NOTES

All of the songs in this volume are connected, in one way or another, to renowned tenor and new music champion, Paul Sperry. Paul has been my dear friend for over 25 years, and he has influenced my work and my thinking about music more than almost anyone else. Like many other contemporary American composers, I owe him more than I can possibly express.

The Long Island Songs were composed in 1992 and premiered in December of that year by Paul with me at the piano. The bittersweet poems, drawn from William Heyen's book Long Island Light, brought back memories of my own youth on that island, a place far different than the traffic jams and strip malls of today would lead you to believe. The Long Island Songs underwent extensive revision in 2005. The Land of Nod was commissioned by, and is dedicated to Paul. In 1992, he telephoned me and exclaimed, "I've just read a new book of poetry and thought immediately of you." I was quite flattered until I read the poems and discovered their subject matter ranged from a hitch-hiking Manson-family devotee to matricide. Still, I had to admit that Paul was right. Alice Wirth Gray's quirky sense of humor was right up my alley. Paul and I premiered the work together at Merkin Hall in 1993.

—Tom Cipullo July 9, 2019

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TEXTS

Long Island Songs

William Heyen

1. Invocation

Outside our bedroom window a nightshift of crickets works hard in the heavy dark. To lie awake is to live, to sleep is to die, I think, as I open and close my eyes.

A crescent, your cheekbone floats real as the pale moon beside me—
Is this the secret, then? Is this the love I could once only imagine?

In the air of the night of this room, I breathe your breath, deeply, slowly. I am drifting back, into your body, drifting back, into your body.

2. The Odor of Pear

No wind bends the branches of those trees behind my eyes, way back past any distance I've a name for.

Though tears begin to gather like the rain, they cannot bend the leaves of those trees behind my eyes, far back past

any distance I've a name for.

For I remember pears, globed to rust and gold, that yellowjackets tunneled to the end of heavy summer. They'll never rot and fall: for now, once more, for all my time, the deep

odor of pear drifts up, from any distance I've a name for.

3. The Nesconset Crickets

Either the crickets stopped, or I fell asleep as they kept on.

But sometimes I'd count their song all night, when I couldn't sleep, or dreamed I couldn't sleep, or dreamed from under grass that I helped them sing.

4. The Crane at Gibbs' Pond

The boy stood by the darkening pond watching the other shore. Against pines, a ghostly crane floated from side to side, crooning. Maybe its mate had drowned. Maybe its song lamented the failing sun. Maybe its plaint was joy, heart-stricken praise for its place of perfect loneliness. Maybe, hearing its own echoing, taking its own phantom gliding the sky mirror of the pond for its lost mother in her other world, it tried to reach her in the only way it could. Maybe, as night diminished all but the pond's black radiance, the boy standing there knew he would someday sing of the crane, the crane's song, and the soulful water.

Invocation, The Odor of Pear, The Nesconset Crickets, and *The Crane at Gibbs' Pond* © Copyright by William Heyen. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Land of Nod, A Death in the Family, Deer in Mist and Almonds, and On a 19th Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J. H. © Copyright 1993 by Alice Wirth Gray. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

The Land of Nod

Alice Wirth Gray

1. The Land of Nod

Dreams of pure spirit are other people's dreams. Animal animas appear as guides. Lobsters befriend them in rocky times, or their dreams are in French, or painted in archaic style on vases: objets d'art. You couldn't hire a guide the hot spots my dreams go. I don't go my nightly journey with friendly totems. There are no areas of abstract color, pure form. Along my way to dreamland are gas stations you need keys to use the rest room. You wouldn't want to get out of the car, not even run down the window in my dreams.y

3. Deer in Mist and Almonds

It's rained for months and the deer step delicately, trying to shake dry their hooves. It's so muddy down by the creek, they've come up close to the house. They stand in the mustard, it's flowered early this year, when a sudden fog, thigh-high, eradicates all below, and all colors not grave go. Only metal stays: pewter, silver, steel stainless sight, lodestones, black holes in the light, great tin gods, pinchbeck on a damask cloth of white, eating the hips off the roses near the road. They browse into the invisible mustard.

Stags in the winter orchard bear their bare branches past the almonds' antlers, float above the white; great inflexible crafts of zinc. Before sunset the sky is icy pink.

2. A Death in the Family

I dreamed last night I murdered Mother Something with poison in it, I think, although I was determined, had she refused to drink, if no luck with one method to try another.

It's for sure, one thing we could all agree: she had it coming. What a nasty character, needlessly obnoxious. Egregiously unloving, always unfortunate with children.

Quarrelsome, hostile, insistently unattractive, not pleasant, no way. And so (snarling, twisted, jealous, plain mean) two cups on the kitchen counter are the way to go.

There were no guilt feelings involved.

I left the two glasses on the sideboard:
one plain, one in which poison was dissolved,
and she, always greedy, drank up both and died.

I was perfectly safe, no one suspected me. But nothing's easy: I had attitudinal problems. I worried I would betray myself unnecessarily. Perhaps I'd get drunk and blurt out everything.

I reasoned,
I wouldn't like prison.
I saw a gray, lonely cell and myself like Mrs. Harris, looking irritably at my watch to see how long till I got out.

I reasoned
I could write a lot in there.
I would manage, but I would not like it.
I reasoned
if I lived an exemplary life
from then on, never did anything naughty again,
no one would turn me in.
No one wanted me punished or put in jail.

I just have to keep calm, be careful, keep my psyche under control, watch my little quirks, not go confessing for the excitement of it, and life will go on as usual.

That's what I'll do.

What a peculiar person I am. It's a wonder my life has gone as well as it has. In the window in my dreams.

On a 19th Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J. H.

Alice Wirth Gray

The wolf makes a funny face not to be taken seriously as evil, but as if there's something wrong with his eyes. He's old and getting cataracts or he's trying to start a conversation by winking at Riding Hood, where she stands by a cheery spread of amanita phalloides, wondering how to get back to her basket of goodies which she left on the other side of the clearing while gathering flowers, and now of course the wolf blocks her way. Some people have a crucifix over the bed: I have a wolf.

The NIGHT POLICE Interrogate Riding Hood: Nice try, kid, but daisies don't grow in that woods. Look at those trees, their trunks acid-green with moss. There's not enough light in there for an impatiens or a cineraria. And that basket with the bottle of Bordeaux sticking out. Explain that. This is a German forest if ever one was: grim Grimm, blacker than Black. Don't you tell us about Perrault: for you all stories with fear in them will always be German. Your mom is sending you through these woods by yourself with a bottle of imported wine? You expect us to buy that? Save us all time. You knew that wolf. You've been encouraging him.

I've always loved that picture because there's Riding Hood far left and the wolf far right and the center absolutely empty. So much space between girl and wolf that is so much more interesting than either of them. You can see into and into the woods until it's so dark you can't. You can see such a long way into the story.

What RIDING HOOD Told the Cops: Of course I talked to him, it's what the books say to do: try to keep them talking.
Reason with them. Look, Mr. Wolf, sit down. We'll drink the bottle.
Then we'll go on to Grandma's and redden our teeth on her.
They sent me here.
They must have known the way the world is.

Myself, I would like to get past all that little-girl-and-the-wolf thing into the dark beyond them both. Honestly, I thought it must be a rite of passage. That the solution might be hidden in the basket under the white cloth. When I peeked, I found she'd sent me off in the dark without so much as a flashlight.

The Report of the NIGHT POLICE continues: We picked the girl up in the woods. Rather, what we mean to say is that's where we took her into custody. She looks like an angel, but you just can't tell What was in the basket, we wanted to know. Was she trying to get rid of something? We asked her to explain herself, and she says her mother hung the lithograph of a wolf over her bed. A likely story. What woman would do a thing like that? There may be enough evidence to run her folks in, too.

The WOLF:
For God's sake.
I was lost.
Can't you tell?
She seemed to mistake me for someone she knew.
I didn't want to frighten her.
You're not going to try to hang this one on me, are you? I'd never have gone there alone.
That's why we always travel in packs.
I mean it's dark in there.
Dangerous.

Testimony of the HUNTER:
So I heard all this yelling
from the old lady's cottage
a female in distress I sez
and I don't think twice
but bust down the door
gun at the ready
and that kid and the wolf
(that's him over there,
yer honor) well, you wouldn't
believe it, the amount of blood
and that kid does she have
a mouth on her it embarrasses me
when girls talk so foul like that

if she was my daughter
I'd beat her till she was civil
and I'd crack all the teeth
in her dirty mouth and I'd
take away her clothes and lock her up
to sit in her own filth until
she'd learned a little respect.
What's that, sir? You want me
to stand down? Well, sure,
if you say so.

MOTHER:

Of course I hung the lithograph over her bed. It's a work of art. You think something like that is going to scare that child? Anyway, I had to put it somewhere, it was a gift. And let me tell you, there was a perfectly safe path around those woods, through a public park, and well patrolled. But not her. You couldn't keep her from looking for trouble, and able to find it where there is none. My husband was no help at all: what do you expect a mother to do? Oh, if only we'd been rich enough to buy her a car.

It was all so complicated: who was this Riding Hood? I never liked the grandmother. Sometimes the wolf wasn't so bad: he could have eaten the girl there in the forest but he put off a present treat to eat a stringy old lady in the future. That's not the reasoning of a beast. Then, never did I doubt he liked Riding Hood more than the others did. What do you mean? What do I see in the picture? Is this some kind of Rorschach? I want to talk to my attorney. It was my mother who hung the picture over my bed. Those dark woods, beckoning, a challenge. A place to go to from the place you are

Catalog No. 8772

Long Island Songs

for Soprano and Piano

William Heyen

Tom Cipullo (ASCAP)

1. Invocation



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2. The Odor of Pear

William Heyen

Tom Cipullo (ASCAP)



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3. The Nesconset Crickets

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^{*} Perform all grace notes quickly before each beat.

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4. The Crane at Gibbs' Pond

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The Land of Nod





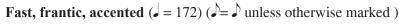




2. A Death in the Family

Alice Wirth Gray

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3. Deer in Mist and Almonds

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On a 19th Century Color Lithograph of Red Riding Hood by the Artist J. H.

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