
David Leisner

West Wind

6 Songs for Tenor (or Soprano) and Guitar

Mary Oliver has long been one of my favorite poets. I was grateful to have the occasion to set some of her work to music. WEST WIND is dedicated to two splendid tenors, William Ferguson and Rufus Müller, who gave its first performances. It was written in 2011.

In recent years, diatonic and chromatic harmonic approaches have merged in my work, mixing in a way that might have seemed confusing before, but feels perfectly natural to me now. These songs are written in this language.

Another departure from my personal method is the fact that most of the six songs in this cycle emerged not out of a melodic line or idea, but out of the structure created in the accompanying guitar part. The first song, for instance, starts with an interval of a minor third, followed by that minor third augmented by a half-step, and then another half-step augmentation and another. Then I laid out all the pitches in ascending order to make an exotic octatonic scale with whole steps and half steps in unusual places. The voice takes on the scalar passage, while the guitar plays with the intervallic augmentations, and then sometimes they switch. The second song uses a simple arpeggiated accompaniment for the guitar, alternating between repetitions of 4, 3, and 5 beats throughout. Each time the chord changes, it changes by only one note at a time. This creates a kind of harmony that I am often drawn to, one that is neither functional harmony nor atonal, but rather a harmony with gravitational attractions. Similar structural conceits guide the other songs, including the last one, which has a circular rhythmic development of a four-bar accompaniment figure in eighth-notes that leads to triplet-eighths, then to sixteenths, then to sextuplet-sixteenths, and returns in reverse order back to eighths. Each of these forms emerged in some way from the content of the poems.

– David Leisner

dedicated to William Ferguson and Rufus Müller

West Wind

6 songs for tenor (or soprano) and guitar

I. Come with me

MARY OLIVER

DAVID LEISNER

With jollity ♩ = 112

Tenor

Gtr.

mf

mf

If there is life af - ter the

earth - life, will you come with me? E - ven then?

Since we're bound to be some - thing, why not to - geth - er! I - mag - ine!

Two lit - tle stones, two fleas un - der the wing of a gull, fly - ing -

* Brackets show rhythmic groupings of 3 beats

** Solid lines in the guitar part are phrase markings, not left-hand slurs.

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transmission is an infringement of copyright. Infringers are liable under the law.

II. Row for your life

5

Intimately ♩. = 63

(spoken:)

You are young. So you know everything. You leap into the boat,

and begin rowing. But, listen to me. With-out fan-fare,—

with-out— em-bar-rass-ment, with-out an - y

doubt, I talk di-rect - ly to your soul.

Lis-ten to me. Lift the oars from the

rit. *p* *A tempo*

The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff in 8/8 time. It features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Dynamics such as *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *p* (piano) are indicated. Performance instructions include *rit.* (ritardando) and *A tempo*. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 3, 6, 8, and 10 marked at the beginning of their respective staves. A large, faint watermark is visible across the center of the page.

III. Dark is as dark does

Very slow

Questioning, hesitant, uncertain ♩ = 40 - 42

p Dark is as dark does.

delicately
all notes ring throughout

Some - thing with the smal-lest wings shakes it - self

from un - der a thumb of bark. The

o - cean breathes in its sil - ver jack-et.

with wonder
mf

Out - side, hang - ing on the trel - lis, in the

pp *mf*

IV. Wild needle

With wild energy ♩ = 152 - 176

f al fine

But how, but how did you,

f al fine

5 but how did you come, but

8 how did you come burn-ing, burn-ing, burn-ing, burn-ing down,— but

11 how did you come burn-ing down, burn-ing down, burn-ing down,— but

The musical score is written for a piano and voice. It consists of four systems of staves. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo/mood is 'With wild energy' with a range of 152-176 beats per minute. The score includes lyrics and performance markings such as 'f al fine' and 'f al fine'. The lyrics are: 'But how, but how did you, but how did you come, but how did you come burn-ing, burn-ing, burn-ing, burn-ing down,— but how did you come burn-ing down, burn-ing down, burn-ing down,— but'. The piano accompaniment features a driving, rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand, often with triplets and slurs.

V. Night birds

Very quiet, very still ♪ = 69 - 76

mp

V

VII

VII

III

i p m p

i p m p

pluck behind the LH fingers with thumbnail, near the first fret

pluck the indicated strings just behind the nut (indeterminate pitches)

sotto voce throughout

p

There are

as before

as before

night birds, in the gar-den be-low us sing-ing.

pp

night birds in the gar-den

VII

V

V

VII

V

pp

* all harmonics sound an octave higher than written

VI. West Wind

Calm and meditative, at first, tempo giusto throughout ♩ = 60 - 63

let notes ring throughout

It is mid - night, or al-most. Out in the world the

wind stretch-es bun-dles back in-to it-self like a hun_dred bolts of lace then

stretch-es a-gain flows it-self o - - - ver the

win - dow-sill and in-to the room it

becoming more and more intense

scat-ters the pa - pers from the desk it is in love

The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff in 2/6 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Calm and meditative, at first, tempo giusto throughout' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 60 - 63. The score consists of 17 measures. Measures 1-4 are instrumental, featuring a melody with triplets and a '2/6 CV' (crescendo) marking. Measures 5-17 contain lyrics. The melody is characterized by frequent triplets and a 'let notes ring throughout' instruction. Dynamics include piano (p), mezzo-piano (mp), mezzo-forte (mf), and mezzo-piano (mp) again. There are also markings for '2/6 CV' (crescendo) and 'V' (decrescendo). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4). A large, faint watermark '©' is visible across the page.