

# Presence

Set to three poems by William Carlos Williams

David Harris

2010

Williams first spoke to me when, as a kid, I read “The Red Wheelbarrow” and was stricken by the power of his understanding of presence, my mind pausing over and over again from the manic dartings of tweenhood on my uncle’s back yard in Tennessee, one of the most beautiful pieces of farmland left in the country. After having read the bulk of his published works, the clarity of emotion he conjures through simple reflections on his surroundings and the potent nature of interconnection among all things continues to thrill my reading of his poetry. As with any setting of someone else’s text that I attempt, the goal of the music is to give his words a place to breathe in public and a chance to offer the listener a view into the emotional nature of my response to the text.

This being the case, the words are paramount. Appropriate text inflection/rhythm always supersedes other musical considerations (meter included). This, of course, must exist within musical phrases, etc., but textual communication must drive decisions as they drove the composition. Each poem is separated by double bar lines, but the piece as a whole contains no pauses.

Notes on “Song”: Chorus members need to be looking at the audience in order for the blinking effect to be most affective. The blink should be a simple, not overly exaggerated, rhythmic image. Singers should begin when their notes begin and then continue to blink throughout, even when they aren’t singing. Repeated syllables should take the shape of phonemes, particularly after the first few have been clearly pronounced. Find and exploit the charm in each syllable, consonant and vowel.

Notes to “The Mind Hesitant”: Many downbeats contain unimportant syllables, so the conductor’s gesture should be light in weight and fairly unobtrusive so as not to distract the choir from appropriate text inflection. The phrases, though static, should still emphasize important syllables and words and deemphasize unimportant ones. The spoken solo can remain within the choir, and simply add a textural and dramatic variance, acting the words more than adhering to the printed rhythm.



shell from the<sup>3</sup> sea

beau ty

beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

where she rules triumphant

till love has

beau ty

beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

13

had its way with  
ty beau - - - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

3

16

her  
beau - - - beau - - - ty - - - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty  
beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty beau - ty

19

scal - lops and Lion's paws scul - beau - - - - beau - - - -

scal - lops\* scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops\* scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops\* scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops\* scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

\*elide "s"es

scal - lops\* scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

21

ptured to the tune sculp - tured to ty beau - - - - ty beau - - - - beau - -

scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops

scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops scal - lops



*pp* un - dy - ing ac - cents ac - cents re - peat - ed<sup>3</sup> till  
 the ear the eye the ear the eye the ear the eye  
 scal-lops scal-lops scal-lops scal-lops  
 un - dy - ing  
 scal-lops scal-lops scal-lops scal-lops un - dy - ing  
 scal-lops scal-lops un - dy - ing

the ear and the eye lie down lie down to -  
 the ear the eye beau - ty the ear  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing



36

ge - ther in the same bed  
 beau - ty the eye beau - ty the ear beau - ty the eye  
 dy - ing un - dy - ing dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un -

40

*after note is released, walk back to the choir*

*stop blinking*

the same bed. the ear eye  
 un - dy - ing dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing  
 un - dy - ing un - dy - ing

*slight slowing into new tempo*

# Part II

## The Mind Hesitant

William Carlos Williams

David Harris

*♩=50* *mf*

Soprano  
Sometimes

Alto  
*mf*  
Some - times

Tenor  
*mf*  
(ing) Some - - times Some -

Bass  
*mf*  
Some - times

Spoken Solo

*stage whisper with a little tone and vocal inflection*  
*rhythm should be loosely interpreted and is less*  
*important than communication, don't overpower the ensemble*

4

Some - times

Some - times

Some - times

times Some

Some - times

Some - times a riv - er be - comes a riv - er in

Some - times a riv - er be - comes a riv - er in

Some - times a riv - er be - comes a riv - er in

Some - times a riv - er be - comes a riv - er in

Some - times

riv - er

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The Mind Hesitant

8

the mind or of the mind or in the mind

the mind or of the mind

the mind

or of the mind

12

Its banks snow the tide fall - ing a dark rim lies be - tween the wa -

Its banks snow the tide fall - ing a dark rim lies be - tween the wa -

Its banks snow the tide fall - ing a dark rim lies be - tween

Its banks snow the tide fall - ing a dark rim lies be - tween the

Its banks snow the tide wa -

The Mind Hesitant

16

ter and the shore and the mind he si-tant re-gard-ing the stream

ter and the mind he si-tant re-gard-ing the stream

and the mind he si-tant re-gard-ing the stream

wa and the mind he si-tant re-gard-ing the stream

ter and the shore the mind

20

sen - ses a like - ness which it will find: some -

sen - ses a like - ness which it will find: some -

sen - ses a like - ness which it will find: some -

sen - ses a like - ness which it will find: some -

sen - ses a like - ness will find some-thing of

24

Musical score for measures 24-27. It features four staves: three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and one bass staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 5/4. The lyrics are: "thing of white brows bound by a rib-bon of soot - y thought be - yond,". The lyrics are repeated on each of the three vocal staves.

bound by soot - ty thought be - yond

28

Musical score for measures 28-31. It features four staves: three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and one bass staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature changes from 5/4 to 3/2. The lyrics are: "yes well be - yond the mo - bile fea - tures of swift - ly Flow - ing". The lyrics are repeated on each of the three vocal staves.

swift - ly Flow - ing

## The Mind Hesitant

32

wat-ers, be - fore the tide will change and rise a - gain be - fore the

wat-ers, be - fore the tide will change and rise a - gain be -

wa-ters, be - fore the tide will change and rise a - gain be -

wa-ters, be - fore the tide will change and rise a - gain be - fore the

wat-ers, be - fore the tide will change and rise a - gain be - fore the

wat-ers, be - fore

the tide will

36

tide will change and rise a - gain may - be may - be may - be

fore the tide will change and rise may - be may - be may - be

fore the tide will change and rise may - be may - be may -

tide will change and rise a - gain may - be may - be

change and rise a - gain

change

and

rise

a - gain

40

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef and a key signature of three flats. The lyrics 'may - be' are written under the notes. The second system continues the vocal line with 'may - be may - be'. The third system features a piano part with a bass clef and a 'p' dynamic marking, with lyrics 'be may - be may - be may - be may - be may - be may - be'. The fourth system continues the piano part with 'may - be may - be'. The fifth system shows the piano accompaniment with 'the tide will change' written below the staff.

the tide will change

# Part III "Against the Sky"

William Carlos Williams

David Harris

♩=40

Soprano  
be

Alto  
*p*  
Let me not

Tenor  
(be) may

Bass

5

*mp*

*mp*  
not for - get

Let me not for - get

*mp*  
me not for - get

*mp*  
me not for - get

not for - get

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9 *mf*

let me not for - get at least, af - ter the three day

let me not for - get at least, af - ter the three day

let me not for - get at least, af - ter the three day

13

rain, beaks raised a face, the two star-lings

rain, beaks raised a - face, the two star-lings at and near the

rain, raised a - face, the two star-lings at and near the top

17

rain, beaks raised a - face, the two star-lings at and

top twig of the white oak dwarf - ing the barn

top twig of the white oak, dwarf - ing the barn, com -

twig of the white oak, dwarf fing - the barn

near the top of the oak, the barn

## Against the Sky

20

fo-liage, their bul - let heads bent back, their horn - <sup>3</sup>y lips

plet-ing the min-ute green of the scul-ptured fo-liage, their bul - let heads bent back, their horn - y lips

green of the scul-ptured fo-liage, their bul - let heads bent back, their horn - <sup>3</sup>y lips

fo-liage, their bul - let heads bent back, their horn - y lips

*slowing*

23

chat - <sup>3</sup>ter - ing to the mor - ning sun! Praise!

chat - ter - ing to the mor - ning sun! Praise!

chat - <sup>3</sup>ter - ing to the mor - ning sun! Praise!

chat - ter - ing to the mor - ning sun! Praise!

Against the Sky

25 *mf*

While the wraith - like war - blers all but un -

*mf*

war - - - blers all

*mf*

while the war - blers all but un -

*mf*

29

seen in loop - - - ing flight dart from pine to spruce,

but un - seen in loop - ing flight dart from pine to

seen loop - ing loop - ing flight dart pine to

wraith - like warbl - ers

33

all but un - seen loop - - - ing flight pine

spruce to pine south - - - ward! where new

spruce to pine south - ward! where new

spruce to pine south - ward! where new

to spruce south - - - ward! where ma -

## Against the Sky

37

ward! where new ma - ting warms the wit and cold does not strike for

ma - ting warms warms the wit and cold does not

mat - ing warms the wit and cold does not strike for

ting warms the wit and cold does

41

*fade out slowly*

re - spite cold does not cold does not stike for re - spite

strike for res - pite cold does not strike for

re - spite cold does not cold does not strike for re - spite

not strike and warms warms

During the fade out, at the individual's choosing, hold one of the notes within your line to the end. The final voices to sing the full line should be a few sopranos, the last one can finish on whatever note they choose. Fading voices on held notes can cut off before the final soprano ends, but a few voices should be in the air with the final note. This can last as long as the choir deems appropriate.