



Marga Richter (b. 1926)

*Dew-drops on a Lotus Leaf* & other songs

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# Marga Richter

## *Dew-drops on a Lotus Leaf* and other songs

**William George** *tenor*  
**Andrea Lodge** *piano*

# Marga Richter



Atlanta and Milwaukee Symphonies and the Minnesota Orchestra and recorded by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, among others. Soloists who have presented her music include Jessye Norman, Menahem Pressler, William Masselos, Natalie Hinderas and Daniel Heifetz.

A comprehensive biography, *Marga Richter*, by Sharon Mirchandani (University of Illinois Press) was published in 2012. Richter's website, [margarichter.com](http://margarichter.com), includes a complete list of works, discography, reviews, sound clips, live interviews, publishers and contact information.

This CD is the first of three projected volumes of Richter's music for solo voice and piano. In addition to *Dew-Drops on a Lotus Leaf* (a 45-minute, 39-song cycle), it includes settings of excerpts from a letter Major Sullivan Ballou wrote to his wife a week before he was killed in the American Civil War, two Shakespeare Sonnets, two ancient Chinese poems and one by contemporary poet, Phyllis Latimer Roberts (1923-2013).

A Mid-Westerner (WI, MN), Marga Richter earned her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in composition from The Juilliard School. She has written over 160 works encompassing virtually every genre. Her orchestral music has been played by over fifty orchestras, including the

## Dew-drops on a Lotus Leaf & other songs

### 1. Sarah do not mourn me dead (1995)

*Summer*

### Two Chinese Songs (1952)

2. The Hermit
3. Fishing Picture

### 4. Wild Moon (2009)

### Two Shakespeare Sonnets (2007)

5. Sonnet 128
6. Sonnet 71

### Dew-drops on a Lotus Leaf (2002)

*Prologue*

7. Thoughts sweet and gentle
8. How still it is
9. Ever in my mind
10. My path is quiet
11. Beside my door the flowers bloom
12. Little ball of woolen thread
13. Could someone have taken my robe away?
14. The soft white clouds of heaven
15. Like a castle
16. A thing unknown

*Spring #1*

17. In the sprightly light of spring
18. How delightful it is
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22. What a pity!
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*Autumn*

29. Kugami's mountain way
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32. Oh autumn rain
33. Full on the new-fallen mountain leaves
34. Aloft o'er the distant hill
35. Before my gate

*Winter*

36. Snow heaps these hills
37. O tree, so lone and sad
38. Beloved waterfall

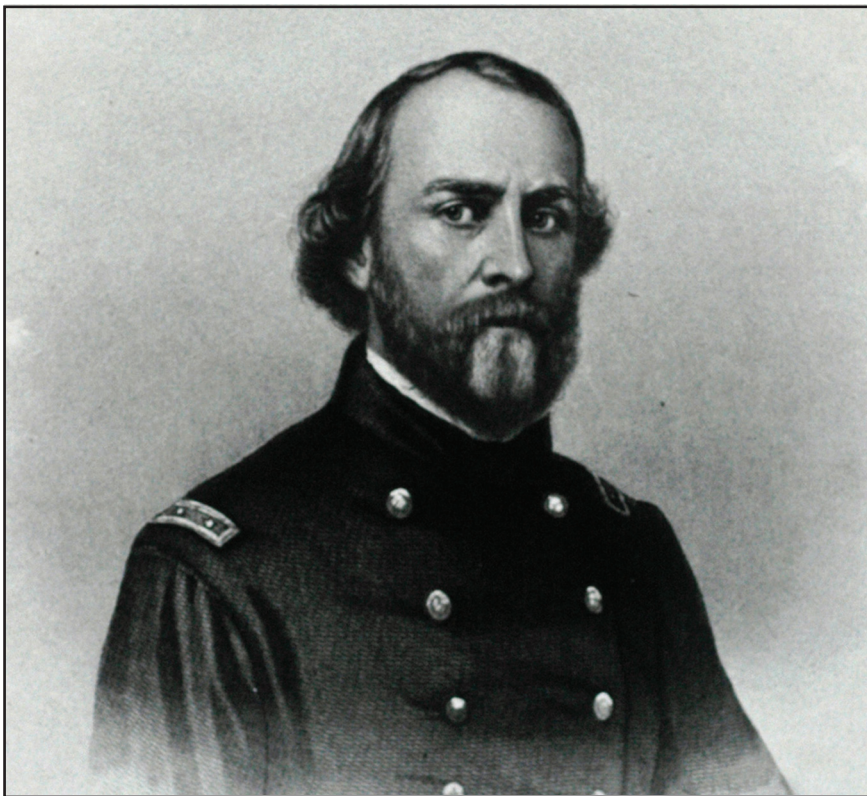
*Spring #2*

39. The spring's pure flowers
40. The music of the spring birds' songs
41. In a mountain village
42. Even when mortal man is no more

*Epilogue*

43. Mortal life is as a drop of dew
44. When I depart hither
45. The island of Sado





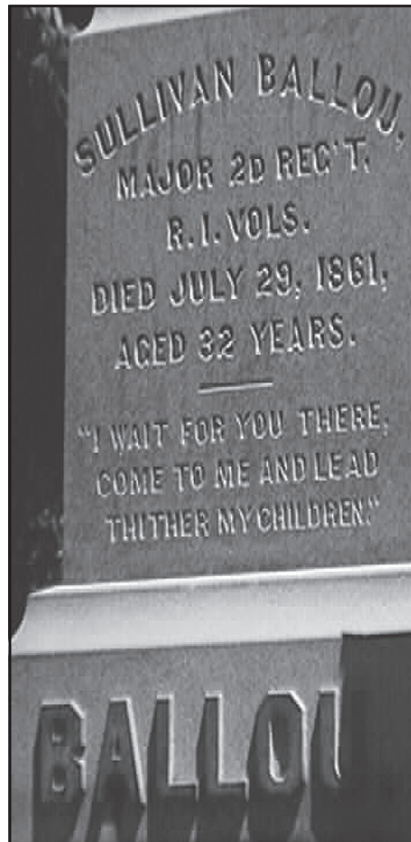
Major Sullivan Ballou

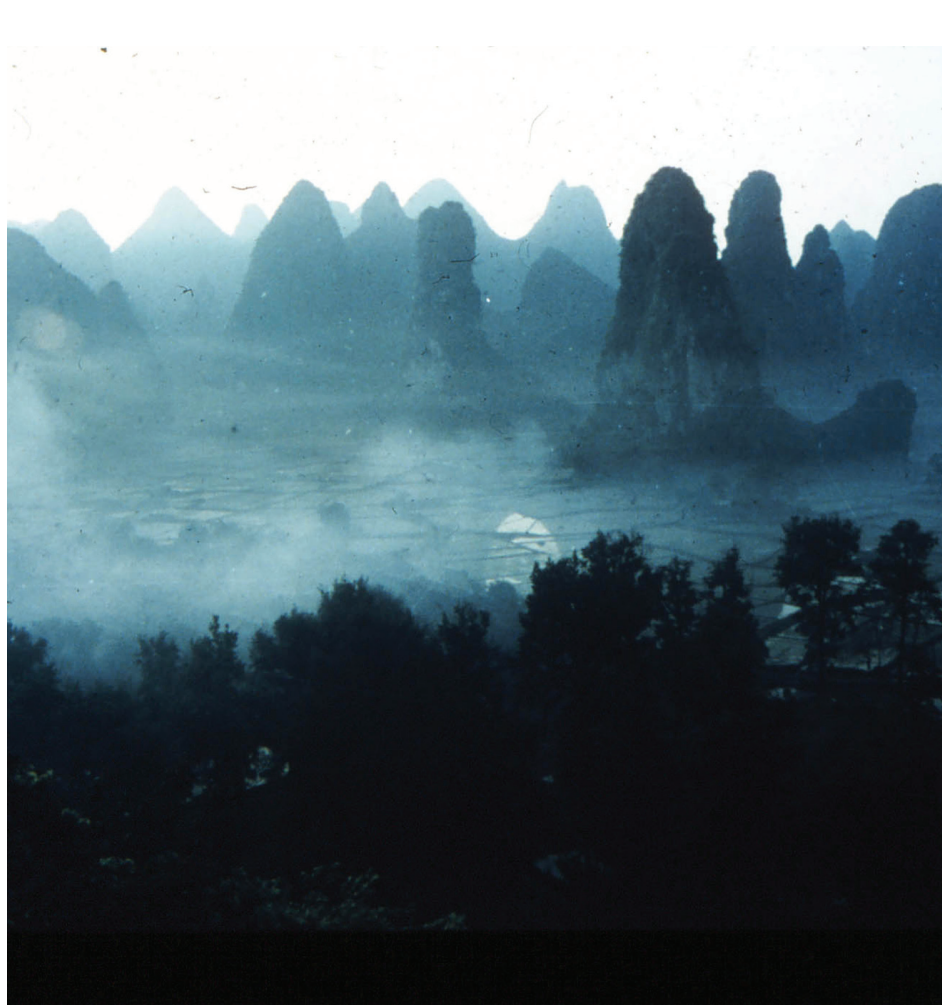
## SARAH DO NOT MOURN ME DEAD

The text of *Sarah do not mourn me dead* is from a letter written by Major Sullivan Ballou to his wife, Sarah, in Rhode Island, during the American Civil War. One week after he wrote it he was killed in the first battle of Bull Run, in July 1861.

"...I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me...perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness..."

But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights...*always, always*, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah do not mourn me dead: think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again..."





## TWO CHINESE SONGS

### **The Hermit** (Li Hai-ku)

A cold rain blurs the edges of the river.  
Night enters Wu.  
In the level brightness of dawn  
I saw my friend start alone  
for the Ch'u mountain.  
He gave me this message  
for his friends and relations at Lo Yang.  
My heart is a piece of ice in a jade cup.

### **Fishing Picture** (Ta-Chung-Kuang)

The fishermen draw their nets  
from the great pool of the T'an River.  
They have hired a boat  
and come here to fish  
by the reflected light of the sunken sun.

*Translated by Amy Lowell*



## WILD MOON



Phyllis Latimer Roberts (1923-2013) was a composer, painter, poet, choral conductor and performer (piano, guitar), whose exuberant espousal of using her gifts to share the joy of artistic endeavors was an inspiration to all those whose lives she touched. Marga and Phyllis became life-long friends from the moment they met in New York City in 1945. Richter has set seven of her poems to music, and used one of her instrumental themes as half of the theme of her four-hand piano piece, *Variations on a Theme by Latimer*. Her poem *Wild Moon* was written in 1948. The musical setting was commissioned in 2009 by New Music New York for their concert commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing.

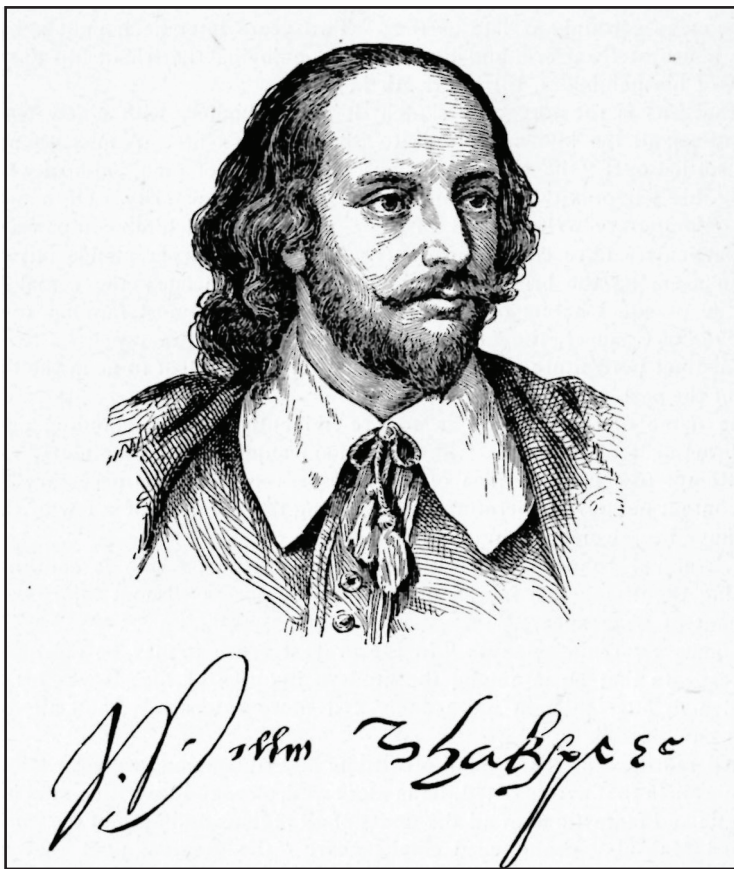
wild night -  
black black night -  
tremulous in the screaming wind

white sky in the east  
whiter, whiter as the earth whirls eastward  
toward the unrisen moon -  
dance, mute body -  
dance in the screaming wind and the  
whitening sky  
fast faster, white whiter  
leap, wild body toward the moon -  
must you cling to the earth,  
must you fawn at its feet?  
scream, mute body in the black black night  
and leap in the whiteness  
and soar with the wind  
into space -

now it comes, comes the moon  
and unbearable, intense  
comes the wild moon  
in the wind-swept night  
and I fly in its whiteness  
unbound from the earth  
screaming space all around me  
furiously flying faster faster  
whiter and whiter grows the wild wild  
moon  
till at last is no night  
and no screaming wind  
no soaring crazily in a whirling space,  
only I and the moon -  
did I say only I and the moon -

there's no I - -

only moon



## TWO SONNETS

### Sonnet CXXVIII

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,  
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds  
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st  
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,  
Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap  
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,  
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,  
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand:  
To be so tickled, they would change their state  
And situation with those dancing chips,  
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,  
Making dead wood more bless'd than living lips:  
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,  
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

### Sonnet LXXI

No longer mourn for me when I am dead  
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
Give warning to the world that I am fled  
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:  
Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,  
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
If thinking on me then should make you woe.  
O if, I say, you look upon this verse,  
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,  
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,  
But let your love even with my life decay;  
Lest the wise world should look into your moan  
And mock you with me after I am gone.



## DEW-DROPS ON A LOTUS LEAF

RYOKAN: Zen-Monk-Poet of Japan (1758-1831)

A master calligrapher, a writer of unusual and highly personal poetry, an eccentric holed up in a tiny hut on a mountainside, a lanky, beaknosed cleric begging for food, foraging for firewood or edible greens or playing games with the village children with whom he romped and played in a remarkably unsanctimonious manner, **Ryokan** chose to live alone, frugally, devoting his time to meditation and literary pursuits. Some of the games he played with the children are described in his poetry. Accounts of him left by his contemporaries make it clear that he was a man of great warmth and compassion. What he tried hardest to capture in his work was the spirit of simplicity and openness. He went very much his own way, in his work and in his life. Today he is recognized as one of the greatest figures of late Edo-period literature.

*Burton Watson (excerpted by Marga Richter)*



**Ryokan compiled no collection of his poems. He gave them randomly to friends and acquaintances. About 1400 in Japanese and 450 in Chinese have been recovered. Of those in Japanese, Jacob Fischer selected and translated into English about 116 of those for inclusion in his brief biography of Ryokan, *Dew-drops on a lotus-leaf*, published in 1954. I chose 39 of these and grouped them into seven sections: Prologue, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring and Epilogue. Although the poetry retains its Japanese provenance the musical language is my own.**

*~ Marga Richter*

### Prologue

#### 1. *Thoughts sweet and gentle*

Oft at morning and at night  
My eyes rest on the far dim island of Sado,  
And thoughts, sweet and gentle,  
Of my fond departed mother  
Fly hither to me.

#### 2. *How still it is*

How still it is here in my lonely hut!  
Before me and behind,  
Blue-misted mountains, cloaked with forest,  
dark and wild,  
Folding me in their somber might.  
Above my head  
Fair clouds cover me with their softness.  
Should human footsteps pass this way,  
My being would be a thing unknown,  
Encircled in unfathomable solitude.

#### 3. *Ever in my mind*

Ever in my mind, I see the suffering crowds,  
So many souls within this vain world's huge iron clasp.  
Amid the sad uproar, my heart is stunned and sobered,  
And my sleeves are moist with weeping.  
Oh, that my black priests robe were full and strong,  
That I might wrap and gather to my heart  
The sad slow figures of this struggling world.

#### 4. *My path is quiet*

For me there is no rise and fall of fortune;  
I dance in the life of freedom.  
I have rice in my bag

And fuel on my hearth.

Who can know aught of mystery and truth?  
What are fame and wealth? They are as dust.  
My path is quiet;  
I lean and rest in sweet pensiveness,  
Lulled by the voices of the wind and rain  
As they fall softly and in gentle mood,  
Upon the dark brooding night.

#### 5. *Beside my door the flowers bloom*

With gentleness and grace  
Moves the moon about my humble hut,  
Folding me in her loveliness;  
Beside my door the flowers bloom,  
And breathe soft beauty,  
Touching with light hands my inmost being,  
Until I feel that life, indeed, is tender  
And full to brimming with content.

#### 6. *Little ball of woolen thread*

Little ball of woolen thread  
Sleeping in my sleeve,  
You are the golden treasure  
Which to my children and me  
Brings joy and health and pleasure!  
Am I not a master  
To play with you! If ever  
Someone asks me so to do,  
Then with tenderness I take you  
And down and up and down and up,  
One and two and three and four  
And five and six and seven.

7. *Could someone have taken my robe away?*  
Could someone have taken my robe away?  
Oh, no! I must have left it with the town clerk!

8. *The soft white clouds of heaven*  
Hither have I gone in search of food  
And have returned with begging bowl filled full  
And heart a-thrill with pride.  
Ah! Whither now?  
'Tis to my home I turn - a silent space far on,  
Where rest and dream in high sweet bliss,  
The soft white clouds of heaven.

9. *Like a castle*  
Like a castle in beauteous woods  
There on the hill stands my cottage.  
A castle you are, little shaky hut,  
And I am the king.

10. *A thing unknown*  
'Tis said,  
Tomorrow is the first of spring.  
Ah, stately queen of seasons! How sweet  
To figure thy oncoming in all thy gracious  
loveliness!  
As through the night, I muse upon the thought,  
A thing unknown disturbs and stirs my being,  
And I cannot sleep.

### Spring #1

1. *In the sprightly light of spring*  
In the sprightly light of spring  
The birds in mirth pour out their souls

In one vast song of ecstasy.  
I pause and listen-deeply entranced and soothed-  
And all my frets and sorrows lose their pain,  
And fade away.

2. *How delightful it is*  
How delightful it is  
To play ball with the children  
The whole spring day  
When the mist is gone!

3. *When the mist cleared away*  
If my father were in that morning mist,  
How happy I would be!  
I would see him then when the mist  
cleared away.

4. *Children, let us off to the hillside now*  
Children, let us off to the hillside now,  
To see the cherry blossoms at their play.  
Delay not our going, for perhaps by the morrow  
Their little forms will have scampered away.

5. *What are those fluttering shadows*  
What are those fluttering shadows  
That peep so shyly through the pale moon's glow  
In this mountain village?  
Are they the tiny blooms - demure and coy,  
Of the plum tree?

6. *What a pity!*  
What a pity!  
The blossoms of the plum tree  
Are at their best.

But the moon,  
Which likes to whisper to them  
Is gone on her journey!

7. *Behold a skylark*  
Behold a skylark, imprisoned in its cage,  
Bursting with exquisite song  
Before the radiant spring!  
Oh, frail happy creature,  
Why must thou be so bound-  
Thou who shouldst be filling the wide free heavens  
With thy praise?

### Summer

1. *The spring has passed*  
How deep and motionless is the solitude of  
my hut!  
The spring has passed with quiet steps;  
And this long while  
No living hand has moved the bar of my gate.  
Only the tall-plumed bamboos shake the silence  
As they stretch their arms, with the gathering  
weeds, about my door.

Within,-my begging bag hangs still  
upon the wall;  
For long whole weeks it has not ventured forth  
To seek the kindly touch of human hands.  
The incense burner is at rest -  
no wavering smoke comes forth  
To break the calm.

Out in the world beyond, in restless mood  
Men sing and drink and strive and play,  
Seeking an earthly content.  
They know not the light and song of my heart.  
Simple, careless, free, I listen in rapt delight  
To the cuckoo's distant cry  
Breaking upon the inner hush of the  
morning's dawn.

2. *The world this day*  
The world this day is still and languid.  
Across the breathless air,  
and through the noon-day glow,  
A mountain cuckoo's voice, lone and sweet,  
like a fairy flute,  
Touches my ears with magic.

Last night  
I lingered in the bamboo grove  
And enjoyed the music  
Of crickets and grasshoppers,  
Admiring the friendly moon.

3. *The shy blossoms of the silk tree*  
The shy blossoms of the silk tree once so  
blithe and gay,  
Teased by the little breezes, have slipped away,  
And I see them no more;  
The cuckoo too is gone; his wandering voice  
No longer shakes the vale.  
Is it, that in sweet company together  
They have taken flight to some far enchanted  
haunt?



#### 4. *Out on the fields*

Out on the fields so fair and wide  
Maidens in long labour are bent  
As they lay the young rice plants in the watery earth.  
Their hands are heavy and their singing lips are dull;  
Care sits drearily upon their breasts,  
For there is no end to their toil.  
Oh, burdened sisters, why is your song so plaintive  
and weary?  
As I listen, each hour brings pity and sorrow to my heart.

#### 5. *My heart is filled with moaning*

Week passes week and still,  
The unfeeling sky withholds its rain.  
The mountain fields lie limp and pale,  
Held in the sun's hot glare, in an agony of thirst.  
No cool touch is near.  
Only the troubled peasant moves  
In that haggard scene.  
Backward and forward he passes  
Bearing water to the gasping lips  
Of the young rice plants.

### Autumn

#### 1. *Kugami's mountain way*

With gentle pace I tread Kugami's mountain way.  
The gray soft air of twilight hangs  
In gathering folds about me.  
Deer startle the silence as they call  
To one another from the hill.  
And down below in hollowed woods  
Along the path the maple leaves in timid mood

Stir and fall gently, as if afraid  
To break the shadowy spell of night.  
I halt not in my going but as I move,  
The mountain folds me in its darkening gloom  
And I am filled with sadness.

#### 2. *Today the world is bleak and still*

Today the world is bleak and chill.  
The north wind whines, and moans, and sighs  
And out from the shivering ashen grass  
The voices of innumerable grasshoppers,  
murmuring and low,  
Cry into my ear - now here, now there.  
-- And I know  
That autumn, that grim forerunner of the snow,  
Is here at last.

#### 3. *The autumn clouds*

The autumn clouds drop unceasing showers  
Upon the still, gray, mountain fields,  
And through the veil of mist I seem to see  
A peasant, aged and bent  
Reaping with gentle desire  
The tired earth's last stalks of rice.

#### 4. *Oh autumn rain*

Oh autumn rain - relentless and unfeeling,  
Wilt thou not stay thy fury?  
Grant me but a moment's space  
That I may hither to draw sweet water from the well  
And gather to my hut fresh herbs  
And friendly fuel for my fire.

#### 5. *Full on the new-fallen mountain leaves*

Full on the new-fallen mountain leaves  
The autumn sunshine gleamed, one day  
Brushing their coloured cheeks with an  
enchanted light  
That glittered and reddened in an ever  
deepening hue  
Till the very path on which I trod  
Seemed to rise in one great burst of flame.

#### 6. *Aloft o'er the distant hill*

Aloft o'er the distant hill, the fleeing birds  
Flash and vanish, and are no more.  
All is utterly still; no sound is there  
Save the secret stir of quiet leaves  
In my garden.  
The autumn's sober wind sighs weirdly,  
And all things that be,  
Seem plunged into a solitude  
That wraps and enthralls my dwelling  
And alights also on me.

#### 7. *Before my gate*

Before my gate, one chill autumn night,  
The crickets raised their voices,  
in one continuous din;  
I leaned my ear, and seemed to hear  
Swift words of warning fall upon the air.  
"Make haste" I thought they cried,  
"Draw close the cloak  
And clothe thyself in warm attire,  
For the harsh wind roars and whistles and groans  
And winter will soon march by."

### Winter

#### 1. *Snow heaps these hills*

Snow heaps these hills,  
and no man comes this way;  
Chill winds, this night, bemoan the winter's march  
And I, alone in these bare paths and this  
forgotten hut,  
Have none with whom to share the mortal dreads  
That tear my soul, as I, forlorn and gray,  
Remain in utter solitude.

#### 2. *O tree, so lone and sad*

Thou standest there,  
O tree, so lone and sad,  
Among the fields. Yet none there is  
To solace thee as thou dost bear  
The stings of life, so harsh and fierce.  
I long to linger by thy side, to bring thee gentle peace.  
A soft caress, up-born from love and tenderness.

#### 3. *Beloved waterfall*

What happened to your mighty sound,  
Beloved waterfall?  
Is it possible  
That ice and snow  
Have forced you to be silent?

### Spring #2

#### 1. *The spring's pure flowers*

Days and months pass over,  
Trailing change and death,  
Till to my pondering heart the world  
Seems empty drift and shadow-

When lo - my eyes uplifting, I behold  
The spring's pure flowers - sweet, unfailing -  
Once again-  
Touching the earth with gentle beauty,  
As they have ever done in years gone by.

2. *The music of the spring birds' song*  
Down through the heart of the cliff-broken forest,  
A woodman follows his uneven trail,  
Bent and weary with his burden of fuel.  
He sits for a space beneath an old and tangled pine.  
And lo - across the shadowy silence of the  
    woodland glade  
There cries into his ear,  
    like some enchanted melody,  
The music of the spring birds' songs.

3. *In a mountain village*  
In a mountain village, I heard  
A thousand birds make gleeful riot  
With their many songs.  
'Twas but a short while past,  
In spring's warm noon-tide hour;  
Now in my evening solitude,  
'Tis the strange sweet voices of the frogs  
That swell my spirit.

4. *Even when mortal man is no more*  
Even when mortal man is no more  
And the lone mountain forest - deep and still  
Is shorn of human company;  
Spring will still make her pilgrimage there  
And fill the silent vales with flowers.

### Epilogue

1. *Mortal life is as a drop of dew*  
Mortal life is as a drop of dew,  
Empty and fleeting.  
My years have gone,  
And now, quivering and frail,  
I must fade away.

2. *When I depart hither*  
When I depart hither,  
I leave no memorial behind me.  
But when spring passes,  
The tender flowers will put forth their blooms.  
In summer's gathering glow,  
The cuckoos will utter their echoing call.  
With autumn's pipe of wind,  
The maple leaves will don their crimson gowns.  
These will speak of me...  
The budding flowers, the singing cuckoos,  
The flaming maples,  
These...  
Reflect my soul.

3. *The island of Sado*  
There is naught that remains unchanged forever,  
But the sea,  
And the island of Sado  
Dim and solemn in the trembling mist.

### William George, tenor

William George has performed with musical organizations around the world, including The Metropolitan, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City Operas, and festivals and concerts in Hong Kong, Finland, England, Sweden, Germany, the Philippines, the U.K., and Carnegie Hall.

An active recitalist and new-music performer, Will is co-founder and Artistic Director for Vancouver's Erato Ensemble. His recordings include *Geometrics* by L.Warde, Brent Michael David's *Viola Jokes* with violist Melia Watras, and *Eastern Odyssey* with guitarist Michael Strutt.

Also a composer, William's songs and vocal chamber works have been performed in Canada, the United States and Europe. He was recently honored with induction into the Canadian Music Centre as Associate Composer. Will also serves as lead singer-songwriter for the Vancouver roots-rock band Horse Opera.



### Andrea Lodge, piano

Newfoundland native Andrea Lodge has been called a "Must See" (The Telegram, St. John's, Canada). A specialist in contemporary piano music, she was awarded top prizes at the Eckhardt-Gramatté Competition for the Performance of New Music in 2010, and has been heard on CBC radio on numerous occasions.

Andrea lives in NYC where she performs regularly as soloist, with the Sorce/Lodge Duo and with Iktus+ new music ensemble. She is Co-Artistic Director of the Chamber Music@Southampton concert series and directs the Stony Brook University Community Chamber Music program. Andrea has been a featured artist at festivals such as the Qubit Noise Non-Ference, NYC Electroacoustic Music Festival, UNPLAY Festival, and recently joined the faculty of the Nief-Norf Summer New Music Festival.

