the picking of the songs. "Peonies at Dusk" was her favourite poem of the whole bunch so I had to do it. Not that I was in any way against the idea, but it was one of the things she had requested.

RS: Working on the pieces, was there anything you did re-write for her at all?

WB: Oh sure, usually things like that, the range problem. Also when you get to a certain age as a singer there are some notes they can't do. So you find a way to work around, that's all. It's all practical. It was never matter of not doing something because it is emotional, it is purely physical restrictions. If you couldn't get a note out comfortably, of course you just find a way to adjust for comfort. There was never a terrible disagreement at any time.

RS: The pieces didn't change dramatically...

WB: No, just here and there. She certainly is a good musician. She certainly could handle it. She did say she regretted that she hadn't done it 10 years earlier thinking that if she had done it 10 years before she would have had a better instrument, but I didn't find any real problem there. I worked a lot with her on diction. I think that the younger singers are spending more time on

getting the words out than people in her generation. I know that in one recording David Bowles was on her about getting the words out just so, and I think we did a reasonably good job. That's not a real problem, just one of those things. A very funny thing happened with "Let Evening Come". We had been invited to a conference and we were going to be doing an afternoon concert in Stuttgart and my student Eric Pamell and Joan was there and all the audience and I was playing the piano part, Cynthia wasn't there this time, so I did the piano part and the violin/violist Peter Shephard, an Englishman, was playing the obbligato Viola part. It's about 5:15 afternoon concert, we were on the last piece...as you know it ends very quietly and contemplatively. People were quietly savouring the ending. All of a sudden, 6:00 happens and every church bell in Stuttgart start ringing as loud as possible. And we were sitting there covering our ears and all you could hear was "bang, bang, boom, ring". It was very funny, "Let Evening Come" and it came with a vengeance! It was a very funny moment. That was surprising and fun! It's been done quite often and turned out to be a kind of commonly done piece, it's nice.

RS: We've discussed the selection of the poetry a little bit already. You mentioned that Benita had selected poems initially?

WB: She sent them to me, but the only one she really insisted we do was "Peonies at Dusk". And, let's see. Other ones I mean I totally agreed with her choices but the fact is, I felt like we needed more contrast. That's why I asked for things like Man Eating and so on...And she had not put in "The Sick Wife", because that of course was published after her death. It seemed important to do because it's a very important poem Don had saved it from the notes, so it was, sort of necessary to do that.

RS: You have been quoted as saying that some of these poems would give you a tune whereas others wouldn't. Can you elaborate on that at all, or, what is it about a piece of poetry that speaks to you?

WB: Well there are poems that give you the distinct impression that there is a tune hidden in there! When I did my cycle for Placido Domingo a piece called Canciones de Lorca. I had a suspicion that everyone of them were each a lyric for a song that hadn't been written. He was quite a good composer and pianist and a very good musician too. There were recordings of his songs being done with him and the piano. And he could have been a major composer had he wanted.

He was a totally schooled musician, and the more I looked at the poems that we had picked, which was done with Placido and me looking at what was possible and he actually picked a few, one of which was not in the collection, it was one he knew of from elsewhere, so we picked that one. The whole business of that selection was finding things that would feel song like. Pretty much all the poems that I looked at had a very strong lyric kind of song like atmosphere and I had this funny feeling I was providing the tunes that Lorca hadn't gotten around to writing. I don't think he had did too much else besides that cycle I heard a recording of with the piano which is really quite stunning. I wish he had done more, he was certainly wonderfully talented. The point is they really had that song like quality. If you look back at them yourself you probably notice that some of Benita's poems like being set, some had a song like quality. If you look back on them yourself you'll notice that some of them have a song like lyric and some have more poetry set to music type feeling.

A few years ago, Sheldon Harnick who was a very old friend, who had a concert put together of some of my songs. Some of which were popular style and some had been serious poems that I had set to music. Sheldon had much preferred those that had been thought of as lyrics. And this is a man who is totally musically literate. He had been a violin major at Northwestern University, wrote some very funny cabaret songs, if you want something fun you should look at some of these including Garbage. (Sings: *garbage, behind my back you called me garbage...*) Very funny. Bossy Bogen is funny. The most famous is The Shape Of Things. It was sort of a fake folk song. (Sings: *Completely rounded so and so, completely square, completely triangular*). It's about a girl whose boyfriend has thrown her out, she kills him (haha). That's very funny. But they're all written out in Sheldon's excellent hand. It must have been wonderful for him to have worked with Jerry Bock and to have him write him a tune. Many people write tunes to be set to music. This happens popular music, it used to anyway. In the 20s it was pretty clear that most of the songs were tuned first, because it was felt that the tune would sell the song. I was once shown by our friend Kaye Swift a whole notebook of Gershwin's which was tunes like he had liked to set. Most of the words would be put in by Ira Gershwin. There were many wonderfully possible tunes. Had Jerry been interested in giving a tune to Sheldon, he would have gone home and would have been able to read the thing and set the tune. I mean this is something you don't normally find. Most lyricists are not into reading music, it's a rarity but a number of them are. Working with Mark Campbell who's also trained as a musician, I could actually send things if I wanted to do that.

Today I think things have changed. The legend is that when Richards Rogers and Morris Hart were working together, that except for the verses, the lyrics were given to Hart. When it got to Hammerstein II, it was the words first. Mind you there are places where the verses or what they call patter or fast areas of songs like "Nobody's Heart Belongs to Me" there's a patter in the middle of those. I think where Larry would put the words and Rodgers would write the music. But particularly in the older days the tunes came first. Where were we?

RS: We just began with the idea that some texts or poems would give you a tune, where as others wouldn't.

WB: Well yes that's true. In the case of Lorca it was a matter of discovering a tune that was latent in the poem. But I think it's not true of other people. Some people don't feel any kind of feeling of a tune or even a sense that in a kind of a way invites it, either sometimes because of the density of the poem or something. Yates would be a very difficult person to be able to set but I had a student Andrew McDonald, he's a Canadian composer based out of the University of Quebec, he decided to set some Yates for his wife who is a soprano and for himself as a guitar. One of the things I always tell my students is that you must always get the rights before you can set it because here you write the whole thing and they say you no you mustn't do, absolutely not, forget it. We did find Yates's brother Jack Yates, who was was a fine painter, and his son Michael had become the executor for the Yates collection. And, I had Andrew write a letter to Michael Yates saying it would be mostly for school performances. Now more often, things that are done for school are often not in question, everybody understands it's academic and you're not going to make any money from it anyway. Anyways, I wrote to Michael and he said yes! It was 25 dollars a poem and he did. So that was very nice, but it is a rarity.

Other times you're going to run into problems with, years when I was at NYU for a short time I was composer in residence for the School of the Arts and I was asked to do a two part play by Harold Pinter, and I said that is terrific but I think we need to get the rights. There was a friend of the school who was an old friend of mine, David Offenheim, who actually founded the school of the arts at NYU. Anyways, David wrote Pinter and Pinter said absolutely not, I don't want anyone to set anything of mine. So I couldn't do it that's the end of that. 10 years later I am driving on Long Island and stop for coffee and there is David's exwife who also knew Harold Pinter. She said she had just seen Pinter in London and he would love someone to set his poems. But 10 years later, I said too late! So you run into quirky things like that.

I've been told that now the estate of Robert Frost has put an absolute ban on anyone setting anything to his poetry. I guess they can do that. You can have little problems these ways so it is very important to do that. I guess the biggest thing is, you have to want to do it. You have to find something that is lyrical. I've had students who have come to me and they would find a poem we have looked for a lyrical element—if you can't find it at all, it will be hard to get this setting comfortable or viable in a good way. The other thing is you look for a necessity for it to be set. I have never done major opera without having a feeling that in some way I could contribute something that otherwise wasn't possible in any other way, to a text.

RS: You talked a little bit already about your friendship with Jane Kenyon. And you mentioned that you had set some of her husband's poetry earlier in your career. My next two questions can kind of bleed together. You spoke about Jane being more monochromatic in style and her husband being different—what is the contrast between writing for two such different poets, as well who were two people you were very close too?

WB: They were a power couple. Don is, well I'm not the first person to compare them to the Brownings. Robert Browning who was all over the place, but consistent, he was considered such a reigning genius. I think that the one more accessible of the two poets was Elizabeth Barrett. The first thing I think of when I think of Robert Browning are two wonderful lines that I would never know how to set. (Recites: *Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beasts?*) Which could not be less like Elizabeth Barrett. I wouldn't say that Don was into anything that was knotty. We actually did do three poems. He had given me a version of a poem called "Names of Horses". The horses who had been on the old family farm up there in Eagle Pond. They had wonderful names, but that has been published as a poem. He then decided he wanted to make it into a song. So we did that, so we ended up with kind of a folk song. Then he had done some rewriting of some of his other poems and I found them less interesting because he had made them an easy doggerel thinking that it was easier for them to be set in this way. Actually what you love is to have something that gives you a challenge...how do i make this sound natural rather than have it laid all in my lap. You want a little resistance from the poem. I think it makes it interesting, you have to find more interesting solutions instead of just the natural sort of thing. I think the two cases we did do that, one is called "The Names of Horses" and the other is called "The Ox"...something to do with Oxen, oh the oxguard. Well that's again, one of them is published and the other is a folk song. In the middle I took one of the his list poems called "Oh Cheese". It's a very funny poem. At least, it lists all these cheeses. It is a funny thing, some of them start to sweat because they know they will be dying haha. Not strophic in any kind of way,

there aren't rhymes. Except the two ones where he put in rhymes so it felt like more of a folk songs, so the one in the middle made it feel like a little bit of a contrast. It's like the cheese filling for the cycle of three songs. Don has such a range, his challenge is probably to be able to make things coherent. He's now in his eighties and he says he doesn't write poetry anymore but he just wrote the most poetic prose poem, without meaning to do it, which was published in the New Yorker a couple months back. It was a 4 page poem, a prose poem. Prose poems you will find a lot of poets really start to ramble and will go on to other people. So many of these poetry anthologies are like paragraphs which are called prose poems. But, Jane didn't do that much of a range of types of poem really. There's a couple that are a little more discursive but nothing like you will find from many other poets such as Don. Those weren't set, they weren't meant to be set.

RS: You already talked a little bit about the idea that you needed a little bit of variety so you requested a certain type of poem, like you requested "Man Eating". Can you elaborate a little bit perhaps on the challenge of taking a collection that was a little monochromatic in nature and then composing...I suppose putting your own style upon that.

WB: Like everything else, you find that something attracts you and gives you a musical idea and other poems refuse to yield anything so you don't. I can't see it as any particular process over weaning, so I really don't know how to answer that question in other way than just that.

RS: You mentioned that in the 5th piece, "Twilight" you directly reference a piece that is by John Verrall. Can you think of any other instances within the entire cycle where the influence of other composers that you admire shows up or shines through.

WB: It's funny. People ask me things like that all the time. That's for other people to find out.

RS: Of Course! You mentioned that it was while you were working on "Twilight" that you received the news about Jane. Can you tell me where in the composition process you were. How close were you to completing the entire cycle at that point?

WB: Well that one's somewhere in midpoint of the cycle. I did tend to want to do things in order. I might have some operas that I have worked on where I am scattered all over the place, but I have to start at page A and end up on page Z. Otherwise you don't have a sense of overall line. This is also true of the songs of Innocence and Experience. I had an interview this morning from a fellow who is working on a paper and he asked me "How do I organize things? Is there a controlling aspect?" No, you just wait for the next thing. I think in retrospect, you will find a form. You can also have certain kind of points of repair where something will lead to a particular thing that I will already have in mind and something else will lead to another point and so on. Sometimes these things act like pillars to hold up the whole roof structure of the cycle. I think what you do is you hope that when you get to it...you think ok that is the next thing on the agenda. It would be fatal to sense when you listen to a piece that this was on his list and check it off. I feel that is often the way with Brückner that he does things in order and it feels as a listener like he is crossing it off a list. So at least that has been my feeling about him. Maybe one day I will find out what everyone is so excited about him for. Dennis Russle Davies who now heads up the Orchestra at Lintz in Austria said that their opera company will be doing McTeague in 2015.

A very old friend we have been working since 1967, I was very happy about this. So he sent me a recording of Bruckner's 4th symphony, and as with Bruckner, I was asleep a few minutes in. It's terrible, I will never tell Dennis because now he has Bruckner's orchestra from Lintz. You don't want the feeling of something on a list, you want the feeling that what is coming is the next inevitable thing not just the next thing on the list.

RS: So you had already chosen an order before you began?

WB: I kind of did but it doesn't always necessarily mean that you are always going to stay with that order. Sometimes you put it all together, and then end up exchanging things. There's a big controversy in Mahler's 6th Symphony as to whether we should do the scherzo right after the first movement. Sometimes the scherzo comes in right after Movement 1 and then the slow movement is the third movement. That's become the regular order. Now it turns out that for once performance Mahler thinks that maybe he should move things and do it the other way around, but by now this is the way people are used to it that way. My own symphonies, which are multi-movement, many times I will have the scherzo in the second movement and the slow movement in movement 3, maybe because of the one particular time where Mahler did it. But sometimes I feel it seems more comfortable to do the slow movement second. I am doing a rather, I'd have to say Romantic Classical, because of the fact it has something of a romantic gesture language...I am working on a piano quintet that will be coming up the 20th something of this month. That is a piece which I had a regular first movement and then a slow movement and then comes a kind of scherzo and then comes the finale. I was interested in referring to the piano quintets of the past, I think Schumann's was the first really big one that everyone seems to know. There is where I kept that particular order. I usually keep my symphonies in that order but there is sometimes where the scherzo follows. That's where I'm referring to the classical mode, but other symphonies aren't like that but the ones that do, sometimes have that.

RS: Can you think of any instances where within *Briefly It Enters*, where you had something sketched out in a certain order and you changed it later on or?

WB: Frankly, I can't remember. It's been awhile. This happens quite often in something large like a stage work. When I was dealing with the second act of *A Wedding*, my last opera for Lyric that I did, there was a character in the second act called Aunt Bea, which turned out to be a double part. The mother of the household, Betty, is in the very early part of the first act of the opera and she dies during the wedding reception. The whole big problem is how do we keep it a secret from all the guests (laughs). It's a funny tragedy. I love that movie though it can take us all over the place. That's one of the occasions of what I was saying before that we can possibly in opera do things that Bob wasn't able to do in a movie context. He had made a great hit with the film "Nashville" which had 24 characters. I expanded it to 48 characters. And it's kind of all over the place in certain ways but I love that movie because I thought it would be a great opera simply because all of the characters are so etched. One of the things I need is that the character has to have a chance to come front and center and say this is who I am in a way that is only really possible in opera. Sometimes it is possible in plays, but especially something like Tennessee Williams, where someone actually does come up and speak an aria of some kind. Not many playwrights have that. Sam Shephards is like a tennis match. Talk, talk talk back and forth. There

is no real room for a person to do that very thing. When I was doing the “A View From The Bridge” the plot is about to Sicilian stowaways and the older brother had been caught because he had trouble accepting that his niece was going get to married to this guy, who he thought was just going to marry her and then abandon her. Here’s Marco in jail, and I realize we hadn’t added anything for Marco that was a real chance for him to sit there, and so there he was sitting in there by himself. So I called up Arnold Weinstein and said I need an aria for Marco. So I asked him and I got a call back a few days later. I asked if it would be alright for Arthur to write the aria, and I said ok how could I not allow that. So I wrote a whole new piece that had nothing to do with the previous context. He needed a moment for him to go out there, it’s a very powerful aria, with a strong response but it’s because he really hasn’t been heard from. It’s almost like the old principle from Chekov that if there is a gun on the mantelpiece it is going to be used. And here’s Marco, you need to hear from him otherwise you will wonder where was he! In a play you can get away with that but in an opera you need a chance to come forward otherwise the singers are not going to be attracted to it. They want a chance to get up there and show who they are and do their bit. It’s understandable. It’s no fun, you go up and do a “bop” here and a “bop” there. You wand give them a chance to do their stuff.

RS: I just have one last question. So I know that the cycle was performed a few times by Ms. Valente and you performed it yourself recently. I was wondering if there are any other notable performances of the work that you can think of or that you saw or if it is something that has yet to be...?

WB: Oh no, people are doing it all over the place quite often. I have been amazed the number of people who have come to me and are working on it, such as you. It seems to be a regular seller in the sheet music so people are doing it. That’s nice. But I’m sure there are major star names doing it...I can’t think of any right now but I am sure there have been. I got a note from my secretary this morning and she looked me up on Youtube and there were 550 hits, there’s different kinds of them, people doing performances, and you don’t even know about them! There might be major things that are there...but I wrote one of the cabaret songs “Amor” and one of my old composition students has done it a number of times. In fact, I did it for the opening of Kreneck Auditorium...and Kreneck was on the point of dying so we got up in the main hall and did “Amor”.

RS: Thank you so much for doing this interview with me.

Bibliography

Bateman, Marlene Titus. "The "Cabaret Songs," volume one of William Bolcom and Arnold Weinstein: An exploration and analysis." Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001. ProQuest (3008241)

Blyth, Alan. "Bernac, Pierre." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02837> (accessed July 5, 2012).

Bolcom, William. *Briefly It Enters: A Song Cycle from poems of Jane Kenyon for Voice and Piano*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corp., 1997.

Bolcom, William. *Let Evening Come; Briefly It Enters; Cabaret Songs, Volumes 3 and 4*. William Bolcom, Joan Morris, Cynthia Raim, Benita Valente. Centaur, compact disc, 2001.

Brett, Phillip, et al. "Britten, Benjamin." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg5> (accessed July 5, 2012)

Chimènes, Myriam and Roger Nichols. "Poulenc, Francis." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/22202> (accessed July 5, 2012).

Corigliano, John. Mr. *Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan for voice and piano*. Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, Inc., 2003.

Ellison, Cori. "Team Player." *Opera News* 57. no. 17, (1993.)

Encyclopedia Britannica, Merriam-Webster, last modified 2004, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enjambment>

Feingold, Michael, (Author). "A team with a view." *Opera News* 67, no. 6, (December 1, 2002.)

Friedberg, Ruth C. *American Art Song and American poetry*. New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1981.

Gidwitz, Patricia Lewy. " 'Ich bin die erste Sangerin' Vocal profiles of two Mozart sopranos." *Early Music* XIX: 565-579. (1993.)

Gilliam, Byan and Charles Youmans. "Strauss, Richard." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/40117pg8> (accessed July 5, 2012).

Greenfield, Edward. "Previn, Sir André." In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/22327> (accessed July 6, 2012).

Hall, Donald. "The after Life." *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2000): 123-131. JSTOR

Jacobson, Robert. "Its Own Reward." *Opera News* Vol. 50 no. 11, (February 1986.)

Jantsch, Nancy E. Jennings. " "Briefly It Enters": A Song Cycle by William Bolcom from Poems by Jane Kenyon." Diss., Ohio State University, 2001. ProQuest (3022425)

Kenyon, Jane. *A Hundred White Daffodils*. Graywolf Press, 2000.

Pride, Mike. "The Abiding Presence of Jane Kenyon." *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Summer 2005): 458-462. JSTOR

Ricky Ian Gordon, Composer. Ricky Ian Gordon. Last modified 2007.
<http://www.rickyiangordon.com/>

Snydacker, Sarah Elizabeth. "The new American song: A catalog of published songs by 25 living American composers." Diss. University of Iowa, 2011. ProQuest (3461236)

Stanley Harris, Raymond. "Songs of Ascents: A collaboration of singer, composer and ancient text." Diss. University of British Columbia. 2005. ProQuest (NR10400)

Timmerman, John H. *Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life*. W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002

Tolansky, Jon. "Garden, Mary." In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2786> (accessed July 5, 2012)

West, Ewan. "Vogl, Johann Michael." In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.darius.uleth.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/29603> (accessed July 5, 2012)