

Apparitions

Six Nocturnes on poems by Walt Whitman

for

Soprano, Violin, Bb Clarinet, and Piano

(played without a break)

music by John Muehleisen

- 1. Twilight** (soprano, violin, clarinet, and piano)
- 2. After the Dazzle of Day** (soprano, violin, clarinet, and piano)
- 3. Apparitions** (soprano and clarinet)
- 4. Look Down Fair Moon** (soprano and piano)
- 5. As If a Phantom Caress'd Me** (soprano and violin)
- 6. A Clear Midnight** (soprano, violin, clarinet, and piano)

Apparitions Text

1. Twilight

The soft voluptuous opiate shades,
The sun just gone, the eager light dispell'd—(I too will soon be gone, dispell'd)
A haze—nirwana—rest and night—oblivion.

2. After the Dazzle of Day

After the dazzle of day is gone,
Only the dark, dark night shows to my eyes the stars;
After the clangor of organ majestic, or chorus, or perfect band,
Silent, athwart my soul, moves the symphony true.

3. Apparitions

A vague mist hanging 'round half the pages:
(Sometimes how strange and clear to the soul,
That all these solid things are indeed but apparitions, concepts, non-realities.)

4. Look Down Fair Moon

Look down fair moon and bathe this scene,
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods on faces ghastly, swollen, purple,
On the dead on their backs with arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus sacred moon.

5. As If a Phantom Caress'd Me

As if a phantom caress'd me,
I thought I was not alone walking here by the shore;
But the one I thought was with me as now I walk by the shore,
 the one I loved that caress'd me,
As I lean and look through the glimmering light, that one has utterly disappear'd,
And those appear that are hateful to me and mock me.

6. A Clear Midnight

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing,
 pondering the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death, and the stars.

Apparitions Program Notes

Apparitions is a song cycle based entirely on poems by Walt Whitman. What distinguishes the poems I used in *Apparitions* from many of Whitman's poems is their brevity, especially when compared to more well-known Whitman poems that tend to embrace broad subjects such as the nature of the human condition and Whitman's personal concept of the "Kosmos," which is to say the nature of the universe and all creation and our interconnectedness to it and to one another. In contrast, the poems of *Apparitions* are more akin to miniature paintings or poetic jewels. As opposed to many of Whitman's more concrete poetic subjects, the subjects of these poems are far more ephemeral, even wraithlike and eerie. One might even claim that these poems have more in common with Japanese or Chinese poetic forms than with Whitman's own *oeuvre*.

I applied the title of the third poem, *Apparitions*, to the entire cycle because I feel it captures the mood and subjects of these poems taken collectively. As apparitions themselves are generally defined as ghostly specters or phantoms that are by their nature indistinct images, these poems, likewise, have the same qualities with their references to haze, oblivion, the dark night, a vague mist, dim moon-drenched images of the dead, phantoms (imagined or real) stalking the poet during a walk on the shore, and so forth. What's more, the cycle—subtitled *Six Nocturnes*—encompasses the period of the daily cycle between sunset and midnight, a time of encroaching darkness when images become less distinct and the imagination is given to flights of fancy and even to primordial fear, albeit of mostly imagined things. In contrast to the first five poems, the final poem, "A Clear Midnight," implies a certain level of epiphany or enlightenment in which the night is no longer portrayed as a hazy, dimly lit, and threatening environment; but as one in which the soul is seen as "fully forth emerging" gazing at a transfigured night filled with the light of stars.