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WHITMAN WAR POETRY SETTINGS BY THREE COMPOSERS

By
GRADY HAYDEN

A RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Vocal Pedagogy
in the School of Music
of the College of Music and Performing Arts
Belmont University

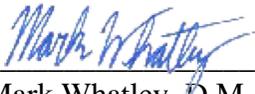
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

May 2022

Submitted by Grady Hayden in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Vocal Pedagogy.

Accepted on behalf of the Graduate Faculty of the School of Music by the Mentoring Committee:

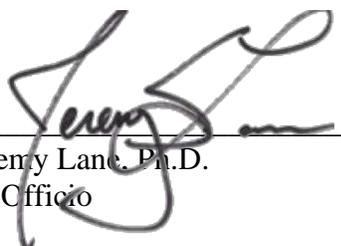
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Introduction

When thinking of the dehumanizing and brutalizing effects of warfare, the American mind is often brought to Vietnam or the Pacific Theater of the Second World War. While both of those theaters of warfare were in their own ways devastating, they suffered a much lower casualty rate than the Civil War. The Vietnam conflict saw a ratio of one man killed or wounded for every forty-four who served in uniform. The Second World War—the deadliest modern conflict—saw one out of every seventeen Americans in uniform wounded or killed. While the exact figures for the Confederacy are unknown, the Union numbers are known. The Union enlisted some 2,213,000 troops and suffered 422,295 casualties throughout the conflict leading to a ratio of one man killed or wounded for every five who served (McElroy, 1999. xi). The Vietnam conflict serves a special place in the American consciousness as the first “TV” war when scenes of the carnage were broadcast on a nightly basis to every living room in the nation. While only a minority of the population could witness firsthand the battles of the Civil War, a larger majority would certainly have read daily accounts of them.

Many of those accounts were written by Walter “Walt” Whitman (1819-92). While during his time Whitman was known to those around him as a journalist, poet, and volunteer nurse, he is today seen as a light of American democracy and values shining in the darkness of broken societal promises and fratricide. He was above all hopeful and blindly optimistic about the greatness of the American project. However, this did not

make him a one-dimensional poet. His works are equally capable of portraying the vices of America just as well as its virtues. From euphoria in “Beat! Beat! Drums!” to the bloody hospital scenes of “The Wound-Dresser,” to the reflection of “Dirge for Two Veterans,” Whitman portrayed the broad and complicated range of emotions present during and after the war. These accounts seem to be irresistible settings for many modern composers.

This paper will focus on Ned Rorem’s *War Scenes* (1969), Kurt Weill’s *Four Walt Whitman Songs* (1947), and Ethan McGrath’s *Four Whitman Settings* (2020). Each composer has in his own way interpreted Whitman’s works and composed music that elaborates on the underlying emotional movement of the text. These sets will be explored through formal and textual analysis along with investigating the backgrounds of the works and their composers. In addition, the technical considerations and challenges of singing the selected songs will be considered.

The consequences of large-scale, protracted, modern warfare on the American homeland have not been experienced by any living American generation. Because of the separation of time, it can be difficult to grasp the individual and societal trauma that an event like the Civil War can produce. However, this understanding can be reawakened in the American psyche by reading about the carnage of the war. There are few better ways to portray these texts than in the medium of song. The intent of this paper and the accompanying lecture recital is to not only broaden academic knowledge on selected songs, but to expose more Americans to the works of Whitman, which portray the immense catastrophe of the Civil War, along with his positive outlook for the American Project.

Walt Whitman

The American Civil War was the spiritual baptism by fire of the United States. The young nation was plunged under the tumultuous currents of fratricide and emerged born again, its faith refined and refocused. America's secular religious tenets of equality, democratic government, freedom, and justice for all were wholly reformed by the Civil War. Walt Whitman arose as a prominent poet who would come to represent this refined America. Born on Long Island on May 31, 1819, Whitman came from a long line of Long Islanders. Whitman's ancestors had been living on Long Island from the late 1650s or early 1660s when Zechariah and his son Joseph Whitman moved from Stratford, Connecticut, to the island. Joseph helped to establish the Whitman name as one of the more prominent family lines on the island, serving the community as a commissioner, constable, grand juryman, and the inspector of leather (Reynolds 1995, 10). The Whitman family came to be a large landholder during the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries. Walt's grandfather Nehemiah owned a farm of some five hundred acres and his grandfather, Jesse, had enough land to distribute to his four children upon his death (Reynolds 1995, 10). The progression of time and the dispersion of wealth and land to various descendants meant that the grand farms of his grandparents were not available to Walter Whitman, Walt's father. Instead, the senior Walter, and his family, lived on smaller tracts of land which were only a fraction of what the Whitman family

once held. Walt's mother, Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, came from the Dutch stock which originally inhabited the area of New York City before the arrival of the English. While Wall Street may have been firmly Anglicized by the early nineteenth century, Long Island was still divided by an ethnic wall. This ethnic wall ran straight through the town of West Hills—Whitman's hometown—which is approximately in the center of Long Island and divides the English population in the west from the Dutch population in the east (Morris 1929, 7). In Walt also came the mixture of his father's Baptist tradition and mother's Quakerism. While Whitman's family was not known for their regular church attendance, when they went to church it was to a Quaker congregation. More specifically, Whitman was most influenced by a breakaway sect of Quakerism led by Elias Hicks and whose members were called "Hicksites." Hicks's theology was Unitarian and placed emphasis on the "Inner Light" over scripture. While Whitman would eventually divorce himself entirely from organized religion, his early religious experiences were influential. He even had a picture of Elias Hicks over the mantel in his Camden, New Jersey, home. Whitman claimed no membership or allegiance to any congregation, but the ideas of universalism and the "Inner Light" are prominent threads in his poetry (Morris 1929, 16-19).

Walter Sr. was trained as a carpenter, and when Brooklyn experienced monumental growth in the 1820s, he made the seemingly wise decision to move the family for better economic prospects. The family moved to Brooklyn just a few days before Walt's fourth birthday in 1823 and would stay in Brooklyn for the next decade. What seemed like a wise move financially for the family ended up as a miscalculation. The housing boom of the 1820s and 1830s saw the large-scale introduction of

prefabrication in residential construction. No longer were artisanal woodworkers in demand for construction as their efforts were more expensive and consumed more time than less skilled laborers throwing up prefabricated houses in shorter timeframes (Reynolds 1995, 25). Walter would also speculate on property by attempting to buy a lot, build a house, and then sell it. While this business model may have appeared as a solid idea, Walter only purchased two properties in a ten-year time frame. The rest of the properties that he lived in or worked on were leased to him or subleased to him. Eventually Walter lost even the properties that he had bought by way of mortgages that fell through. The family wound up having to rent a property that the father had once owned but lost (Reynolds 1995, 24-25). The long-term lack of business success led Walter to move his family back to the country in 1833.

Perhaps due to his family's financial insecurity, Walt Whitman entered the workforce at eleven years old. His first job was that of an office boy at a firm in Brooklyn. Owned and operated by father-and-son James B. Clarke and Edward C. Clarke, the firm employed the young Whitman for only a short time. How much work Whitman actually accomplished in the office is unclear. Of his workplace Whitman is remembered to have said that "I had a nice desk and a window nook to myself" (Morris 1929, 20-21). It was at this desk and in the nook that Whitman spent his days reading books that came from a subscription to a circulating library that Edward Clarke had given to him. The first book that Whitman recalled reading during this stint in the office was the *Arabian Nights*, which ignited his love for storytelling. It was also in this office that Whitman discovered the novels and poetry of Walter Scott, who may have been one of the first poetic influences on the future poet (Morris 1929, 21). In 1831, Whitman

apprenticed under the editor of a weekly paper on Long Island called the *Patriot*. The next year he worked under a Brooklyn-based printer. The year 1833 saw the Whitman family move back to the country, while fourteen-year-old Whitman stayed behind working for the *Long-Island Star* (Reynolds 1995, 44-45). Whitman's work in these various printing houses led him to develop a holistic approach towards writing and publishing. In the early nineteenth century, artisanal publishing was still a viable profession. The editor of the paper was also its typesetter, mechanic, businessman, and marketer. In this way, one individual had complete artistic and economic control of his product. Whitman applied these ideas in a sort of unified approach in which he strove for complete artistic control of his works along with self-publishing, marketing, and selling his works, which did not always work out. When attempting, unsuccessfully, to publish *Drum-Taps*, Whitman told a friend that "I shall probably try to bring it out myself, stereotype it, and print an edition of 500—I could sell that number by my own exertions in Brooklyn and New York in three weeks" (Morris 2000, 185). Whitman was not able to go through with this plan.

In 1835, Whitman moved to Manhattan to work as a compositor. In the 1830s, New York was in the beginnings of an economic slump that was further exacerbated by the great fire of 1835. All of this led to a financially-precarious position for the young Whitman, and because of this he accepted positions as a schoolteacher and newspaper editor on Long Island. Whitman moved to Long Island in 1836 and he would stay there for five years until 1841 (Reynolds 1995, 54-55). Whitman was not happy with the move and seemed to hold a disdain for his situation, as teaching was only a job of last resort for him. However bleak he may have seen his situation, it did help jumpstart his writing

career. 1848's *The Shadow and Light of a Young Man's Soul* (1848) is a semi-autobiographical account in which Whitman portrays his move to the country and the despair he felt in teaching. The opening lines read:

When young Archibald Dean went from the city—(living out of which he had so often said was no living at all)—went down into the country to take charge of a little district school, he felt as though the last float-plank which buoyed him up on hope and happiness, was sinking, and he with it. But poverty is as stern, if not as sure, as death and taxes, which Franklin called the surest things of the modern age. And poverty compelled Archie Dean; for when the destructive New-York fire of '35 happened, ruining so many property owners and erewhile rich merchants, it ruined the insurance offices, which of course ruined those whose little wealth had been invested in their stock. (Whitman 1848, 1)

Whitman must have felt quite depressed as his “plank” of hope and happiness was sinking. What must have been even more annoying was the fact that Whitman had to live an almost nomadic lifestyle on Long Island, transferring from school to school throughout the course of his teaching career. Teachers of his time had to be nomadic, as schools were only required to be open for business three months out of the year. These three-month intervals were called terms and a schoolteacher in the 1830s and 1840s could expect to make about \$40 dollars a term, or \$160 a year if they took no breaks. Due to the dissimilarity of school term lengths across various communities, a teacher could spend the entire year at one school or likely work at four schools each year (Reynolds 1995, 57-58). In 1838, Whitman quit teaching and founded his own newspaper, the *Long-Islander*. Whitman ran the *Long-Islander* for about a year before he sold it. After selling the *Long-Islander*, Whitman wrote a series for the *Long Island Democrat*. This series called “The Sun-Down Paper” represent Whitman’s first major publication (Reynolds 1995, 60-31). During this period, Whitman also returned to teaching after his brief foray into starting up the *Long-Islander*. However, he was now successfully writing for a handful of Long

Island-based papers and was beginning to see success with some New York-based papers.

Throughout the 1840s Whitman established himself as a writer. He wrote a popular temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*. Whitman also found himself editing and writing for various popular papers in New York and Brooklyn such as the *Sun*, *New York Mirror*, *Democrat*, *Daily Plebian*, *Aurora*, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, and *The Aristidean* (Reynolds 1995, 83-84). This was a very public time in the young writer's life where he openly wrote about and supported topics such as the abolition of slavery, easing relations with Mexico (with whom the U.S. was at war from 1846-1848), and the importance of only admitting new free states into the Union. This last point was a break from orthodox Democratic politics of the time, which supported the Missouri Compromise. Whitman's very public break from the party line cost him his editorship of the *Brooklyn Eagle* in 1849 (Morris 1929, 27).

The year 1849 saw Walt and his brother Jeff move from New York to New Orleans. The Whitman brothers journeyed down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers until coming to New Orleans on the mouth of the Mississippi river. While in New Orleans Whitman wrote for a daily paper called *The Crescent*. The journey from New York to New Orleans (spending only a few months in the city) and then back again took Whitman on a tour of the United States which would be very influential on his later writing and his political ideals. Whitman was a strong supporter of the "union of these states" (Whitman 1882, 263). Whitman's view of the union was one of a body whose members all needed each other to function properly and to thrive. His time in New Orleans also gave him a certain sympathy for the South, which led him to at the same time sympathize with the

plight of the southern states after the Civil War. During the course of the war, he told his friend Horace Traubel “. . . that if I lived in the South I should side with the southern whites” (Morris 2000, 82). Whitman’s answer to the slavery question seemed to stop at freedom and not to progress into civil rights like enfranchisement. Charles Eldrige, a publisher of Whitman, recalled that he “never knew him (Walt) to have a friend among the negroes while he was in Washington. Of the negro race he had a poor opinion. He said that there was in the constitution of the negro’s mind an irredeemable trifling or volatile element, and he would never amount to much in the scale of civilization” (Morris 2000, 80-81). Whether Whitman’s views of the black race developed in the home (his great grandfather had owned slaves and slavery was only outlawed in New York in 1827), as an adult in New York or Long Island, or during his time in the South, cannot be known. What can be known was his disdain for radicals on both sides of the slavery question, who would come to tear the nation apart. In a notebook written a short time before *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman jotted down the following poem:

I am the poet of slaves, and of the masters of slaves
 I am the poet of the body
 And I am the poet of the soul
 I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters
 And I will stand between the masters and the slaves,
 Entering into both so that both shall understand me alike. (Whitman [1847-1854?], 35)

Whitman wished that he could stand between the forces ripping apart his beloved union and with his own power hold them together. *Leaves of Grass* seems to have been Whitman’s attempt at using poetry to desperately hold together a squabbling nation. This work was perhaps his most influential book of poetry, which he updated and revised several times to follow the changing American in which he lived.

Leaves of Grass, first published in 1855, begins with an essay of several pages on the poet's understanding of America, its values, and its place in the world. To put the American experience to poetry is appropriate according to Whitman, because "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (Whitman 1855, iii). The book would undergo multiple revisions and republications from 1855 to 1892. From the first edition can be found such famous poems as "Song of Myself," "I Sing the Body Electric," and "There Was a Child Went Forth." One of Whitman's longest poems, "Song of Myself" serves both as a representation of Whitman's experience and life in America and as a reflection of the American nation itself. The speaker seems to fluidly transition from Whitman the poet to America the nation. *Leaves of Grass* was a living work, constantly being worked on and updated as the poet reacted to changes in American society. The fourth, fifth, and sixth editions of *Leaves of Grass* were all published after the Civil War and due to the living nature of *Leaves of Grass* included wartime and postbellum poetry such as *Drum-Taps* and *Memories of President Lincoln*. By the final publication, *Leaves of Grass* had grown to a work of around 400 poems in fourteen sections including such famous poems as "O Captain! My Captain!," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," "Beat! Beat! Drums!," "Pioneers! O Pioneers!," and "I Hear America Singing." *Drum-Taps* in particular was influenced by Whitman's direct exposure to the carnage of the war through his experience volunteering at hospitals in Washington, D.C., and Brooklyn.

Following the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman was in a career slump. He had not yet become the famous poet that he would be later in life and spent his time socializing and drinking with other Bohemians in New York, all the while searching

for his next big thing. Whitman did not have to wait long—in the late hours of April 12, 1861—he along with the rest of the nation read about the newly-minted Confederate Army firing upon Fort Sumter, igniting the American Civil War. While Walt may have toyed with the idea of joining the Union Army, it was his brother George Washington Whitman who actually did enlist first in the 13th New York State Militia and later joined the 51st New York Volunteers. As part of the Army of the Potomac, the 51st New York Volunteers would spend its war chasing General Lee throughout much of Maryland and northern and eastern Virginia and keeping would-be Confederate conquerors out of the nation's capital. September 17, 1862, saw the Army of the Potomac led by General George B. McClellan square up against the Army of Northern Virginia commanded by Robert E. Lee. This day would prove to be the bloodiest in all the Civil War with heavy fighting concentrated around Burnside's Bridge that saw Major General Ambrose Burnside's IX Corps make multiple human-wave assaults against an opponent who held high ground above a terrain feature, in an attempt to secure a foothold on the other side of Antietam Creek. George Whitman's unit, the 51st New York Volunteers, assaulted the bridge and George Whitman established himself as a brave and unrelenting warrior. His reputation would lead to a battlefield commission to first lieutenant, and he eventually rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Union Army. In December of 1862, George Whitman once again had a chance to prove himself in the battle of Fredericksburg. Feeling the political pressure for a decisive victory against the Confederates, General Burnside made the ill-advised decision to assault entrenched Confederate positions, a tactic that would unfortunately be repeated throughout the war by Union commanders. Due to their superior positioning and entrenchment, the Confederate soldiers were able to

inflict some thirteen thousand casualties upon the Army of the Potomac. Throughout American cities on both sides, newspapers regularly published casualty lists of the local men believed to have been wounded or killed in recent battles. Unfortunately for the Whitman family, George appeared on one such list after the battle of Fredericksburg.

As soon as he could, Whitman made his way to Washington D.C. to hunt down his brother and learn how seriously wounded he was. Whitman wandered several hospitals in vain searching for George who seemed missing entirely. Eventually Whitman found a familiar face in Charles C. Eldridge, his former publisher, who lent him some money (Whitman had been pickpocketed on the journey). Eldridge also put Whitman in touch with his then-boss, Major Lyman S. Hapgood, who procured a transportation pass to Falmouth, Virginia, for Whitman. This is where the 51st New York Volunteers were encamped after the battle of Fredericksburg (Morris 2000, 49-50). When Walt made it to Falmouth, he found that George was very much alive and barely wounded considering the circumstances. A shell fragment had slashed through one of George's cheeks, leaving a hole through to his mouth. For the severity of wounds received in battle, George's was a fairly lucky and innocuous wound. Walt also found that his brother had been promoted to Captain (Morris 2000, 50-51). Winter was now in full swing, and this season normally served as a time of rest and recuperation for the armies on both sides. A few days were spent getting reacquainted with his brother George, but the majority of Walt's time in camp was spent getting to know the soldiers of the 51st New York Volunteers. His time with the soldiers inspired quite a bit of poetry and a newspaper article called "Our Brooklyn Boys in the War," which was published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Morris 2000, 61). Perhaps most importantly for Walt, his visit to the encampment in Falmouth

left him with the impression that he should do something for the wounded soldiers. Much of his time in Falmouth was spent wandering from hospital tent to hospital tent visiting the wounded and conversing with them. This was a pattern of behavior that Walt would continue throughout the rest of the war and for some time after.

Whitman did not return home to Brooklyn after visiting his brother in Virginia. Instead, he took up residency in the nation's capital looking to continue his work in the hospitals. It is important to note that Whitman was never an actual nurse. He held no official position in any hospital and was only a visitor. Whitman received no payment or incentives for his hospital visitations. He just did it because he felt like he needed to. To support himself in D.C., Whitman took on a series of jobs at government agencies working as a copyist. His first of several posts was in the office of Major Hapgood. Whitman enjoyed this work as a copyist because he only had to work a few hours a day to support himself and the few work hours allowed him plenty of time to spend in the hospitals. Most of Whitman's time in the hospitals was spent simply visiting and paying attention to the sick and wounded men. It was common for Whitman to have been seen sitting for hours at the bedside of some casualty holding his hand or speaking to him. Whitman was also a Santa Clause-like character, taking notes on all the things that individual men wanted, purchasing them, placing the items into a big sack, and then distributing the items to the men. He spent a great deal of his own money on this venture and realized that he should also raise some funds to augment his gift-giving. In February of 1863, he wrote home to his brother Jeff asking him to raise funds at work. In return, Jeff sent Walt six dollars, but Walt was not pleased when he found out that Jeff had sent him five of his own dollars and one of their mother's (Morris 2000, 105-6). Over the

years, Whitman witnessed the worst possible injuries and resulting sicknesses that were present during the Civil War. From amputations and infections to wasting diarrhea and medically induced insanity, Whitman watched as an endless stream of young American men died and suffered in the tens of thousands.

Whitman's time in the hospitals deeply affected him. The poet who entered the hospitals would never be the same, and his resulting poetry was significantly darker and more vivid in its gruesomeness. *Drum-Taps* was the main poetic output of this hospital period. A book on its own, publication of *Drum-Taps* was delayed several times, most notably due to the assassination of President Lincoln. *Drum-Taps* was meant to reflect the nation's experiences during the Civil War, but the assassination of President Lincoln added an element of that story which Whitman could not ignore. The contract to publish the book was signed on April 1, 1865, but within two weeks the President of the United States was assassinated (Morris 2000, 217). In the months between April and October 1865, Whitman wrote what was to become *Memories of President Lincoln* and various other poems which were inserted into *Drum-Taps*. Among these post-assassination poems was "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and perhaps one of Whitman's most famous poems, "O Captain! My Captain!" (Morris 2000, 232-3).

In his later years, Whitman moved to Camden, New Jersey to live with his mother and brother George who had set up a place for the family there. Whitman was fifty-four years old when he moved to Camden in 1873, and Camden would remain his home until his death in 1892. It was also in 1873, before the move to Camden, that Whitman suffered a paralytic stroke which would initiate his health decline that continued until his death (Morris 1929, 71). His later life was filled with depression due to his worsening

health, but also with visits to new places and old friends. He would travel to Boston to visit his long-time friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, to D.C. to visit John Burroughs and Peter Doyle, or across the river to Philadelphia to visit the Gilchrist family. Whitman also travelled to parts of the continent that he had not seen before. He made it as far west as the Rocky Mountains and as far north as Canada (Morris 1929, 76). His long distance travelling stopped in 1887 when he was sixty-eight years old. Approaching his seventies, the main travelling that Whitman engaged in was for his annual lecture on the character and assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The lecture was more of a regional show being held in cities close to Camden, such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston (Morris 1929, 92). Whitman made a deliberate effort to give these lectures on the fifteenth of April, the anniversary of the death of President Lincoln. Each lecture would end with Whitman personally delivering a recitation of “O Captain! My Captain!” Whitman continued to give these lectures annually until 1890, only two years before his death in 1892 (Morris 2000, 242).

As happens so often with great creatives, Whitman’s deserved recognition and massive fame came after his death, in the twentieth century. In the world of music, Whitman found a home in the settings of many composers, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Ned Rorem, Lee Hoiby, and Kurt Weill. The following chapters will investigate how a handful of twentieth and twenty-first-century composers have taken Whitman’s poetry and expounded on the emotional landscape with their music.

Kurt Weill

Born the son of a Jewish cantor, Kurt Weill seemed destined by family to become a musician. His father Albert Weill was the cantor for the Jewish Synagogue in Dessau, Germany, where Kurt was born on the second of March 1900. Located seventy miles to the south and west of Berlin, Dessau was a moderately-sized German town at the turn of the twentieth century, with some fifty thousand people residing there. Of that population, the Jews were a small minority who congregated in in the southern area of Dessau. Beginning in 1672, Jews were permitted to move into Dessau and establish a presence in the area. By the time the Weill family arrived in Dessau, the local Jews had established their own synagogue, cemetery, school, and ambitions of a community center, all located in a strongly Jewish neighborhood (Taylor 1992, 3).

The young Kurt Weill had plenty of musical influence in his life. He would have seen his father rehearse and perform the chants and hymns for synagogue services, and his mother, Emma Weill, played the piano. Beginning at the age of six, Weill started taking piano lessons from his father. By the age of nine Kurt had already outgrown his father's lessons, and a more professional teacher was sought. The winning candidate for a new piano teacher was a Parisian, Madame Margarète Evelyn-Schapiro. By all measures Weill's piano technique excelled, and his interest in furthering his education in music was reinforced. At fifteen, the young Weill had convinced his father to let him study composition with Albert Bing, the director of the Dessau Opera House. Aside from

teaching the young composer composition, Bing also gave him some great opportunities. These opportunities included accompanying for the local opera company and multiple solo piano performances. One of these performances in 1915 resulted in Weill receiving a commission to teach piano lessons to the local Duke's nieces and nephew (Taylor 1992, 10). Some of Weill's earliest pieces are nationalistic pieces expressing support for Germany's involvement in the first World War. Because he was fourteen at the start of the war, Weill never had to serve in the German army due to his age. However, he came close to being conscripted after his eighteenth birthday. To avoid conscription on the day that he was to present himself for medical examination, he overdosed on aspirin which caused immense sweating, as well as irregular respiratory rate and heartbeat. Through the four years of war, his opinion—like most Germans—changed from blind support of the war to wishing to see a quick end to the bloodshed.

After dodging military service, an eighteen-year-old Weill arrived in a Berlin that was still struggling through the last months of the war. Upon arriving in Berlin, Weill enrolled in the Hochschule für Musik. During his first semester there he studied counterpoint, composition, and conducting. Weill studied with many famous musicians at the Hochschule, but his composition teacher Engelbert Humperdinck was perhaps the most notable of his professors. Humperdinck was most known for his opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893). Eventually, Weill would come to study under Ferruccio Busoni, a prominent pianist, treatise writer, and composer. Busoni would prove to be a master teacher for Weill, and his instruction helped to ensure that Weill would become a great composer.

Kurt Weill's career can be broken down into three periods: Pre-Brecht, collaborating with Brecht, and his later life in America (Jarman 1982, 8). Weill's first period includes everything up until 1927. During this initial period, the bulk of his compositional output consisted of one-act operas, orchestral arrangements, string quartets, and genres in which young composers typically can obtain performances of their works. In 1927, Weill met Bertolt Brecht, a rising poet and playwright only two years Weill's senior. Brecht and Weill formed a professional partnership, working together to produce new sung theater pieces for the growing post-industrial population of post-war Berlin. These operas had a proto-musical theater elements to them, with the first, *Mahagonny* (1927), being called a "Songspiel." The term translates literally to "song play." These new sung plays intentionally distanced themselves from the traditional understanding of opera and were closer to what would become musical theater (Schebera 1990, 96). Along with scoring Brecht's plays, Weill wrote music for his shorter forms of poetry and prose such as a piece for a bass and ten woodwinds from Brecht's *Hauspostille* (Schebera 1990, 102). The most notable of the collaborations from this period is *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Three Penny Opera*, 1928). *The Three Penny Opera* became the smash hit of German theater in the 1920s. The show ran for a full year in Berlin and then became international with performances in Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Russia, and Italy. An overnight commercial success, reductions and individual songs were sold and records of the music were pressed (Taylor 1992, 144-5). *The Three Penny Opera* is still a hallmark of what is now understood as early musical theater with continual revivals to this day.

January of 1933 saw Adolf Hitler appointed as the Chancellor of the Weimar Republic. In February, Nazis initiated a false flag attack on the Reichstag, burning it to the ground and blaming communists. In March, the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) was able to secure an unbreakable majority of seats in the Reichstag. The result of these three tumultuous months in German history was the total dissolution of democracy and the institution of totalitarianism on the back of emergency declarations and orders. Many Jews could see the writing on the wall, and subsequently fled Germany. Weill left for France in March of 1933 and then departed for the United States in 1935, where he would live the rest of his life (Taylor 1992, 196, 215).

At first, Weill thought that his time in America would only consist of his time working on *The Eternal Road* (Taylor 1992, 217). In what would turn out to be extremely good luck, Weill's passport expired the year after his entry to the United States. Before Weill renewed his passport, the Nazis had passed the Nuremberg laws, which—along with banning miscegenation between Jews and Gentiles—stripped all German Jews of their citizenship. Oddly enough, Weill was issued a new passport even though he was no longer considered a German citizen; however, he would not return to Germany on this passport. By the time France had fallen in 1940, Weill had arranged for his immediate family to immigrate to the United States (Taylor 1992, 234-5). During the 1930s, Weill's output consisted largely of film scores and stage music. During the late 1930s and 1940s, Weill turned back to the operatic ideas of his Brecht period and wrote musical theater. It was musical theater that would come to dominate his American period, and it would lead to great success within his lifetime.

The anti-German sentiments that were prevalent in America during the First World War resurfaced in America during the Second World War. Weill wanted to prove that he was fully American and not a fifth columnist to his fellow Americans. This must have been especially stressful for Weill, as he was not made an American citizen until 1943, nearly two years into the war (Kowalke 2000, 109). Walt Whitman was not unknown to Weill prior to his immigration to the United States. Starting in 1919, Germany went through a Whitman obsession, as the year was to have been the poet's one hundredth birthday. Weill most certainly would have been familiar with Whitman before his arrival to the poet's home state. After the Weills reentered the United States from Canada on their new immigration papers, a friend gave Kurt a copy of *Leaves of Grass*. Weill toyed with the idea of setting some of the pieces, but it was the Japanese attacks on December 7, 1941, that pushed Weill to compose Whitman pieces. Weill spent the entirety of the war trying to show that he was just as much of an American as anyone else. While he may have personally enjoyed Whitman's poetry, the speed with which he turned out "O Captain! My Captain!" after Pearl Harbor may have also been an opportunity to prove himself as a good citizen.

What would become *Four Walt Whitman Settings* saw its first public life on the twenty-fifth of December 1941 when Weill presented the holograph score of "O Captain! My Captain!" to friend and playwright Maxwell Anderson. The set initially consisted of three pieces: "Beat! Beat! Drums!," "O Captain! My Captain!," and "Dirge for Two Veterans." This set of three songs was first performed in public as patriotic recitations with underscoring for RCA Victor as part of the war propaganda effort of the American entertainment industry during the conflict (Kowalke 2000, 114). Soon after, Weill's

publisher sold the set as *Three Walt Whitman Songs* for medium voice and piano at the cost of one dollar. The fourth song “Come Up from the Fields, Father” was added in 1947 and turned the set into the *Four Walt Whitman Songs* which has remained the same since.

Beat! Beat! Drums!

In late July 1861, the first major engagement of the war—the Battle of First Manassas—delivered a massive Union route from the field of battle. A disheveled and whipped Union army came streaming into Washington D.C., shaking the false confidence of the northern population who had been expecting a quick victory. It was upon hearing the news of this defeat that Whitman took up his pen to write a recruiting poem. “Beat! Beat! Drums!” is one of Whitman’s few outrightly jingoistic poems, so blatant in its purpose that the “antepenultimate line of the poem’s first published version was ‘Recruit! Recruit!’” (Kowalke 2000, 119). The impressions of the unstoppable drive towards war and the need for men to take up arms for their country may have certainly influenced Kurt Weill as he chose to include “Beat! Beat! Drums!” in a set of Whitman songs as a response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor (Kowalke 2000, 114). Weill’s setting plays with two main rhythmic motives. The first and most prominent is a long-short-short-long-long (which I shall label as A), and the second is long-long-long (labeled as B). Motive A appears in the first measure in the left hand of the piano. The pitches which are significantly below the staff may represent the unstoppable drums of war underscoring the daily life of the people of New York City. In measure three, motive B is introduced in the right hand with three successive quarter-note value iterations, and it foreshadows what will come to the surface in the vocal line. Both motives appear in the vocal line starting with motive B in measure 5 on the text “Beat! Beat! Drums!” The first full

iteration of motive A in the vocal line is in measure 8. Dynamically, the piece is a series of smaller *crescendos* within a larger overarching *crescendo*. The sections that begin with a *p* or *mp* marking are generally more rhythmically gentle, consisting largely of quarter and eighth-note exchanges with some use of triplets and sixteenth notes. Generally, the rhythm tends to increase in complexity and intensity during more dynamically intense (*mf*, *f*, *ff*) passages. Measures 22-37 exemplify this, with the opening measure consisting of only quarter-notes in the vocal line. The next measure introduces eighth notes and one eighth-note triplet. Right before the *crescendo* in measure 25, a variation of rhythmic motive A is reintroduced with sixteenth notes added to the mix. Noting a short dynamic setback with the dynamic marking returning to *p*, in measures 27-30, the rhythmic diversity continues to increase as the dynamic level increases. Measure 33 is a 2/4 bar which functions as the pickup to a new phrase, a phrase that reinforces the final rhythmic complexity which is a variation on motive A (longs being subdivided and shortened by dotting an eighth note). By the time the *ff* is reached in measure 35, the rhythmic complexity has increased from straight quarter notes to moving eighths, sixteenths, eighth- and sixteenth-note triplets, a 2/4 pickup bar, and dotted rhythms. All of this occurs while the overarching dynamic moves from *p* to *ff*. Having lived through World War One as an adolescent in the German Empire, Weill would certainly have understood the clamorous motions of a nation driving itself towards war. I believe that it is this chaotic but pointed energy which cannot be stopped once started that Weill is trying to portray by using these musical devices. As the call to war gets louder, the war drums beat faster.

Vocally, all of the songs in *Four Walt Whitman Songs* are technically difficult to sing. In general, the tessitura rests rather high for a baritone in the low voice collection. All four songs spend a lot of time in the E5-G5 range. In “Beat! Beat! Drums!,” the highest pitch is an F5, which first occurs in measure 42. Often, Weill anticipates high notes by writing a melodic line that ascends up to them. The F5s in measure 42 have such a buildup, starting in measure 40 with the A4 to B4, then in measure 41 with stepwise motion ascending from B5 to E5. There is a quarter-note rest on beat one of measure 42, allowing the singer to take in a quick breath before singing the succession of F5s which occur in measure 42 and 44. While the breath on beat one of measure 42 can be helpful, I find that taking as small of a breath as possible or simply taking a lift and not breathing allows for more consistent phrasing and ease of accessing the F5. Because of the high tessitura of “Beat! Beat! Drums!” along with all the other pieces, choice of vowels is paramount for the successful execution of the song. Any of the following vowel modifications are the subjective suggestions as to what I find best work in my voice. A different singer may need to do different things for their voice. The word “blow” appears consistently and repeatedly on an E5. For some singers, the [o] of “blow” can be difficult to sing on an E5, especially with multiple E5s of differing time values. One possible remedy for this is to modify the vowel towards an [ɔ] or an [ɑ]. In measures 42 and 44, the word “mind” appears as a quarter note on the pitch F5. This vowel can also be modified towards an [ɑ].

O Captain! My Captain!

For the singer, “O Captain! My Captain!” is much more rhythmically simple. The vocal line consists largely of quarter notes with the occasional eighth notes and dotted

quarter notes to emphasize the motion found in the piano part. Weill's music for the piano in this song is much more interesting than that for the voice. The piece starts out in measure 1 with a lilting two-measure theme that will reappear throughout the piece in whole and in part. The melody slightly rises, falls, and then rises again like a wave going from peak to trough to peak, losing amplitude with each repetition. The imagery of a ship on the water is hard to miss in this early section, as the scene is set well before the singer gives the textual context. The fact that the piano stays relatively calm and uses mostly stepwise or small intervallic movement alludes to a ship in calmer waters, perhaps entering a bay after escaping from a storm. This is a nice tonal underlining of the meaning of the poem that although Abraham Lincoln leads the ship of the union into safe harbor, the storm of the Civil War took him in its rage. This piece also has obvious Germanic traits that are revealed in musical moments in which Weill emphasizes the F-major tonality while highlighting the flatted submediant. The flatted submediant makes its way into a motive F–E-flat–D-flat–C, which repeats throughout the piece in the piano (see measures 1-2) and the voice (see measures 16-18) (Kowalke 2000, 121). Another Germanic trait can be found in the form of the song. Weill writes the song in modified strophic form, with two strophic verses followed by new music on the third verse with a partial return to the primary music. This leads to an expanded bar form of AAB or AABa.

Vocally, this is the easiest song of the set. It has the lowest tessitura, reaching up to an F5 only. Some vowel modifications may be necessary, such as on the word “heart” in measure 21 and the word “exult” in measures 73-74. For “heart,” I would recommend removing the [ø] coloration and just sing an [ɑ]. The word “heart” should come through with the slightest amount of [ø] or even none at all. For “exult,” instead of [ɛgzølt], the

singer should try replacing the schwa [ə] with either [ɑ],[u], or [ɔ]. The next hardest task for the singer is to maintain consistent phrasing throughout the song. Considering that most of the vocal line is quarter note after quarter note, it is easy to fall into the trap of singing note-to-note and ignoring the broader phrase.

Come Up from the Fields, Father

“Come Up from the Fields, Father” is the most musically diverse and complex song of the set, visiting multiple tonal areas, rhythmic motives, and emotional landscapes. Interestingly, Weill has chosen to play with the text itself by removing certain sections or phrases. From the first section of text, Weill removes the lines “(Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines? Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were lately buzzing?).” “Down in the fields all prospers well,” begins a new section in Whitman’s copy, but Weill connects it to the first section in his song waiting to restart the piano’s triplet motive until “but now from the fields come father.” Also from this section, Weill has chosen to remove the fact that Pete was shot in a “cavalry skirmish.” The simplification of the line here makes sense as the audience really does not care in what context the son was shot. It would not make a difference if he was shot in a line engagement, on picket duty, or in a cavalry skirmish. What the audience really cares about is that the son has been shot, and the effect that it has had on his family. Leaving the context of the injury up to the audience’s imagination adds to the drama of the piece and is a good subtraction. The most dramatic change that Weill makes to Whitman’s text is the removal of the fourth section. This section of the poetry follows and describes the mother in her grief and anguish. While Weill could have certainly written interesting music to elucidate the emotions portrayed by the mother, the song is already long enough, coming in at over six

minutes (Whitman 1882, 236-7). Moreover, the parallelism of placing “but will soon be better” right before “he will never be better” hits like an emotional sledgehammer and drives the message further home than it would have been by taking a detour to explore the mother’s grief for an entire section of the song, considering that the last section will still explore that grief.

It is this final section that contains the climax to the song and its extremely dramatic music. The song maintains the key signature of three flats all the way through, but Weill visits other tonal areas throughout the song. Early in the first page, Weill alternates between C minor and E-flat major. By the end of the song, other tonal areas are visited and by more complex means than pivoting from relative minor to major. In the middle of the mother’s grief Weill executes a wonderfully climatic key change using a Fr+6 in measure 107, leading into the tonicization of C minor on “O that she might...” (sung on an E5) followed with a sudden D major on “withdraw.” Again, at the climax of the phrase on an E5, Weill returns with a C minor chord that changes on the word “escape” to a D major. The harmonic switching from C minor to D major on words of refuge such as “withdraw” and “escape” leads to the impression of a mother briefly forgetting her grief only to be fully drawn back into it seconds later.

Because “Come Up from the Fields, Father” is perhaps the most musically-complicated piece of the set, the singer is not spared his share of difficulties. This piece contains difficult intervals and rhythms that are intimidating at first but can be accomplished with practice. Weill makes liberal use of accidentals, including double-flats. Another thing to note is the triplet on “yellower and” in measure 16. This is a half-note triplet expressed as two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes. Weill likes to

deny the singer straight triplets, and this is just one example of the several from this set which can be tricky. Just like the other pieces in the set, “Come Up from the Fields, Father” has several high notes, but notably it has the easiest high notes for the singer of all its sibling pieces. The highest pitch of F5 is presented either at the start of a phrase (as in measure 13) or is reached by leap (such as in measures 114-16). On these high notes, some vowel modifications may be necessary. For “lo,” the singer should try to move away from [o] and towards [ɔ] or [ɑ]. There is an F5 on the word “all” in measure 26. For this word, the singer should sing the vowel [ɑ] and to wait until the very last possible moment to include an [ɪ]. Should the singer sing an F5 on an [ɪ] he will more than likely feel extreme compression, which may haunt him for the rest of the piece. In measure 116, the word “dear” [dɪə] can be difficult to sign with the [ə] included. The singer should try removing the [ɪ] coloration of the [ə] and including it at the very last moment possible.

Dirge for Two Veterans

“Dirge for Two Veterans” feels the most like a musical theater song out of all of the songs of the set. The consistent chromaticism and long phrases on high notes add to that feeling. This piece also feels like it is best approached with the idea of singing down from the top. So much of the tessitura is high, and many phrases start on an E5 with a *p* dynamic marking (such as in measures 9 and 62). Approaching the song through the feeling of the lighter mechanism of the voice must be the chief mode in which this song is sung, which is very difficult considering the many *f* and *ff* markings on phrases with an F5 or G5. The singer is constantly battling between wanting to sing the song at maximum intensity or reserved and light as some phrases demand. Certainly, more dynamically

intense phrases will happen, but overall, in order to sing multiple F5s and G5s in a row, the singer must not force his way up into that range.

Rhythmically, Weill uses the eighth note to carry the text in this song. The quick forward moving pace of the vocal melody never really slows down, and certain rhythmic ideas tend to increase the speed in certain areas. Like the other songs in the set, Weill makes liberal use of triplets, such as in measure 13. Weill also uses a broken triplet in measure 39 on the word “veterans.” While the triplets can be hard to execute, the hardest rhythm to sing in this song is the measure made up entirely of eighth notes sung on a high pitch. An example of this can be found in measures 21-22 and 38-39, among others. While the rhythm is not difficult to sing, the singing of multiple words quickly on a high pitch is. What may be helpful for the singer is to imagine that he is chanting out those words on any given pitch. A chant-like delivery removes the need to think of the words as separate words but rather as one long elided phrase.

Like all of the other songs in the set, vowel modification is a must with high notes. The word “lo” in measure 9 can have its vowel shift away from [o] and towards [ɔ]. “Up” from measure 11 may be sung easier on a [ʊ] rather than the spoken [ʌ]. In measure 40, the word “together” on a G5 can be difficult to sing without modifying the vowel of the second syllable to [æ] and the third syllable to [ə]. The “a” vowel of “have” in measure 59 can possibly be sung more easily as an [æ] rather than an [ɔ] or [ɑ]. The last G5 of the piece occurs on the word “heart” after a challenging octave leap up to it. I find that the easiest vowel to go towards on this word is an [ʊ]. While the [ʊ] may seem to be the wrong vowel for [hɑ̃t], I find that it works on the “heart” of that specific G5.

In comparison to the Rorem and McGrath sets, *Four Walt Whitman Songs* contains the most vocally taxing music to sing. The combination of a high tessitura and long phrases require attention to detail regarding vowel choice. The songs in *Four Walt Whitman Songs* also average a longer run time than those of the other two sets. The singer may be able to get away with some mediocre vowel choices and breath work in a few of the songs in the Rorem or McGrath sets; however, the unique difficulties of *Four Walt Whitman Songs* will exacerbate these issues in a singer who is not able to successfully navigate them.

Ned Rorem

Born in October of 1923, Ned Rorem is one of the most prolific songwriters in the history of the United States. Starting off at Northwestern University in 1940, transferring to the Curtis Institute in 1942, and finally finishing his education at Julliard in 1947, Rorem spent the entirety of the 1940s undertaking his formal academic compositional training. Like many Americans during the first half of the twentieth century and like his mentor Aaron Copland, Rorem spent almost a decade in Paris before returning to the States in 1958. Beginning his career in academia at The University of Buffalo, he later taught at the University of Utah before he ended up returning to the Curtis Institute as a faculty member (Tommasini, Holmes, and McDonald 2001).

As a composer, Rorem is best known for his song catalogue numbering around four hundred songs. It was due to his reputation as a great song writer that French baritone Gérard Souzay commissioned him to write the set that would become *War Scenes*. From Rorem's diary dated March 25, 1969, he writes:

And a letter from Gérard Souzay who wants me to compose a cycle for his autumn tour. Short notice. Twenty years ago when his voice flowed smooth as warm caramel and my inspiration reeked like musk, I could have whipped up something in half a week, probably on the verses of Musset. Now we're other people. Now his art concerns me only as a steely wail through which some sad words could make a sharp point. What words? For never again will I write in French. (Rorem 1983, 256-7)

This journal entry accurately foreshadows what *War Scenes* would become. From receiving the letter in late March to the compositions being completed in late June is

certainly longer than half a week. His ending remarks about not writing in French and Souzay's art only being able to convey "sad words" that make a "sharp point" is exactly descriptive of the texts found in Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War*.

The resulting composition, *War Scenes*, is dedicated to "those who died in Vietnam, both sides, during the composition: 20-30 June 1969." Premiered by Gérard Souzay in Constitution Hall, Washington D.C., on October 19, 1969, *War Scenes* is a set of five songs with texts taken from Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days and Collect* which itself contains text from Whitman's earlier *Memoranda During the War*. Set for medium-low voice and piano, the songs are haunting, emotional, and technically difficult for both pianist and singer to execute (Rorem 1971, 1).

A Night Battle

War Scenes is bookended by its two longest songs, "A Night Battle" and "The Real War Will Never Get in The Books." As the longest piece in the set, "A Night Battle" serves as contextual background for the events to come in the next three songs. Found in *Specimen Days* "A Night Battle, Over a Week Since" is a four-page long prose recounting the Battle of Chancellorsville (May 3, 1863). May 2, 1863, saw Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson make a daring night assault on the Union right. It is this engagement which lasted from late in the evening on Saturday (May 2) to early in the morning on Sunday (May 3). The resulting skirmish routed the Union XI Corps but was not decisive towards the outcome of the battle. The Confederates were still outnumbered about two to one and Lee had quite the task ahead of him on the morning of Sunday, May 3. Lee would eventually win the battle, but victory came at a heavy price: over—twelve thousand—casualties that the Confederate

States of America could not replenish. Even more devastating for the morale of the south was the death of Stonewall Jackson who was mortally wounded in a friendly-fire incident (which Whitman left out of his account) towards the end of his assault.

Rorem's version of Whitman's account cuts out much of the prose. The entirety of the historical context for the battle is removed, giving it a sense of timeless ambiguity. Rorem did not limit his set to the context of 1863 or of Chancellorsville but instead constructed a scenario which could have occurred at any point in the war. This works well with the following song "Specimen Case," in which Rorem goes from the macro (the battle) to the micro (one victim of said battle). Disregarding that the actual soldier described in "Specimen Case" was not at Chancellorsville, the selective editing of the respective texts creates a convincing thread between the initial two songs.

"A Night Battle" is challenging in several ways for the singer. First are the intervals frequently populating the pages of this song: minor ninths and augmented fourths (along with other difficult and strange intervals). The key signature contains no sharps or flats, but the piece is most definitely not in C major. The song appears to begin in A minor with the initial piano motive starting out on an A1 containing two Cs, but the fifth of the A minor triad is missing. The singer's initial motive partly mirrors the initial motive in the piano, with an A3 followed by octave B-flats to end on an A4. While A minor is hinted at, the establishment of the key is avoided for the duration of the song.

Another area of difficulty of this piece is the lack of support for the singer in the piano part. Often, the piano is either not playing or it is sustaining a chord. Only occasionally does the accompaniment faintly whisper any sense of the beat. This means that the singer is largely on his own to count a piece with difficult rhythms. The singer is

provided with two bars of an established beat in measures one and two and is then left alone for the rest of the page. The beat is fully obscured first in measure 7 with the quarter notes landing on the second beat and the second eighth note of the third beat. Additional difficulty can be found in the numerous half-note triplets which first appear in measure 13. Rorem uses the half-note triplet as a rhythmic motive, using either one in a measure or two in a measure. Measures 28-30 feature a string of half-note triplets in the voice part. Unfortunately for the singer, the piano plays on beats two, three, and four of measure 29 which makes these half-note triplets difficult to execute in time. Along with straight half-note triplets, Rorem also breaks apart the triplets by removing the first quarter note or by replacing the first two quarter notes with a half note as in measure 76.

Vocally, “A Night Battle” is not very difficult to sing. The piece ranges from an A3 to a F5 with the F5 only appearing once towards the end of the piece. While the intervals are strange (especially the recurrent A3 to B-flat4), the tessitura of the piece is reasonably within a comfortable range for a baritone.

Specimen Case

This song is much easier to sing than the preceding song. Rhythmically, the piano is very helpful for the singer, playing half-note chords without fail on beats one and three throughout the entire piece. This makes the counting for the singer much easier.

“Specimen Case” is also missing the rhythmic difficulty in the vocal line that “A Night Battle” has. The singer must only worry about half, quarter, and eighth notes. The most difficult rhythmic aspect of this song is the syncopation of the voice line which first appears in measure one. The emphasis is on the second eighth notes of beats one and three, offsetting the beat by an eighth note. This gives the effect of abnormality in an

otherwise normal situation. A young man laying a hospital bed while an attendant watches over him is not abnormal. What is abnormal about the text is that this young man has been mortally wounded in a conflict which has wounded all the men in the hospital ward around him. By offsetting the beat Rorem takes the normality of a peace time hospital scene and contrasts it to the abnormality of war time hospital scenes.

While “A Night Battle” is grounded in the context of a wider battle, “Specimen Case” is more specific than Rorem treats it. Describing his day on June 18, 1863, Whitman wrote about the suffering of Thomas Haley. An Irishman from the Fourth New York Cavalry, Haley had left his home in Ireland to enlist in the Union cause. Described by Whitman as a “fine specimen of youthful physical manliness,” Haley was in a terrible condition when Whitman encountered him. He had been shot through the lung and existed in a trance-like state, only acknowledging Whitman with passing glances as he attempted to sleep through the pain. From the text it seems as though Whitman could somehow tell that Haley was not registering the fact that Whitman was present whenever he glanced his way. Perhaps due to the pain, the medication, or a combination of both, Haley in his delirious state does not know “the heart of the stranger that hover’d near” (Whitman 1883, 36-7).

By anonymizing the very real Thomas Haley, Rorem has made the text more approachable for both singer and audience to add their own interpretations. As stated previously, “A Night Battle” and “Specimen Case” work well as a pairing because “Specimen Case” shows the aftermath of “A Night Battle” on an individual soldier. Rorem also isolates the text from its broader context, but the section that he uses is kept whole. Only the last three sentences of the half-page long entry are used in the song.

However, this is the most poetic part of the excerpt, with the rest of the text reading more like a journal entry.

Vocally this is perhaps the easiest to sing of the five songs in *War Scenes*. The song ranges from a B-flat³ to an E-flat⁴. The tessitura sits in a comfortable place for the baritone. “Specimen Case” certainly feels like a break after having sung “A Night Battle.”

An Incident

The first text to be represented in its entirety, “An Incident” delivers a look into the slow death of a Confederate soldier with freakish apathy. Interestingly, Rorem directs the singer to be “uninvolved, like a reporter.” This guidance is unique in the set and among the broader category of art song. “A Night Battle,” “Specimen Case,” and “Inauguration Ball” contain no directions for the singer at the very beginning of the piece, yet they can certainly not be sung “uninvolved.” From the neuroticism of “A Night Battle” to the sorrow of “Specimen Case” and the disgust of “Inauguration Ball,” Rorem crafts songs full of emotional impact. Why then would Rorem include a song that is intentionally hollow and apathetic in an otherwise emotionally-charged set? One possibility includes the piece’s context as framed in the set. “An Incident” is the third of five songs, placing it in the center or the core of the set. Perhaps Rorem is trying to play into an anti-war sentiment that war is at its core empty, meaningless, and leaves hollow shells of men in its wake. In choosing where to place “An Incident,” Rorem has dug a deep, black, bottomless pit in his set. Near the surface are “A Night Battle” and “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books” which take a macro approach to war and history, focusing on the societal effects rather than the individual victims. Further down the pit

but still visible are “Specimen Case” and “Inauguration Ball” which highlight the willful blindness of that surface society to the deeper struggles of the individual when thrown into war. The soldier in “Specimen Case” is found within the broader context of a full and busy hospital in which individual soldiers would have received the bare minimum treatment necessary to save time and resources for the collective of injured. The text is framed in such a way as to imply that the narrator simply happened across the young man and paid him the kind of attention that no nurse or physician would have, let alone the uninvolved society at large. The party from “Inauguration Ball” mixes the world of the individual with the society in which wounded soldiers are brought to a ball with beautiful women, music, and dancing. Yet the narrator detects something perverse in the fact that a party is being held while others suffer and die alone and unattended. In the deepest region of the pit lies the apathetic, morse code-like delivery of “An Incident.” In this piece, the subject is left alone to suffer and die over several days while being observed and reported upon by a dry, monotone observer. He receives no human empathy or connection as did the subjects of “Specimen Case” or “Inauguration Ball,” and his death arrives within minutes of soldiers attempting to move him.

Regarding musical features, this song avoids establishing a key, with the only hint of a tonality being the F4 where the voice spends most of its time. The piano part seems disjointed and paranoid. The opening motif falls squarely and hurriedly from the far-right end of the keyboard to the far-left end. This is contrasted with a slight scurrying movement in the piano (see measure 6 for the first instance) which repeats throughout the piece as the most prolific piano motif. The third and final piano motif is the most rhythmically stable being a chord held over two measures (first seen in measure 12).

Rorem limits his composition for the piano to these three motifs. The first motif is used to transition between verses. The second appears disjointedly between phrases, almost as if the narrator's delivery is being interrupted by an overactive and disturbed mind. Focus seems to be regained whenever the third motif enters, as it is always preceded by the second motif but is often underscoring the delivery of text.

The vocal line roughly parallels the rhythmic activity of the piano with its own rhythmic ideas. These similarities are found in the quick quarter and eighth notes as well as triplets both whole and broken that populate the vocal line. The quick quarter and eighth notes sound like a line of Morse code being transmitted or received by the reporter narrating the story. Next come the triplets, which are prevalent throughout the rest of *War Scenes*. They first appear in measure 7 with a broken half-note triplet (the triplet is missing the initial triplet member) followed by a whole half-note triplet. This leaves the listener with an uneasy sense of syncopation that is again used starting on the third beat of measure eighteen. Most of the triplets in "An Incident" are either whole or missing their first member; however, the final triplet of the song is missing its last member. Found in measure 55, Rorem brilliantly cuts this triplet short as the young soldier's life is cut short, dying in a matter of minutes.

Inauguration Ball

The Presidential Election of 1864 saw the Republican incumbent Abraham Lincoln crushing his Democratic challenger General George B. McClellan with an electoral college landslide of 212-12. Lincoln's second inauguration took place on March 4, 1865 and the official inaugural ball would occur two days later on March 6. Walt Whitman joined the other ball attendees in the Patent Office venue. Found in *Memoranda*

During the War and Specimen Case and Collect, Whitman recounted his experience at the inauguration ball. Rorem has once again taken the hacksaw to Whitman's prose. The edited version of the text found in "Inauguration Ball" contains about half of the material that Whitman's original entry does. Rorem has inserted his own paraphrase of the first few lines. Whitman's description of the venue, the dancing, and the battlefields represented by the war wounded are all cut in favor of the following paraphrase: "At the dance and supper room, I could not help thinking, what a different scene they presented to my view since, filled with a crowded mass of the worst wounded of the war" (Rorem 1971, 17). The final sentence of the text is also shortened, removing what Whitman had included in brackets (Whitman 1883, 66).

This paraphrasing of the text allows Rorem to deliver a more succinct and poignant picture of the perversion found in the situation. A naive and carefree group of partiers is contrasted to the "mass of the worst wounded of the war." That a party with "beautiful women, perfumes, . . . violins . . .," and dances can exist in the same reality in which men are suffering and dying unattended baffles the narrator and seems to be an irreconcilable contradiction (Rorem 1971, 18).

"Crude and fast," the direction given at the top of the song, is perhaps the best way to summarize "Inauguration Ball." Set as a dance in 3/4, the crude aspect of the music is immediately shown in the left hand of the piano part. Measure 1 has the left hand part playing on beats one and two, whereas measure 2 has the left hand playing on beats two and three. This pattern of beats one and two against two and three continues for much of the song. The effect feels clumsy, like a dancer struggling to stay in step. The right hand part is filled with moving eighth notes and quarter-note triplets. The movement

of the right hand is much more regular than that of the left hand; however, it still has its share of syncopation. The most common form of irregularity in the right hand is that the downbeat is often shifted by one eighth note, leaving the measure to begin on the “and” of beat one rather than on the downbeat. This first occurs in measure one and can be seen in many measures throughout the song.

For the singer, “Inauguration Ball” is the least rhythmically-challenging song in *War Scenes*. The ever-present triplets are missing, and most rhythms are quarter notes. The difficulty for the singer comes in the form of intervals. While none of the intervallic leaps are too challenging to execute, the consistent swinging back and forth of half steps along with major and minor thirds gives the song an uneasy sense. There is no sense of stability for the singer, for once he lands somewhere that should feel comfortable, he leaves it by a half step. E-flat to E-natural is the most frequent example of this. In measure six the singer descends from a D5 to an E-flat4 only to step up to the E-natural4 on the succeeding note. This E-flat4 to E-natural4 event happens six times throughout “Inauguration Ball.” Overall, “Inauguration Ball” is one of the easiest songs of the set to sing. The accompaniment is rhythmically consistent and underscores the singer at all times.

The Real War Will Never Get in the Books

Representing Rorem’s greatest feat of paraphrasing in *War Scenes*, “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books” ends the set with Whitman’s opening comments in *Memoranda During the War*. Remarkably, Rorem boils down three pages of text into a four-page song, leaving out entirely the first page and picking up on the last paragraph of the second page. Notably, Rorem includes the line “And so goodbye to the war” which is

absent in *Memoranda During the War* (1875) but is present in 1882's *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882). All of the texts found in *War Scenes* comes from Whitman's *Memoranda During the War* and *Specimen Days and Collect*. While Rorem specifies that he took the text from the 1882 version of *Specimen Days and Collect*, Whitman's earlier publication of *Memoranda During the War* contains all the same text as *Specimen Days and Collect* except "And so goodbye to the war" (Whitman 1883, 80). In *Memoranda During the War*, Whitman uses the text of "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books" as way to set the tone for the rest of the book. In *Specimen Days and Collect*, the line in question is inserted to connect two otherwise disconnected sections of prose. Recycling his poetry and prose is nothing new to Whitman. His magnum opus *Leaves of Grass* underwent several revisions between 1855 and 1892 with formerly standalone works being incorporated into the later versions. In the context of *War Scenes*, Whitman's "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books" gives a better sense of clarity of the form of the set when interpreted using *Memoranda During the War* rather than *Specimen Days and Collect*. Using the text as found in *Memoranda* as the opening remarks of the book, the final song functions as an indicator of definite reflection upon the events found in the preceding songs. This can be accomplished by using *Specimen Days and Collect* to interpret the text as well, and the later addition of "And so goodbye to the war" certainly assists both Whitman and Rorem in the transition between pieces. However, the parallelism of the first thing being last and the last being first when reflecting on major events and trauma in history and art can be a helpful tool for interpretation.

While Whitman's original introductory text lives up to its required purpose in both books, Rorem's abbreviated version functions to deliver a gut-punch to an already

emotionally-drained audience as a sort of inconclusive finale. It also serves as a bit of character development for the singer. No longer is the character just some narrator, journalist, or historian dryly recounting the events of the war—he has experienced the suffering firsthand and knows intimately the smaller and less-known details. While much of the text found in *War Scenes* could have been experienced by soldiers, reporters, and anyone else involved in the infrastructure of war, this final song refers to the specific experience of someone serving in a hospital. This ties the narrator back to the story recounted in “Specimen Case” and helps to explain the otherwise detached, journalistic accounting of the stories in “A Night Battle” and “An Incident.” He was not at those battles, but he heard about them from the wounded to whom he tends daily. A conclusion that can be accurately drawn about the narrator is that he is a nurse or stretcher bearer who has experienced the war from the wings of hospitals rather than at the front. Perhaps he is Whitman himself. In Rorem’s mind and time, this narrator could have easily been a contemporary U.S. Army field surgeon, medic, or nurse, or perhaps his North Vietnamese counterpart.

War Scenes is dedicated to “those who died in Vietnam, both sides, during the composition: 20-30 June 1969.” Each song includes the date of composition after the ending double bars. The first song to be written, “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books,” on June 20, 1969, ends up being the finale of the set, implying that Rorem knew where he wanted to go with the set and that like many Americans in the wake of the Tet Offensive of 1968, he too wished to say goodbye to the war.

“The Real War Will Never Get in the Books” has a haunting sonority to it. The initial piano contribution is two simultaneously rolled chords on the downbeat of measure

1. The left hand has a B-flat major seventh chord in third inversion while the right hand shows a type of A minor seventh chord in third inversion with both the raised and diatonic seventh scale degree being present in the chord. These two major and minor chords with roots only a half-step away being played at the same time provide a very uneasy and inconsistent context in which the song is framed. The pianist playing two different chords on top of each other becomes a theme in this song. Measure 21 has these same two chords on top of each once again. The first measure of the third page features a D-flat major seventh chord in third inversion in the left hand, while in the right hand an A-flat major triad in second inversion with accompanying raised and diatonic second scale degree (the B-flat in A-flat minor) further throws off any sense of stability. Finally, the initial B-flat major and A minor chords reiterate in measure 38 and continue to the end of the song in measure 44. Why are the contradicting chords played against each other? Perhaps Rorem is implying the bittersweet feelings felt at the end of a war. Once a war is over, there is an underlying sense of stability and safety, but at the surface remains the destruction and rubble that needs to be rebuilt. This is suggested by the major chord underscoring a minor chord containing both raised and diatonic scale degrees.

The singer's part of the song is rhythmically simple but rather challenging, considering the intervals. The tessitura of the song lies at the lowest point of the set, with the singer starting on an A3 and spending much of the song floating around an E4. While the singer will ascend and descend throughout the song, climaxing on an E-flat5, he returns down to an A3 or G-sharp/G3. The song ends on a G3 on the word "grave." A low tessitura, and the consistent return to the realm of G3-A3, work as foreshadowing that almost everything having to do with the war has already been "buried in the grave."

Compared to McGrath's *Four Whitman Settings* and Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs*, Rorem's *War Scenes* is the most depraved setting of Whitman. The Weill set can feel a bit too lighthearted and abundant, with excited energy at times, while the McGrath often seems abstract and ethereal. *War Scenes* is a bitter reminder that war is dirty, that war destroys more than what we can see on the surface. To sing or listen to *War Scenes* is to entirely void yourself of any emotions that could be positive and uplifting and to fill yourself with the somber realities of human suffering.

Ethan McGrath

Ethan McGrath is a contemporary composer living in the area of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Born in Collegedale, Tennessee in 1990, McGrath began his musical studies by taking piano lessons at the age of nine. He was homeschooled and was therefore freer to practice music than many children his age and spent most of his time at the piano. Taking to composition at the age of fourteen, McGrath would go on to study composition in college. He holds degrees from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and the University of Cambridge. Primarily known for his choral compositions, McGrath's music has been performed around the world, from England to Poland and Taiwan. McGrath is not only a choral composer but has composed orchestral and chamber works, solo piano music, and art songs. McGrath's *Four Whitman Settings* (2020) were inspired by Thomas Hampson and his *Song of America* (2005) album. It was this album that introduced McGrath to composers like John Alden, Ned Rorem, Charles Ives, and Aaron Copland. Notably, the record includes "Dirge for Two Veterans" from Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs*. *Song of America* also introduced McGrath to Walt Whitman (six out of the twenty songs on the record are set to Whitman texts). On why he chose to set Whitman to song, McGrath states:

As a teenager, I had become obsessed with the idea of writing music that sounded "American," convinced that I should be following in the footsteps of people like Copland and Ives in that regard. I saw the unique Americanness of Whitman's brash aesthetic as the poetic counterpart to what

I wanted to achieve musically at the time, so I was drawn to setting his works to music.
 (Ethan McGrath, email correspondence with author, March 11, 2022: see Appendix)

The Whitman songs that would come to comprise *Four Whitman Settings* were first drafted around 2006 or 2007 when the composer was around sixteen or seventeen years old. A set of four songs, *Four Whitman Settings* is based on texts from two poetic books within *Leaves of Grass*. The set can thus divide in half with the text of the first two songs coming from *Drum-Taps* and the text of the last two songs coming from *Memories of President Lincoln*. At first abandoning the songs, McGrath came back to revisit and rework the songs in 2019 after having more education in composition. Finished in 2020, *Four Whitman Settings* was first performed later that year by baritone Ted Long, a friend of the composer, at an Abraham Lincoln-themed event organized by McGrath.

Look down fair moon

Ethan McGrath has a very soft style of composition that floats across the score. The opening song of *Four Whitman Settings*, “Look down fair moon” begins with a short opening theme in the piano followed by the plodding quarter notes which accompany the voice for the duration of the song. One of the shorter works from Whitman’s *Drum-Taps*, “Look Down Fair Moon” consists of only four lines of text. With only two pages of music, “Look down fair moon” is a relatively short song. McGrath takes the four lines of text and separates them into pairs, with two lines of text on each page. Each pairing inhabits its own page of the song, seventeen and eighteen measures each, separated by three measures of music in the piano part which echo the initial three measures of the

song. In this way, McGrath separates the verses as two distinct thoughts with a hard reset in between.

McGrath employs text painting throughout the song. Just as the moon looks down and bathes the world in its light, so does the melody fall from above, coming to rest about an octave lower than where it started. In the first section, the highest pitch for the singer is a D5 in measure 12, which first occurs on the initial words “look down.” The next D5 occurs in the line “pour softly down...” on the initial syllable of “softly.” Each occurrence of the D5 is followed by the descent of a fifth to a G4. This gentle descent represents the downpouring of the moons soft white light upon the landscape. What the moon’s reflection lands on, however, is not gentle. Revealing “faces ghastly, swollen, purple . . .” the peaceful light of the moon finds itself discordant with the scenes of horror it unveils. This discord is present in the music with the singer landing on and staying near a D-flat4, a major seventh distant from the previous D5 which started the song for the singer.

Beginning in measure 22, the meter changes six times within seven measures. This has the effect of distorting and concealing the beat along with stretching and compressing the phrasing into a more surreal state of dreaming or nostalgia which is more ethereal than tangible. While this is an effect of the compositional device used, McGrath’s intention in changing meter so often was to “accommodate the accents of the text, which would have been difficult to do properly if it was just in 4/4 the whole time” (Ethan McGrath, email correspondence with author, March 11, 2022). McGrath’s attention to detail when it comes to accommodating the “accent” of the text becomes a

recurring theme seen in every song. Often, meters and rhythmic patterns will change suddenly to allow for the text to flow naturally.

As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods

Set in 4/4 time with at a tempo that is to be played “wistfully” at 92 beats per minute, this is the most lyric song of *Four Whitman Settings*. Apart from a low A3, “As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods” sits in a comfortable tessitura for the baritone, with much of the song spent around the area of an A4. Vocally pleasant to sing, the song features little difficulty for the singer. The most interesting attributes of “As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods” are the poetic asides and the accompaniment, which changes depending on the perspective of the character in the poetry. Throughout the entirety of *Four Whitman Settings*, McGrath maintains the integrity of each Whitman poem that he uses. Rorem and Weill both heavily edit the texts of whichever Whitman excerpt they are dealing with, whereas McGrath uses the text in its entirety. In his words on the subject, McGrath writes:

It is important to me to be as faithful to the poet as possible, so I usually avoid cutting anything from the poem. When I do leave something out, it is usually when I am writing a strophic setting of a lengthy stanzaic poem, where some of the stanzas can be omitted for the sake of time, lest the setting become too boring/repetitive (since it generally takes a lot longer to sing a poem than to speak a poem).
(Ethan McGrath, email correspondence with author, March 11, 2022)

Whitman's “As Toilsome I Wander'd Virginia's Woods” contains two poetic asides.

They are both in the first and second stanzas and read:

As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods,
To the music of rustling leaves kick'd by my feet, (for 'twas
autumn,)

I mark'd at the foot of a tree the grave of a soldier;
 Mortally wounded he and buried on the retreat, (easily all could I
 understand,) (Whitman 1882, 240)

As asides, the two phrases contained within parentheses are not necessary for the understanding of the previous phrase. Instead, they take the narrator out of the immediate period of reflection to clarify something outside of the initial flashback. Compositionally, McGrath maintains the idea that these asides are to be understood as separate ideas. Each aside moves its way down the staff, floating around E4, C4, and landing on B-flat3. These are some of the lowest pitches for the singer in the song, and of the phrases that each aside ends. These low endings to the vocal melody give a sense of finality to the asides as they wrap up the preceding lines of poetry.

During these first two stanzas, the piano accompaniment stays relatively static, comprised mostly of chords of whole- and half-note durations. The first stylistic change appears in measure 32. Here, the accompaniment becomes more martial with the use of a syncopated rhythm. The music seems to speed up for a moment to reflect the bustle of daily life and is only slowed down once the singer is reminded of the sign placed above the grave. The music reaches its slowest moments around the inscription “bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrade” to emphasize this text. McGrath stretches out these seven words over five measures of music, giving each descriptive word at least two beats. The accompaniment picks up once again at “long, long I muse, then on my way go wandering.” The accompaniment plays quick and sweeping arpeggiated chords which accelerate through the implementation of triplets as the time described in the text progresses. Representing the passage of time, this change in the accompaniment compliments the vocal line. Finally, the accompaniment returns to the familiar chords of

half- and whole-note durations as seen in the beginning of the piece to end it. Most interestingly in this final section, the accompaniment is suspended, sustaining one chord as the singers sing the inscription.

Hush'd be the camps to-day

The final two pieces in *Four Whitman Settings* are about the death of President Abraham Lincoln. The first of these two songs, “Hush'd be the camps to-day,” is a funeral dirge and march for Lincoln, and the last song “This dust was once the man” is a shorter reflection on the life and accomplishment of Lincoln.

“Hush'd be the camps to-day” is the most rhythmically interesting of the *Four Whitman Settings*. In it, McGrath heavily syncopates the vocal line, starting almost every vocal phrase on the second eighth note of beat one. There are only three phrases in the song that start on a strong beat. McGrath's reason for writing most of the phrases like this was to avoid emphasizing certain words. The song is set in the context of a funeral march and McGrath was trying to replicate a march cadence, which launches off the strong foot—or in this case the strong beat. In describing “Hush'd be the camps to-day,” McGrath writes:

This song is in a simple ABA form, plus a brief introduction that foreshadows the B section—a favorite compositional device of mine. The A sections are rather grim, both in terms of the text and in the dirge-like manner in which I set it to music. But the words “Sing, poet, in our name, / sing of the love we bore him” suggested different music; the poem becomes more bittersweet, more sentimental even, and the dirge idea does not really fit that. So in the B section of my song there is no strong sense of a beat, and the flitting, slightly playful piano part suggests, perhaps, the idea of birdsong—which I actually got from a different Whitman poem, “When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,” in which the speaker addresses a bird, telling the

bird to sing (“Sing on there in the swamp”), the implication being that the bird’s singing gives voice to the sorrow that the speaker feels (“I understand you”).
(Ethan McGrath, email correspondence with author, March 11, 2022)

Throughout the song, McGrath makes liberal use of triplets, dotted rhythms, various syncopations, and different time signatures. Measures 26 through 39 see the piece leave the initial 4/4 time and then trade back and forth between 12/8 and 9/8. This is the beginning of the B section, where the perspective shifts from the narrator to the funeral marchers. Here the marchers are directly charging the poet to sing “of the love we bore him...” The vocal line in this middle section feels more lyrical and flightier, like the bird song described by McGrath with its rapid eighth-note-fueled line which ebbs and flows up and down the staff.

The final section of the song returns to the perspective of the singer-poet as he watches the marchers “in vault the coffin” and “close the doors of earth upon” President Lincoln. Musically, this final section is like the first section of the song, with the plodding quarter-note chords in the accompaniment and a similar vocal line. The main difference is the sustained high F5 which lasts for five beats and functions as the climax of the song, and the singer poet’s reflection on the charge of the marches to “sing in our name” as the final thought of the song.

This dust was once the man

“This dust was once the man” is musically the simplest song of *Four Whitman Settings*. Compared to his other songs in the set, McGrath has vastly reduced the accompaniment and the vocal line in their scope and complexity. The most comparable song in *Four Whitman Settings* to “This dust was once the man” is “Look down fair

moon.” McGrath frames his set within the confines of a beginning and ending song which are short pieces, consisting of thirty-five measures (“Look down fair moon) and twenty-nine measures (“This dust was once the man”). Also like “Look down fair moon,” “This dust was once the man” contains four lines of poetry within *Leaves of Grass*. In contrast to “Look down fair moon,” the final song contains much less music in the piano accompaniment. Whereas “Look down fair moon” has a chord on just about every beat of the song, “This dust was once the man” has many measures that are much more rhythmically empty than the first song.

The vocal line in “This dust was once the man” lies in a higher tessitura than the other songs of *Four Whitman Settings*, with several high E5s. The final E5 of the song on the first syllable of “union” (from the line “was saved the union of these States”) serves as the climax for the song and for the broader set as a whole. Vocally, this song—like the rest of the set—is not difficult to sing.

The musical simplicity of “This dust was once the man” works well with the text. In stating that the simple dust was once a great man who did something that lasts long after he is turned to dust, Whitman accurately describes Lincoln’s impact on American and world history. By writing a song with simpler musical content than the rest of the set, McGrath highlights the simplicity and plainness of the dust described. The song drives towards the climactic realization that the Union has been saved by the man who was once this dust. Interestingly, the final five measures in the accompaniment echo the last phrase of the singer on the words “Was saved the Union of these States.” This serves as an effect to bring forth the echo of history reflecting the accomplishment of President Lincoln’s ultimate victory in the American Civil War.

Compared to Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs* and Rorem's *War Scenes*, McGrath's *Four Whitman Settings* is an easier set for singer and pianist to perform. Unlike Weill's *Four Walt Whitman Songs*, *Four Whitman Settings* has a comfortable tessitura for the baritone and is much easier to sing. Rhythmically, *Four Whitman Settings* is much easier to execute than *War Scenes* for both pianist and singer. When these three sets are programmed together on a recital, *Four Whitman Settings* is a relaxing vocal break compared to the Rorem and Weill sets. This is not to say that *Four Whitman Settings* are easy to perform. With much longer phrases than *War Scenes* or *Four Walt Whitman Songs*, the difficulty found in this McGrath set can be found in the lyricism and textual focus. In his compositions, McGrath makes sure to highlight, emphasize, draw out, and stress the text often in longer sustained phrases. In this way, the songs have their own degree of difficulty for the singer which places them on equal footing with the songs of *War Scenes* and *Four Walt Whitman Settings*.

Conclusion

While warfare has evolved since the American Civil War, the emotional toll of war on its victims is the same today as it was over 150 years ago. It is through a mutual understanding of emotions that modern people can connect to every human who has and will ever live. Walt Whitman provides a bridge to the emotional state of the people who were the victims of the American Civil War, and for that reason he is an invaluable resource. The emotional content of his works when set to music is elevated and highlighted, and it is for these reasons that I selected his poetry for this project.

The songs in this recital have been shown through a combination of formal analysis, textual analysis, and biographical information to elevate the emotional content of Walt Whitman's poetry and prose. Whitman sought to write for the America that he experienced, but also the America he wished he could see. To define America in poetry—reflecting all her virtues, values, and vices—is a monumental task, but Walt Whitman rose to exceed that task. The songs of Kurt Weill, Ned Rorem, and Ethan McGrath help to amplify different aspects of Whitman's understanding of the Civil War. As a proud immigrant, Kurt Weill composed *Four Walt Whitman Songs* to rally a nation under attack around the flag. Ned Rorem perceived the loss of life in Vietnam as a meaningless human tragedy for all and thus sought to bring awareness to the tragedy of war by composing *War Scenes*. Seeking to find an American sound while living amongst several Civil War battlefields, Ethan McGrath's understanding of the American sound could not help but be

influenced by the Civil War and its greatest poet. The jingoistic patriot Kurt Weill, the anti-war humanitarian Ned Rorem, and the Americana inquirer Ethan McGrath all lived within the Walt Whitman who wrote through these contradictions to portray a nation that in many ways has always been full of contradictions. If one man could embody the many competing and common values of the United States of America during the Civil War period, that man would be Walt Whitman—for, in many important ways, to know Whitman is to know America.

I heard that you ask'd for something to prove this puzzle the New World,
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,
Therefore I send you my poems that you may behold in them what you wanted.

“To Foreign Lands” from *Inscriptions*

Walt Whitman

Appendix

The following is an interview of Ethan McGrath conducted by the author over email. The author's remarks are italicized whereas McGrath's are not. McGrath replied to the author with his responses on March 11, 2022.

When and where were you born?

1990 in Collegedale, TN.

When did you start studying music?

I started piano lessons at age 9.

What was your early musical education like?

I was homeschooled and was given a lot of time to pursue my interest in music. This involved a lot of listening to music, a lot of reading about composers, and hours and hours spent at the piano—all self-inflicted, because I had such a passion for it. My mom, after seeing how serious I was about all this, signed me up for piano lessons with Bruce Ashton at Southern Adventist University.

What colleges/universities have you studied at and when did you graduate/complete each program?

I spent my freshmen and sophomore years at Southern Adventist University, where I studied organ with Judy Glass. I transferred to UT Chattanooga where I finished my bachelor's in composition under Jonathan McNair in 2014. I did my masters in Choral Studies at the University Cambridge, where I graduated in 2018.

Who are and have been your major musical mentors?

In addition to the teachers mentioned above:
Sin-Hsing Tsai, my piano professor at UTC. Alice Parker, a composer. I have studied with Stephen Layton, one of my conducting teachers in Cambridge.

How long have you been composing?

Since I was 14 years old.

What was your first piece to be published?

“When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d” for SATB choir. Published by Earthsongs Choral Music in 2010.

Where would you like to see your compositional career take you?

I would like to get to the point where most of my income can come from composition, freeing me to spend more time on it. At this point my income is mostly from playing organ at a church and miscellaneous gigs as a pianist.

I believe that you started out as a keyboardist, what drove you towards choral conducting and composition?

I always liked the idea of composing, but did not work up enough courage to do it until the age of 14 or so, shortly after I began taking piano lessons from Bruce Ashton, the former piano professor at Southern Adventist University. Dr. Ashton is also a composer and it was through his influence that I became a composer as well.

I initially became interested in choral music around the same time, when I became the accompanist for the inSpirit Men’s Chorus, a community group based in Collegedale, TN. That constituted my first significant exposure to choral music, and it set me on a path to composing a lot of choral music ever since.

How do you approach composition?

When it is vocal music, I start with a text—usually a poem, as in the case of these songs. I get to know the text very well, and often the text will suggest musical ideas to me—i.e. the words will suggest a certain rhythm or a certain rise and fall in their intensity. Sometimes I sit at the piano with the words in front of me and improvise whatever music comes to mind, making a note of which ideas I like as I go along. Other times I start away from the piano; I just recite the words to myself and think up musical ideas for them in my head, sometimes singing, humming, or whistling to myself, and again making a note (often just a mental note) of the ideas that I like. And thus the composition gradually takes shape. Sometimes I have a pretty clear idea of how the whole composition will go before I write anything down; other times writing down ideas is part of the process of discovering how the finished piece will go. In any case, I usually write down a rough

draft of the music on paper before transferring it into the computer and making final edits.

I am mostly familiar with your choral music, does your approach towards composition change when applied to art song and if so, how?

What I said above still applies, but one difference is that the piano tends to take a more prominent role in my art songs than in my choral music. This varies from composition to composition, but sometimes my choral music does not have a piano part at all, and when it does, the piano is usually in an accompanying role. With art songs, though, I think of them more like chamber music; the voice and the piano are in a sort of intimate dialog with one another, they are equal players in the game, so to speak, rather than the piano just playing chords or arpeggios to support the singer.

I think “intimate” really is the key word. Choral music is usually intended for relatively large venues, whether church or concert hall, but I think of art song as something to be performed in a small space—a drawing room, a small recital hall, etc. That is not how it always is presented in practice, but that, at least, is the tradition of art song. As such, there is a lot of subtlety to it, and a greater sense of personal expression, rather than of collective spirit (which we have more of in choral music).

*When did you decide to write *Four Whitman Settings*?*

I originally wrote them as standalone songs when I was 16 or 17 years old. Since I did not have much of a performance outlet at the time, and since, after I got a bit of college education under my belt, I decided that my early work was “terrible,” these songs collected dust for over 10 years. In 2019, I went back to the songs and decided I could revise them and put them together into a set.

What inspired you to write this set?

I was inspired largely by baritone Thomas Hampson’s Song of America project. It had a big impact on me as a teenager, when I first wrote these songs. I had come across some of Hampson’s recordings of American art songs, and this was my first exposure to songs by the likes of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, John Alden Carpenter, Ned Rorem, and many other American composers. I discovered that this was an art form I resonated with very deeply.

What was your introduction to Walt Whitman and what is it about his writing that compelled you to set his works?

I was also introduced to Whitman at the same time through Hampson's work. He recorded a whole disc of Whitman settings by various composers, entitled *To the Soul*. Whitman quickly became my favorite poet. As a teenager, I had become obsessed with the idea of writing music that sounded "American," convinced that I should be following in the footsteps of people like Copland and Ives in that regard. I saw the unique Americanness of Whitman's brash aesthetic as the poetic counterpart to what I wanted to achieve musically at the time, so I was drawn to setting his works to music.

The set is dedicated to Ted Long. Who is Ted Long and what is your relationship to him? Why was this set dedicated to him?

Ted Long is a baritone based in Dalton, GA. He and I have performed together a few times. Though these songs were originally written before I met Ted, I revised them and put them all together as a set for Ted to sing at an event I organized in 2020.

When composing the set, did you compose with a specific singer in mind? If so, who was the singer?

See above.

In general, how do you approach writing for solo voice?

Refer to my answers to questions 4 and 5, as most of that is applicable here. With all the vocal music I write I do quite a bit of singing in the composition process, to get a feel for what seems most natural in the voice. When writing for solo voice, if I am writing for an advanced singer, I usually feel freer to write things that are a bit more virtuosic/demanding than what I might write for a choir.

*What version of *Leaves of Grass* did you take your excerpts from?*

This is the note included in the edition I have: "The text of the poetry is that of the Inclusive Edition, itself based upon the last edition which Whitman revised."

Why did you choose the poems that you did?

I was quite interested in Civil War history as a teen, so Whitman's poems about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln were of particular interest to me at the time.

What challenged you about writing this set?

I do not remember many details about the composition process, as my original versions of these songs are so old. I will say that Whitman, with his sprawling free verse, can be hard to set to music, as he sometimes writes very long sentences, interrupted by parenthetical statements and such. This makes it difficult to decide where to start or end a musical phrase, how to come to a cadence mid-sentence without making it sound like the end of the sentence, etc. And with free verse, the opportunities to repeat musical material are not obvious or simple to execute, unlike setting metered, stanzaic poems to music. While it is usually easy enough to communicate the message of a Whitman poem when speaking it, to convey that message through music without the listener getting a bit lost is hard to do—partly because it usually takes much longer to sing something than it does to speak it. This is one of the reasons why I try to write things in something close to speech rhythm as a default, breaking this rule to elongate particularly meaningful words.

What was the compositional timeline of this set?

As I said above, I wrote these songs in 2006-2007 and then revised them in 2019.

Would you return to Whitman for more material in the future, or are you currently writing or planning to write more Whitman songs?

Yes, I am sure I will write more Whitman settings at some point, though I do not have any concrete plans at present.

You have chosen to use the poems in their entirety. The other composers who I am studying for this project (Ned Rorem and Kurt Weill) both omitted sections of the text from the works that they set. What drove the choice to include the entirety of the excerpted work? I am thinking especially of the poetic asides that are in parenthesis featured in “As toilsome I wander’d Virginia’s woods.”

It is important to me to be as faithful to the poet as possible, so I usually avoid cutting anything from the poem. When I do leave something out, it is usually when I am writing a strophic setting of a lengthy stanzaic poem, where some of the stanzas can be omitted for the sake of time, lest the setting become too boring/repetitive (since it generally takes a lot longer to sing a poem than to speak a poem).

Were your poems selected and ordered the way they are for any particular reason? The final song makes total sense to me as a closer, but do you intend a larger string or message to be pulled through each song as the set progresses?

I like how starting with “Look down fair moon” has a certain shock value, because the text describes such a horrific scene in a very eerie way, and I think it helps us to hear and feel the following poems more viscerally. “As toilsome I wander’d” then zooms in, as it were, and gives us the personal experience of one soldier. The final two songs are about Abraham Lincoln’s death, which happened just after the war ended, so from that standpoint it made sense to put them at the end. These poems are back to back in Leaves of Grass, so I left them that way.

Perhaps in addition to the previous question, did you intend to pick poems that all ended in the death or reflecting upon the death of someone/a group of people? And if so is that the connection between all the songs?

Yes, it was intentional, but it was not sparked by the death of anyone close to me. I just resonated with Whitman’s anti-war stance and was very moved by these poems, all of which have to do with the Civil War. The first two are from “Drumtaps,” the portion of Leaves of Grass dealing with the Civil War, and the last two are from “Memories of President Lincoln,” the portion of Leaves of Grass written in response to Lincoln’s assassination. I put these songs together in a set to be performed at a Lincoln-themed concert I organized in 2020.

The following questions will be specific to each song.

“Look down fair moon”

In the B section of this song, you change time signature every measure for 5, arguably 6, measures in a row. To me this has the effect of (a.) distorting/concealing the beat, and (b.) stretching/compressing the phrasing into a more surreal state of dreaming/nostalgia that is more ethereal than tangible. While this is what I have interpreted from the composition it may not be what you intended. What was your intention in using this device?

I had not thought of it in those terms exactly, but I think you are right about the effect it has. My primary reason for the meter changes was to accommodate the accents of the text, which would have been difficult to do properly if it was just in 4/4 the whole time.

“Hush’d be the camps to-day”

To me this song feels like dirge being sung as a march. The soldiers march along in a steady 4/4 towards the graveyard where they “invault” the coffin. The march is only interrupted by a change in subject as the poet is now addressed separately instead of addressing the body of soldiers. I believe that you are using the 12/8 and 9/8 with a swaying melody as a form of text painting on the word “sing.” Is this what you were going for in this section of the song?

Yes, that is the idea. This song is in a simple ABA form, plus a brief introduction that foreshadows the B section—a favorite compositional device of mine. The A sections are rather grim, both in terms of the text and in the dirge-like manner in which I set it to music. But the words “Sing, poet, in our name, / sing of the love we bore him” suggested different music; the poem becomes more bittersweet, more sentimental even, and the dirge idea does not really fit that. So in the B section of my song there is no strong sense of a beat, and the flitting, slightly playful piano part suggests, perhaps, the idea of birdsong—which I actually got from a different Whitman poem, “When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d,” in which the speaker addresses a bird, telling the bird to sing (“Sing on there in the swamp”), the implication being that the bird’s singing gives voice to the sorrow that the speaker feels (“I understand you”).

This song features a lot of phrases starting on the “and of one.” I like the given effect, but what was your reasoning for writing so many of the phrases this way?

I did not consciously set out to do this. Most of the words that find themselves on the “and” of beat 1 are words that I did not want to emphasize, and putting something right on beat 1 tends to put emphasis on it—which is why “hush’d” falls on beat 1, but the word “and” in the next measure comes after the beat. It really comes down to using whatever rhythm the words most naturally suggest to me.

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