Michael Murray
PERCIPIENCE
Andrew Childs tenor Ann Moss soprano Chris Thompson baritone
Navona Records
FINE MUSIC

“THESE SETTINGS EXPLORE A PART OF THAT RANGE, FROM CYNICISM AND DESPAIR TO PLAYFULNESS AND IRREVERENCE ”

FIVE BLAKE SONGS

was written in 2001 for soprano Pearl Yeadon and clarinetist Ani Berberian of the Missouri Chamber Players. English writer and painter William Blake (1757-1827) possessed an extraordinary ability to convey a wide range of emotions and attitudes to his subject matter. These settings explore a part of that range, from the cynicism and despair of “The Smile” and “Holy Thursday” to the playfulness and irreverence of “The Fly” and “The Little Vagabond.”

“The Smile” describes the dichotomy between perception and reality that often occurs in human interaction. “I heard an Angel singing” explores the role of happiness in human existence, suggesting that misery is a necessary part of life. “The Fly” examines our place in the world by comparing our existence to that of a fly. The question of what we can and should do to achieve social and moral justice is posed in “Holy Thursday.” Blake asks us to consider why poverty exists “in a rich and fruitful land.” “The Little Vagabond,” although superficially written from a child’s perspective, questions the value of traditional worship in our relationship with God.

FOUR SONGS OF SOLOMON

was composed between 2007 and 2009 for tenor Andrew Childs. The cycle uses poetry from the biblical *Song of Songs*, with English translations prepared by the composer. The musical settings express the ecstasy experienced in an intimate physical relationship between two lovers and/or the intimate relationship between God and God’s people. The complex and various emotions depicted through both explicit and metaphorical descriptions of sexual intimacy in the poetry are supported by the musical setting.

“HUMAN SEXUALITY AND LOVE FEATURE SIMULTANEOUS AND CONFLICTING CHARACTERS OF BEAUTY AND VIOLENCE.”

The opening movement, “Oh, You are beautiful,” introduces several poetic and musical themes that occur throughout the cycle. The lover comments on the beauty of his beloved and uses metaphorical descriptions of her beauty to express his desire, beginning with her eyes then moving downward to her hair, teeth, lips, mouth, cheek, and neck, ending with her breasts.

Human sexuality and love feature simultaneous and conflicting characters of beauty and violence. This dichotomy is portrayed most explicitly in the second song, “Beautiful as Tirzah,” as the music shifts from the violence and terror of the opening section (“You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah; lovely as Jerusalem, frightening as visions!”) to the gentleness and beauty of the closing section (“Your hair is like a flock of goats that stream down Mount Gilead.”).

The third song, “Your love is beautiful,” begins with a continuation of the admiration and desire the lover feels for his bride (“Your love is… more pleasing than wine. Your fragrance is finer than any spices.”), and concludes with the lover’s declaration of his intent to act on his desires (“Arise, north wind, and come south wind! Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow.”).

In the fourth and final movement, “How beautiful are your sandaled feet,” the lover continues his admiration for his beloved’s body that was begun in the opening movement, but now moves further downward to include her feet, thighs, belly, and “valley.” The cycle concludes with the lover’s description of how he envisions the progression of the sexual encounter (“I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its branches… Your mouth will be like the best wine flowing smoothly over our lips.”).

“WHEN LOOKING BACK ON MEMORIES OF LIFE AND LOVE FROM A MATURE PERSPECTIVE, THOSE MEMORIES OFTEN TAKE ON A DIFFERENT COLOR.”

NEUTRAL TONES

Four Songs of Thomas Hardy for baritone and viola was composed in 2013 for Chris Thompson and Kathy Murray. The English poet and novelist Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is perhaps best known for his novels *Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Ubervilles*, and *Far from the Madding Crowd*. The poems in this cycle span Hardy's career, but they share the common theme of the passage of time. All four address the process of aging and how our perceptions of significant events in our lives change over time. When looking back on memories of life and love from a mature perspective, those memories often take on a different color.

"The Self-Unseeing" expresses the theme of changing memories as it moves from the present ("Here is the ancient floor") into the past ("Childlike, I danced in a dream") with a marked contrast between the two perspectives. The second movement, "Looking Across," reflects upon the passage of time and the loss of loved ones through death. The interplay between the voice and viola portrays the memories of interactions between dear friends. The movement ends with the narrator wondering why his own life continues while his closest friends are gone ("Tired, tired am I of this earthly air"). The playfulness at the beginning of "The Robin" becomes resignation as the change of seasons brings upon the ultimate conclusion of the passage of time: death. ("When winter frost makes earth as steel, I search and search but find no meal.") The concluding movement, "Neutral Tones," most directly expresses the themes c ommon to the cycle: aging, changing memories, winter, and death. The colorless imagery of the outer stanzas ("And the sun was white…" "a pond edged with grayish leaves") is reflected in the stark accompaniment of the viola, while the intense bitterness of the second and third stanzas ("The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing") is enhanced by the clipped, angry delivery of the singer.

“THE MUSICAL SETTINGS HELP TO CONVEY DONNE’S APPROACH TO THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONTRASTING ELEMENTS OF OUR HUMAN EXISTENCE, SUCH AS LOVE & HATE, GOOD & ILL, AND LIFE & DEATH.”

THREE DONNE SONGS for mezzo-soprano and string quartet was written in 2011 for Paula Patterson, and is based on poetry of the English metaphysical poet John Donne (1572-1631). Donne’s love poetry makes use of extreme contrasts to portray the complexities of human relationships. His cynical and ironic attitude toward human love offers a refreshing alternative to the typically idealized treatment so often encountered in writing on the subject. The musical settings help to convey Donne’s approach to the symbiotic relationships between contrasting elements of our human existence, such as love & hate, good & ill, and life & death. Although written from a 17th-century male perspective, the poetry works just as well from the point of view of a modern female.

“The Message” expresses the lover’s conflicted emotions over an attraction to a false heart. The courtship that began so eagerly and promisingly has soured to the point of bitterness. As the lover realizes the true nature of his beloved, both the poetry and music take an ugly turn. The second song, “Community,” is a scathing commentary on the character of women in general. Although this movement may be interpreted as being misogynistic, I prefer in this day and age to think of it as being misanthropic. In our modern view, the poet could just as easily be referring to the poor character of all of humankind. The cycle concludes with “The Prohibition,” a song in which the lover warns any prospective mate about the likely consequences of entering into a relationship. The experience of false love has left the lover cautious and hesitant. While continuing to hope for a good outcome, the lover appears to accept that the bliss of love must always be accompanied by the frailties inherent in the human character.

MICHAEL MURRAY

The music of composer Michael Murray (b. 1964) has been described as "well crafted," "expertly and adroitly handled," and consisting of "pleasing washes of sounds and tone colors." Reviewers have praised his writing for voice as "excellent," "lovely," and "a gift to singers." In addition to works for the concert hall, he has written music for film, theater productions, dance, and visual arts installations. He currently lives in Springfield, Missouri, where he teaches composition and music theory at Missouri State University.

Murray has won awards and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ohio Federation of Music Clubs. His music has been performed and recorded across the United States and Europe, featured in venues in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, the Czech Republic, and over 20 different states and the District of Columbia. Incidental music and sound design Murray composed for Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice was featured in the International Prague Quadrennial Scenofest exhibition of theater design. Among his commissions are those from the Missouri Chamber Players and the music fraternities of Missouri State University. He earned his BM in composition from the Catholic University of America and his MM and DMA in composition from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. Prior to coming to MSU, he taught at Loyola University in New Orleans and Angelo State University (Texas). His music is published by Ars Nova Press.

michaelmurraymusic.com

ANN MOSS

An ardent and acclaimed champion of contemporary vocal music, soprano Ann Moss's silvery, flexible voice has been singled out for "beautifully pure floated high notes" (Opera News) and "powerful expression" (SF Classical Voice). In addition to working closely with well-known composers such as Jake Heggie, John Harbison, Aaron Jay Kernis and Wayne Peterson, Ann seeks out and performs music by emerging voices at forums and festivals across the USA. She has performed new works with Earplay, Eco Ensemble, New Music Works, San Francisco Lyric Opera, the Ives, Alexander, and Hausmann String Quartets, Sanford Dole Ensemble, Composers in Red Sneakers, at FENAM, Fresno New Music, PARMA, Switchboard, Other Minds and SF Song Festivals. As co-founder and Artistic Director of new-music repertory group CMASH, she has been responsible for the creation and premiere of over fifty art songs, opera roles and vocal chamber works. She has lectured about vocal composition at MIT, UC Davis, Longy School of Music, NYU Tisch School For The Arts, UT Pan America, Sacramento State University, and CSU Los Angeles, and served on the 2008 & 2011 faculty at CSU Summer Arts' Composer/Performer Collaboration Workshop. Her debut album CURRENTS (Angels Share Records, 2013), recorded and produced by Grammy Award-winner Leslie Ann Jones at Skywalker Sound, features some of the extraordinary new and recent American vocal/chamber music Ann has championed over the past decade.

annmosssoprano.com

ANDREW CHILDS

Tenor Andrew Childs serves currently as Associate Dean, Humanities Chair, and Professor of Music at St. Mary's College. Previously, he taught at Missouri State University, the Yale University School of Drama, the Thames Valley Music School at Connecticut College, and served as Managing Coordinator of the Department of Voice and Opera at the Yale School of Music. He earned his Bachelor of Music Degree from the University of California, Irvine, and his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Washington.

Guest appearances include those with Seattle Symphony, the American Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Chorale, and the Yale Camerata. Dr. Childs has sung over one hundred performances of nearly thirty operatic roles for, among others, Seattle Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Harrisburg Opera, and the Center for Contemporary Opera. He made his Lincoln Center debut in the workshop performances of Glimmerglass Opera's commissioned premiere trilogy "Central Park" in 1999. His numerous premieres include works by Pulitzer Prize winner Yehudi Wyner. Centaur records released his premiere recording of Timothy Melbinger's "Some things are Dark" in 2003, and distributed his solo disc of Charles Ives songs in 2006, about which the American Record Guide stated, "…there is no better recording by a tenor."

CHRIS THOMPSON

Baritone Chris Thompson is an international artist noted for compelling performances on stage and in the concert hall. He has performed leading lyric baritone roles across the United States and England ranging from Figaro in Il Barbiere di Siviglia to the title role in Elijah to Carl Magnus in A Little Night Music.

A strong advocate of new music, Chris made his Carnegie Hall debut in January 2012 singing Posh, a song cycle by composer Mohammed Fairouz, released on Naxos (Native Informant) where he was described as a "remarkable baritone" (Opera News) who delivers a "supremely nuanced performance" (Gramophone). Chris made his Off-Broadway debut in Fermat's Last Tango (Original Cast Recordings) and is a featured soloist on Impetuosities (Albany Records), a CD of music by New York composer Joshua Rosenblum. Chris is a devoted teacher with successful singers winning competitions, singing at major summer programs, and landing leading roles as young professionals. A graduate of the University of Kansas, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (London), Loyola University (New Orleans), and Kansas State University, Chris presently serves as Coordinator of Vocal Studies at Missouri State University.

christhompsonbaritone.com

FIVE BLAKE SONGS

I. The Smile

There is a Smile of Love,
And there is a Smile of Deceit,
And there is a Smile of Smiles
In which these two Smiles meet.

And there is a Frown of Hate,
And there is a Frown of disdain,
And there is a Frown of Frowns
Which you strive to forget in vain;

For it sticks in the Heart's deep Core,
And it sticks in the deep Backbone,
And no Smile that ever was smiled,
But only one Smile alone,

That betwixt the Cradle & Grave,
It only once Smiled can be,
But when it once is Smiled;
There's an end to all Misery

II. I heard an Angel singing

I heard an Angel singing
When the day was springing:
"Mercy, Pity, Peace
Is the world's release."

Thus he sung all day
Over the new mown hay,
Till the sun went down
And haycocks looked brown.

I heard a Devil curse
Over the heath & the furze:
"Mercy could be no more
If there was nobody poor,

And pity no more could be
If all were as happy as we."
At his curse the sun went down,
And the heavens gave a frown.

Down poured the heavy rain
Over the new reaped grain,
And Miseries' increase
Is Mercy, Pity, Peace.

III. The Fly

Little Fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink & sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength & breath,
And the want

Of thought is death,

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

IV. Holy Thursday
Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor;
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak & bare.
And their ways are filled with thorns.
It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,
And where'er the rain does fall,
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

V. The Little Vagabond
Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,
But the Alehouse is healthy & pleasant & warm;
Besides, I can tell where I am used well;
Such usage in heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,
We'd sing and we'd pray all the livelong day
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing,
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring,
And modest dame Lurch, who is always at Church,
Would not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch.

And God, like a father rejoicing to see
His children as pleasant and happy as he,
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the barrel
But kiss him & give him both drink and apparel.

texts by William Blake (1757-1827)

FOUR SONGS OF SOLOMON

I. Oh, You are beautiful (4:1-7)
Oh, you are beautiful, my love.
  Oh, you are beautiful
Your eyes are doves behind your veil
Your hair is like a flock of goats
  that stream down Mount Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of sheep
  rising from the washing in twos,
  each with its twin.

Like a scarlet thread, your lips,
  and your mouth is lovely.
Like a gleam of pomegranate,
  your cheek behind your veil.

Your neck is like David's tower built in rows
with a thousand shields upon it,
all the weapons of warriors.

Your breasts are like two fawns,
the twins of a gazelle
browsing among the lilies.

Until the day breathes and the shadows disappear
I will go to the mountain of myrrh
and the hill of incense.

All of you is beautiful, my love.
There is no blemish in you.

II. Beautiful as Tirzah (6:4-7)

You are beautiful, my love, as Tirzah,
lovely as Jerusalem, frightening as visions!

Turn your eyes away from me,
for they assault me.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
that stream down Gilead.

Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
rising from the washing in twos,
each with its twin.

Like a gleam of pomegranate
your cheek behind your veil.

III. Your love is beautiful (4:10-12)

Your love is beautiful, my sister, my bride!
more pleasing than wine.

Your fragrance is finer than any spices.
Your lips drip honey, my bride.
Honey and milk are on your tongue.

The fragrance of your garments
is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

You are a garden enclosed, my sister, my bride.
A garden enclosed, a fountain sealed.

Arise, north wind, and come south wind!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow.

Interlude (5:1)

I come to my garden, my sister, my bride!
I gather my myrrh with my spices.
I eat my honeycomb with my honey.
I drink my wine with my milk.

IV. How beautiful are your sandaled feet (7:1-3, 6-9)

How beautiful are your sandaled feet
O noble daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
the work of an artist.
Your valley is a round bowl
brimming full of mixed wine.
Your belly is a mound of wheat
surrounded by lilies.
Your breasts are like two fawns
the twins of a gazelle.

How beautiful and how pleasing you are
  O love, with your delights.

Your stature is like a palm tree
  and your breasts are like clusters of grapes.
I will climb the palm tree
  and take hold of its branches.
Your breasts will be like clusters of grapes
  and the fragrance of your breath like apples.
Your mouth will be like the best wine
  flowing smoothly over our lips.

texts from the Song of Songs
translations by Michael Murray

NEUTRAL TONES

I. The Self-Unseeing

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

II. Looking Across

It is dark in the sky,
And silence is where
Our laughs rang high;
And recall do I
That One is out there.

The dawn is not nigh,
And the trees are bare,
And the waterways sigh
That a year has drawn by,
And Two are out there.

The wind drops to die
Like the phantom of Care
Too frail for a cry,
And heart brings to eye
That Three are out there.

This Life runs dry
That once ran rare
And rosy in dye,
And fleet the days fly,
And Four are out there.

Tired, tired am I
Of this earthly air,
And my wraith asks: Why,
Since these calm lie,
Are not Five out there?

III. The Robin

When up aloft
I fly and fly,
I see in pools
The shining sky,
And a happy bird
Am I, am I!

When I descend
Towards their brink
I stand, and look,
And stoop, and drink,
And bathe my wings,
And chink and prink.

When winter frost
Makes earth as steel
I search and search
But find no meal,
And most unhappy
Then I feel.

But when it lasts,
And snows still fall,
I get to feel
No grief at all,
For I turn to a cold stiff
Feathery ball!

IV. Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
        - They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
        On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
        Like an ominous bird a-wing…

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
        And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

texts by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

THREE DONNE SONGS

I. The Message

SEND home my long stray'd eyes to me,
Which, O ! too long have dwelt on thee ;
Yet since there they have learn'd such ill,
Such forced fashions,
And false passions,
That they be
Made by thee
Fit for no good sight, keep them still.

Send home my harmless heart again,
Which no unworthy thought could stain ;
Which if it be taught by thine
To make jestings
Of protestings,
And break both
Word and oath,
Keep it, for then 'tis none of mine.

Yet send me back my heart and eyes,
That I may know, and see thy lies,
And may laugh and joy, when thou
Art in anguish
And dost languish
For some one
That will none,
Or prove as false as thou art now.

II. Community

GOOD we must love, and must hate ill,
For ill is ill, and good good still ;
But there are things indifferent,
Which wee may neither hate, nor love,
But one, and then another prove,
As we shall find our fancy bent.

If then at first wise Nature had
Made women either good or bad,
Then some wee might hate, and some choose;
But since she did them so create,
That we may neither love, nor hate,
Only this rests, all all may use.

If they were good it would be seen ;
Good is as visible as green,
And to all eyes itself betrays.
If they were bad, they could not last ;
Bad doth itself, and others waste ;

So they deserve nor blame, nor praise.
But they are ours as fruits are ours ;
He that but tastes, he that devours,
And he that leaves all, doth as well ;
Changed loves are but changed sorts of meat ;
And when he hath the kernel eat,
Who doth not fling away the shell?

III. The Prohibition

TAKE heed of loving me ;
At least remember, I forbade it thee ;
Not that I shall repair my unthrifty waste
Of breath and blood, upon thy sighs and tears,
By being to thee then what to me thou wast ;
But so great joy our life at once outwears.
Then, lest thy love by my death frustrate be,
If thou love me, take heed of loving me.

Take heed of hating me,
Or too much triumph in the victory ;
Not that I shall be mine own officer,
And hate with hate again retaliate ;
But thou wilt lose the style of conqueror,
If I, thy conquest, perish by thy hate.
Then, lest my being nothing lessen thee,
If thou hate me, take heed of hating me.

Yet love and hate me too ;
So these extremes shall ne'er their office do ;
Love me, that I may die the gentler way ;
Hate me, because thy love's too great for me ;
Or let these two, themselves, not me, decay ;
So shall I live thy stage, not triumph be.
Lest thou thy love and hate, and me undo,
To let me live, Oh love and hate me too.

texts by John Donne (1572-1631)

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FIVE BLAKE SONGS

Ann Moss, soprano; John Ferraro, clarinet

1	I. The Smile	1:30
2	II. I Heard An Angel Singing	2:07
3	III. The Fly	1:39
4	IV. Holy Thursday	3:24
5	V. The Little Vagabond	1:34

FOUR SONGS OF SOLOMON

Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra | Petr Vronský, conductor;
Andrew Childs, tenor soloist

6	I. Oh, You Are Beautiful (4:1-7)	4:09
7	II. Beautiful As Tirzah (6:4-7)	2:37
8	III. Your Love Is Beautiful (4:10-12)	3:08
9	IV. How Beautiful Are Your Sandaled Feet (7:1-3,6-9)	4:12

NEUTRAL TONES

Chris Thompson, baritone; Peter Sulski, viola

10	I. The Self-Unseeing	1:49
11	II. Looking Across	3:15
12	III. The Robin	2:03
13	IV. Neutral Tones	3:51

THREE DONNE SONGS

Ann Moss, mezzo-soprano; Zoia Bologovsky,violin I; Amy Ripka, violin II;
Justin Ouellet, viola; Dorothy Braker, cello

14	I. The Message	3:28
15	II. Community	2:52
16	III. The Prohibition	6:17