
Song texts for *Visions: Song Sets for Tenor and Piano*

Miss Wheatley's Garden

I. Songs for the People

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me sing for little children,
Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
To float o'er life's highway.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

-Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

II. I want to die while you love me

I want to die while you love me,
While yet you hold me fair,
While laughter lies upon my lips,
And lights are in my hair.
And bear to that still bed your kisses:
Turbulent, unspent, to warm me when I'm dead.
And never, never see the glory of this day
Grow dim or cease to be.
I want to die while you love me,
Oh, who would care to live
'Til love has nothing more to ask
And nothing more to give?

-Georgia Douglas Johnson

III. A Winter Twilight

A silence slipping around like death,
Yet chased by a whisper, a sigh, a breath;
One group of trees, lean, naked and cold,
Inking their cress 'gainst a sky green-gold;
One path that knows where the corn flowers were;
Lonely, apart, unyielding, one fir;
And over it softly leaning down,
One star that I loved ere the fields went brown.

-Angelina Weld Grimké

Songs of Sorrow

I. Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but
that is all that I shall do for Death.
I hear him leading his horse out of the stall;
I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
He is in haste; he has business in Cuba,
business in the Balkans, many calls to make this morning.
But I will not hold the bridle
while he clinches the girth.
And he may mount by himself: I will not give him a leg up.
Though he flick my shoulders with his whip,
I will not tell him which way the fox ran.
With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where
the black boy hides in the swamp.
I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death;
I am not on his pay-roll.
I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends
nor of my enemies either.
Though he promise me much,
I will not map him the route to any man's door.
Am I a spy in the land of the living,
that I should deliver men to Death?
Brother, the password and the plans of our city
are safe with me; never through me Shall you be overcome.

II. Dirge

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve.

III. Lament

Listen, children:

Your father is dead.

From his old coats

I'll make you little jackets;

I'll make you little trousers

From his old pants.

There'll be in his pockets

Things he used to put there,

Keys and pennies

Covered in tobacco;

Dan shall have the pennies
To save in his bank;
Anne shall have the keys
To make a pretty noise with.
Life must go on,
And the dead be forgotten;
Life must go on,
Though good men die;
Anne, eat your breakfast;
Dan, take your medicine;
Life must go on;
I forget just why.

-Edna St. Vincent Millay

Desert Songs

I. Only ten

I'm only ten.
What do you expect me to do?
I don't know my future.
I cry everyday.
My family said they hate us. Oh why?!
You see all these kids around me;
We don't know when we will die
Survive

They don't deserve to sleep scared
Why would you send a missile to kill them?
Parents are crying
Mothers can't believe their kids are dying.
We don't deserve to die
We are still young.
It's not fair.

-found text compiled by Kyle Stegall

II. Without a Sound

Of course, I can't cry in front of them.
My son can tell the difference
Between a rocket hit in the air and one that lands outside.
They ask
"What was bombed? Where?"
I tell them
"Far from this place. Do not be afraid."
But I am afraid.
Bad images fill my head.
We are worried about our children.
I was crying without a sound
So they didn't hear me.

-found text compiled by Kyle Stegall

III. River

She was ten only once.

No land is a virgin.

Desert is a verb.

To be equal does not make us equals.

Grief is not for words.

Time ages. It does not follow that the lost will be found.

But for ____ he would be dead.

Can there be poetry, here?

There are no tears without salt.

And when salt meets water, both are undone, both are undone.

Shall we gather up a river, to flood our share of sorrow.

Yes, we'll gather up a river.

Let us rescue each other.

-Tsitsi Ella Jaji

- Inspired by Jaji's words, Boykin set a variation in the last three poetic lines. The musical score reads "Shall we gather *at the river?*" and quotes the American hymn tune of the same name.

Four Romantic Love Songs

I. My Heart to Thy Heart

My heart to thy heart,
My hand in thine;
My lip to thy lips,
Kisses are wine
Brewed for the lover in sunshine and shade;
Let me drink deep, then, my African maid.

Lily to lily,
Rose unto rose;
My love to thy love
Tenderly grows.
Rend not the oak and the ivy in twain,
Nor the swart maid from her swarthier swain.

II. Invitation to Love

Come when the nights are bright with stars
Or when the moon is mellow;
Come when the sun his golden bars
Drops on the hay-field yellow.
Come in the twilight soft and gray,
Come in the night or come in the day,
Come, O love, whene'er you may,
And you are welcome, welcome.

You are sweet, O Love,
You are soft as the nesting dove.
Come to my heart and bring it to rest
As the bird flies home to its welcome nest.

Come when my heart is full of grief
Or when my heart is merry;
Come with the falling of the leaf
Or with the redd'ning cherry.
Come when the year's first blossom blows,
Come when the summer gleams and glows,
Come with the winter's drifting snows,
And you are welcome, welcome.

III. Longing

If you could sit with me beside the sea to-day,
And whisper with me the sweetest dreamings o'er and o'er;
I think I should not find the clouds so dim and gray,
And not so loud the waves complaining at the shore.

If you could sit with me upon the shore to-day,
And hold my hand in yours as in the days of old,
I think I should not mind the chill baptismal spray,
Nor find my hand and heart and all the world so cold.

If you could walk with me upon the strand to-day,
And tell me that my longing heart had won your own,
I think all my sad thoughts would then be put away,
And I could give back laughter for the Ocean's moan!

IV. Good-Night

The lark is silent in his nest,
The breeze is sighing in its flight,
Sleep, Love, and peaceful be thy rest.
Good-night, my love, good-night, good-night.

Sweet dreams attend thee in thy sleep,
To soothe thy rest till morning's light,
And angels round thee vigil keep.
Good-night, my love, good-night, good-night.

Sleep well, my love, on night's dark breast,
And ease thy soul with slumber bright;
Be joy but thine and I am blest.
Good-night, my love, good-night, good-night.

-Paul Laurence Dunbar

Visions of Judgement

I. A Morning Hymn: Thou wakeful shepherd

Thou wakeful shepherd, that does Israel keep,
To thee I offer up this hymn
As my best morning sacrifice;
May it be gracious in thine eyes
To raise me from the bed of sin.
And do I live to see another day?
I vow, my God, henceforth to walk thy ways,
And sing thy praise
All those few days
Thou shalt allow.
Could I redeem the time I have mis-spent
In sinful merriment,
Could I untread
Those paths I led I would so expiate each past offense,
That ev'n from thence
The innocent should wish themselves like me
When with such crimes they such repentance see.
With joy I'd sing away my breath,
Yet who can die so to receive his death.

II. In the black dismal dungeon of despair

In the black dismal dungeon of despair,
Pin'd with tormenting care,
Wrack'd with my fears,
Drown'd in my tears,
With dreadful expectation of my doom
And certain horrid judgement still to come.
Lord, here I lie,
Lost to all hope of liberty,
Hence never to remove
But by a miracle of Love,
Which I scarce hope for, or expect,
Being guilty of so long, so great neglect.
Fool that I was, worthy a sharper rod,
To slight thy courting, O my God!
For thou did'st woo, intreat, and grieve,
Did'st beg me to be happy and to live;
But I would not; I chose to dwell
With Death, far from thee,
Too near to Hell.

But is there no redemption, no relief?
Thou sav'd'st a Magdalen, a thief;
O Jesu! Thy mercy, Lord, once more advance.
O give me such a glance
As Peter had; thy sweet, kind, chiding look
Will change my heart, as it did melt that rock;
Look on me, sweet Jesu, as thou did'st on him!
'Tis more than to create, thus, to redeem.

III. An Evening Hymn: Now that the sun hath veil'd his light

Now that the Sun hath veil'd his Light,
And bid the World good Night;
To the soft Bed, my Body I dispose,
But where shall my Soul repose?
Dear God, even in Thy Arms, and can there be
Any so sweet Security!
Then to thy Rest, O my Soul! And singing, praise
The Mercy that prolongs thy Days.
Hallelujah!

-William Fuller