

Anne L. Neikirk

YEARS LATER

**A Song Cycle
for Mezzo Soprano and
String Quartet**

**Text by
Penelope Cray**

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www.annieneikirk.com

YEARS LATER

Text

Field of eyes wide

What is it about these daisies? No matter
how many I pick, there are the same number, none

missing from the place I plunder, my pains
counted on their petals. The uncertainty here

has not to do with love, as most assume,
but how a yellow flower, a sturdy stem, can hide

its dark center, tiny from the vantage-point of normal
observation but cavernous up close, the entire field

a backdrop to its bees, haunches obliterated
by pollen, fragrant fire. I've noted in times of storm

the daisies don't close over, the sun somehow
earns their faith, each a spindled missive

concerned only with what it bears, its wide eye
stretched so the iris becomes the aperture inside.

Meander

From the East gangs of the dead come

Sounds in the West when darkness comes

Winding through the orchard relentless

Doors slammed the sky witless

Myna birds yellow beaked sharp tongued

Glass confused by pointed diamond

Snatching words like nesting material

The narrow river the loosening reel

The unrecovered

Before the storm, I saw our old backyard.
I'd been preparing to count the oranges when it appeared
and I ran to it, calling for you.
But your swing was empty and I was left
to remember how you rose in the air, legs reaching
for the gum tree, its long leaves flipping,
how you pumped until you reached them,
then stopped and shut your eyes.

The rain was immediate, all light
gone. I ran toward the orange trees,
still there, and I loved them
flashing as if by strobe light, orange and green.
I felt myself inside the rain
beating on my field, inside my pretty day's eyes
gleaming up, still faithful
as if suns needed stars of their own.

Piece of the parcel

For every flower, a bumblebee.
Hundreds maybe thousands teeming,
though I never found one dead, not one
carcass nestled in the short grass.
I've looked.

And tested. I've trapped one
in my hands, pressed it flat—
to no effect. I wasn't stung,
just left empty handed, a bee
looping through the air.

The wind buffets, the bees
scrawl above the field,
a matrix of hum and bumbling,
building yellow bundles
of pollen on their legs.

I've come back empty
from my searches for nests.
It seems they work for nothing,
no need to die for being
what they are.

Point in the distance

The birds get at the bees'
being, how their wings mimic stone
slivers, patterned after the age of stones: *these beings*
are old as stone! the birds exclaim, whirling
around the field, each one trained on a bee's path.

Even so, I've never seen a mouth opening, nor a bee
swerving for cover: rather, perfect synchronicity
of intent to evince the nature of this place,
a sense of fitting somewhere inside a bee-
line traced end to end.

Gangrel

I crouch inside the storm,
 trees buckle at my back—
are they hollow? The squall and you are everywhere
 behind each tree, your tiny feet
quick inside the orchard.
 I hear you
make your spry approach, you scamper
 closer, closer still, then
the sound of you far off and moving
 closer, closer still
this through every darkness,
 end to end. I am
terrified to see you, terrified not
 to see you
lit by lightning, little girl,
 your dress pulled over your head.

Bowl

I pray for sorrow:
that it may be comforted,
made to understand itself,
its content worn
as a mantle in the world;
that it may grow quiet,
seek peaceful celebration
of what came before;
that it may find courage
to be itself merely
and not seek other notions;
finally, that in this form
it may come to you.

Pasturage

Bees are blurs in the green grass air
when you appear in the orange trees,
threading between the branches. Your orange hair,
atmosphere of light and twine, your dress
a flap for cradling tender oranges.

As you climb, small hands creep around
particular chosen fruit, five-fingered star-
fish clinging to dimpled skin. I can't see you
for the shapes you fit into; idea of a daughter,
you are never near enough. I stand in the center

of my field alone, cut off from you: natural
magnetic repulsion between the dead and the still
living. I can watch as long as I like, from here.
Move any closer and you turn from girl to whisper,
haze of pink and orange in the leaves. By the time

I reach the trees, a clot of myna birds disperse,
your name caught in their beaks.

From THE FARTHER AFIELD WE GO
by Penelope Cray

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Program Notes

Years Later is a song cycle for mezzo soprano and string quartet. The cycle grew out of a collaborative project with the composer's cousin, poet Penelope Cray and violist and musicologist Robert Fallon. Most of the poems are written in first person and are told from the point of view of a man who committed suicide. He observes the world in which he used to live, particularly the family he left behind and most especially his daughter. This morose narrative is starkly contrasted with vivid pastoral imagery throughout the poetry. The poems are peppered with myna birds, orange trees, bumblebees, daisies, rainstorms, wind, fields and swings. Most of the pieces present an unsettling juxtaposition between these bright, cheerful visions of nature and themes of death, isolation and sorrow. The first song I composed for the cycle, *Stone Slivers*, is for solo viola and mezzo soprano and was written for Dr. Fallon, a Messiaen scholar. Its harmonic language is derived from Messiaen's modes of limited transposition, which are non-traditional scales that are symmetrical and can be divided into identical subsets. The harmonic ambiguity afforded by the modes served me well in depicting the concurrently pastoral and morose themes in Cray's poetry. I saw a lot of potential in the pairing of this harmonic language with this poetry and thus expanded the work to a full eight-song cycle, half of which utilizes the full quartet while the other half features subsets of the quartet with the singer, another nod to Messiaen. The cycle utilizes four different modes, paired two at a time within the cycle.

Composer Biography

Anne Neikirk was born in 1983 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and grew up in Scotia, New York. She is currently working towards a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition at Temple University. She holds a Master of Music degree in composition from Bowling Green State University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from Hamilton College. She serves as a music theory and orchestration teaching assistant at Temple. Anne is an alumna of the Brevard Music Institute's composition program. She serves as the president of conTemplum, Temple University's student chapter of the Society of Composers, Inc. She is also a member of ASCAP, AMC and the American Composers Forum. For more information please visit www.annieneikirk.com.

For Penny

Field of eyes wide

Text by Penelope Cray

Anne Neikirk

Pastoral $\text{♩} = 76$

With exasperation
mf mf f

Mezzo-soprano
What is it a-bout these dai - sies? —

pizz. *Tauntingly*
mf *mp* *p* *mf*

Violin I
mf *pizz.* *mp* *p* *mf*

Violin II
mf *pizz.* *mp* *p* *mf*

Viola
mf *pizz.* *mp* *p* *mf*

Violoncello
mf *p* *mp* *p* *mf*

7 *mp*

M-S.
No mat-ter how ma - ny I pick, there are the

Vln. I
p *mf*

Vln. II
p *mf*

Vla.
p *mf*

Vc.
f *p* *mp*

♩. = ♩ = 76

12 *mf* *p* *p* *mf*

M-S. same num - ber, none mis - sing from the

Vln. I *p* *pp*

Vln. II *p* *pp*

Vla. *p* *pp*

Vc. *mf* *p* *pp*

16 *f*

M-S. place I plun - der my pains coun - ted on their

Vln. I *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

Vln. II *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp*

Vla. *mp* *mf* *f* *mp* *p*

Vc. *mp* *mf* *f* *mp* *mp*

arco

20 *p*

M.S. pe - tals

Vln. I *mp p arco mf f mp f*

Vln. II *p mf f mp*

Vla. *mp p mp f mp*

Vc. *arco p f*

25 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 76$ with unease *mf*

M.S. The un - cer-tain-ty here has not to

Vln. I *tr mp p*

Vln. II *f mp p*

Vla. *f p mp p*

Vc. *tr mp p*

31 *mp* $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 76$ *mf*

M-S. do with love, as most as-sume, but how a yel - low flo - wer,

Vln. I *mp* *mf* *mp*

Vln. II *mp* *mf* *p* *mf*

Vla. *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *mf* *mp* *mf*

poco pont.

poco pont.

poco pont.

38 *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

M-S. a stur - dy stem, can hide its dark cen - ter,

Vln. I *p* *mf* *ord.*

Vln. II *mf* *p* *mf* *ord.*

Vla. *mf* *mf* *ord.*

Vc. *mf* *pp* *mf* *mf*

ord.

46 *mp*

M.-S. ti - ny from the

Vln. I *p* *mf* *p* *fp*

Vln. II *p* *mf* *p* *fp*

Vla. *p* *mf* *p* *fp* *mp*

ord.

Vc. *p* *mf* *p* *fp*

54 *mf* *f* *mp*

M.-S. van-tage-point of nor-mal ob-ser - va - tion but ca - ver-nous up close,

Vln. I *mp* *pp* *f* *mf*

Vln. II *mp* *f* *mf*

Vla. *pp* *f* *mf*

Vc. *mp* *pp* *p* *f* *mf*

61

M-S. *f* *ff* *mp* *tr*

the en - tire field a back-drop to its bees

Vln. I *p* *f*

Vln. II *p* *f* *mp* *mf*

Vla. *p* *f* *mp*

Vc. *p* *f*

69

M-S. *f*

Haun-ches o-bli-te-ra-ted by pol - len, frag - rant fire

Vln. I *mp* *mf* *p* *ff*

Vln. II *mp* *p* *ff*

Vla. *mf* *mp* *pizz* *ff*

Vc. *mp* *pizz* *arco* *ff*

74

M.S.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

arco

tr

molto dim.

fp sfz

sfz

molto dim.

fp sfz

molto dim.

sfz

78 *Introspectively p*

M.S.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf *mp* *mf*

I've no - ted_ in times of storm, the dai-sies don't close o - ver_

III *pp*

IV *pp*

IV *pp*

non vib.

ord.

non vib.

ord.

ord.

pizz

pp *mp* *pp*

p

84 *f* *mp* $\text{♪} = \text{♪}$

M-S. — the sun — some-how earns their faith

Vln. I *espressivo* *f* *mp* *mf*

Vln. II *espressivo* *f* *mp* *f*

Vla. ord. *espressivo* pizz arco *f* *mp* *f*

Vc. *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

91 *mp* *f*

M-S. each a spindled missive — con - cerned on-ly with what it bears,

Vln. I *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p* *mf* *mp*

Vc. *mf* *mp* *p*

97 *mf*

M-S. *mf*
its wide eye stretched so the i - ris be -

Vln. I *p* *mf*

Vln. II *mf* *p* *mf*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *mf* *mp* *p*

102 *p* *mp* *pp* *n*

M-S. *p* *mp* *pp* *n*
comes the a - per - ture in - side

Vln. I *p* *pp* *mp*

Vln. II *p* *pp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p* *pp* *mf*

Vc. *p* *pp*

arco

108

M-S.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf

f

ff

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for measures 108 to 113. The M-S. part consists of six whole rests. Vln. I and Vln. II play a melodic line of six half notes: G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5. Vln. I starts with a dynamic of *f* and Vln. II with *f*. Both reach *ff* by measure 113. The Vla. part plays a melodic line of six half notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4. It starts with a dynamic of *f* and reaches *ff* by measure 113. The Vc. part plays a melodic line of six half notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3. It starts with a dynamic of *mf* and reaches *ff* by measure 113. All parts have a crescendo hairpin from measure 110 to 113. The Vln. I part has a flat accidental on the first measure of the second staff.

Pasturage

Text by Penelope Cray

Anne Neikirk

Mezzo-soprano $\text{♩} = 60$ *mf*

Violin I *fp* *f* *mp* *pizz*

Violin II *fp* *f* *mp* *p gliss.* *arco*

Viola *fp* *f* *mp* *p gliss.*

Violoncello *fp* *fp* *f* *mp*

Bees are blurs in the green grass air

M-S. *mp* *f*

when you ap-pear in the orange trees,

Vln. I *arco* *p gliss.* *mf* *p*³

Vln. II *gliss.* *mf* *p*³

Vla. *gliss.* *mf* *p*³

Vc. *p gliss.* *mf* *p*

7

M.S. *mf* *f* *mp*
 thread-ing be - tween the bran - ches. Your

Vln. I *mp* *mf*

Vln. II *mf* *p* *mf*

Vla. *mf* *p* *mf*

Vc. *mf* *p* *mf*

10

M.S. *mf* *mp* *mf* *p*
 o-range hair, at mo-sphere of light and twine, your dress a flap for crad-ling ten-der o - ranges.

Vln. I *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *subp*

Vln. II *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *subp*

Vla. *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *subp*

Vc. *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *subp*

15

M-S. *f*
As_ you_ climb, small

Vln. I *f* *p*

Vln. II *f* *p*

Vla. *f* *p*

Vc. *f* *p*

20

M-S. *mp*
hands creep a-round par - ti - cu - lar cho - sen fruit,

Vln. I *gliss.* *mp* *p* *pizz.*

Vln. II *gliss.* *mp* *p* *pizz.*

Vla. *gliss.* *pizz.* *arco* (♯)

Vc. *pizz.*

23

M-S. *five-fin-gered star - fish cling-ing to dim - pled skin.*

Vln. I *arco*

Vln. II *arco*

Vla. *pizz*

Vc. *arco*

26 *With frustration f* *mf*

M-S. *I can't see you _____ for the shapes you fit in- to; _____ i - dea of a daugh ter _____*

Vln. I *f* *p* *mf*

Vln. II *f* *p* *f*

Vla. *arco f* *p* *mf* *f*

Vc. *f* *p* *mf*

31 *ff* *mf*

M-S. — you are ne-ver near e- nough. — I stand in the cen- ter —

Vln. I *ff* *mp*

Vln. II *ff* *mp*

Vla. *ff* *mp*

Vc. *f* *ff* *p*

arco

35 *p* *mf*

M-S. — of my field a-lone, cut_ off from you: *♩ = ♩.*

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p* *mp*

Vla. *pp* *mp*

Vc. *pp* *mf*

sul pont

ord.

41 *f* *mp*

M-S. nat-'ral mag-ne-tic re - pul - sion _____ bet-ween the dead _____ and the still li- ving _____

Vln. I *mf* *pp*

Vln. II *mf* *pp*

Vla. *mf* *mp* *p*

Vc. *mp* *p*

47 *mp* *mf* *mp*

M-S. I can watch as long as I like from here _____ move an - y _____

Vln. I *mp* *mf* *p*

Vln. II *mp* *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc.

53

M-S. *mf* *pp* *mp*

clo - ser___ and you turn from girl to whis - per, haze of pink and orange in the

Vln. I *pp*

Vln. II *mf* *p*

Vla. *p* *pp* *mf*

Vc. *p* *pp*

59

M-S. *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

leaves. By_ the_ time_ I_ reach the_ trees_ a_ clot of

Vln. I *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

Vln. II *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

Vla. *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

Vc. *f* *mp* *mf* *mp*

64 *f* *mf* *f*

M-S. *tr*
my - na birds dis-perse, your_ name caught in their

Vln. I *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *f* *mp*
tr *gliss.* *tr*

Vln. II *p* *mf* *f* *mp*
gliss. *gliss.*

Vla. *p* *mf* *f* *mp*
gliss. *gliss.*

Vc. *f* *p gliss.* *mp* *mf*

68 *mp*

M-S. beaks

Vln. I *p* *f* *pp*

Vln. II *p* *f* *pp*

Vla. *p* *f* *pp*

Vc. *p* *f* *pp*