Three Sunsets for Soprano and Chamber Orchestra

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THREE SUNSETS FOR SOPRANO AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

by

Adam Matthew Reifsteck

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Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Adam Matthew Reifsteck
Published after his death in 1898, Lewis Carroll's poem *Three Sunsets* explores the deepest of human emotions—love and loss. These complex emotions are often difficult to describe in words, yet Carroll is able to draw the reader into this world and project the shared feelings of all humanity. Unlike romantic poetry of his time, this work by Carroll is written in third person as a retelling of the story between two star-crossed lovers. This perspective allows the reader to experience the emotions of both the woman and the man. While Carroll's poetry remains open to all explanations of meaning, the music I wrote to accompany this particular poem hopefully conveys the artistry, sensitivity, and emotional depth inherent in *Three Sunsets*. 
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ABOUT THE COMPOSITION

Published after his death in 1898, Lewis Carroll’s poem *Three Sunsets* explores the deepest of human emotions—love and loss. These complex emotions are often difficult to describe in words, yet Carroll is able to draw the reader into this world and project the shared feelings of all humanity. Unlike romantic poetry of his time, this work by Carroll is written in third person as a retelling of the story between two star-crossed lovers. This perspective allows the reader to experience the emotions of both the woman and the man.

All of us have experienced finding love, losing it, and hopefully finding it again. This is perhaps why one can easily relate to Carroll’s poem *Three Sunsets*. Our protagonist, however, never learns to let go of his lover when the relationship comes to an end. He lives out the rest of his life miserable and alone. So often we may want to hold on to people who were only meant to come into our lives for just a while in order to teach us something about ourselves. Perhaps the hardest thing to do in life is to let go and say goodbye. Letting go and saying goodbye is a necessity so we can grow and experience the fullness of life. Like the main character in the poem, there is the danger of being so consumed by our grief that we are unable to be open to the positive influences and new beginnings that can result from letting go.

When we enter into a relationship with someone, whether in friendship or love, we eventually have to come to realize that the relationship will ultimately end either in death or other circumstances. This concept seems to tantalize the man in *Three Sunsets*. Therefore, he is unable to go beyond himself and see the bigger picture. After many years, the woman passes the man on the same street corner where they had met to bid farewell. Consumed by his misery, he did not recognize his lost love. The woman did, however, and silently pitied him because he was not able to let go with love and experience the fullness of life as she did. The message Carroll perhaps is conveying is that we must be able to let go of our pain.
and suffering and see the world again through a child’s eye. This may be why Carroll was drawn to writing mostly children’s stories. He longed for that innocence. Life becomes complicated as we get older, but do we make it more complicated than it actually is?

In this musical setting, I centered the work on C-minor; a key that I feel is suiting for the text as it evokes both somberness and nostalgia. While the first 150 measures remains in C-minor, the addition of minor third relationships between chordal progressions becomes important as a text painting devise to establish the sense of uncertainty.

The first two stanzas of the poem begin in a hopeful tone, yet the music is in direct contrast to this sentiment. The opening falling fourth in the bass is the quintessential motive for sadness. Then, the voice enters with a minor sixth, the saddest of intervals. Although this may seem limiting in the ability to transform emotions, the dark quality of the music establishes the unrelenting sadness present in Carroll’s poem. While there are no earth-shattering concepts in the piece, I attempted to draw on the influence from the late Romantic Era as well as incorporate non-traditional chord progressions and melodic development.

The text more or less dictated the form of the composition. The meter of the poem remains consistent throughout in terms of the stressed syllables (8 8 8 8 8 8) which lends itself to be strophic. However, just as the story unfolds, the music unfolds: A A A A B B C C C C D D E A A C D A A with interludes sometimes separating each section before new material is added. Although sections are repeated, it is never orchestrated the same way twice. The form of the text mimics that of a nursery rhyme, but to set the music as such would be trite.

Shifts in tonal centers group the stanzas of the poem into distinct sections. Interestingly enough, the F chord serves as a pivot for all of the key modulations, just as time references (“so after many years”, “long time the memory”, etc.) serve as a literary devise to push the story in different directions and perspectives.
In performance of this work, conveying the text should be of the utmost importance. The work was conceived with coloratura soprano Jennifer "Dru" Rutledge in mind. Therefore, the text should be performed by the soprano very lyrically and dramatically. The dynamic indications are by no means exhaustive and balance between instruments should take precedence over the markings. The instruments should play cantabile for the majority of the work except at rehearsal F and J. These sections should be played lightly and detached. The composition should also be performed at the tempos indicated. From measures 496 to the end, however, it should not be done in strict tempo, but quasi recitative.

While Carroll's poetry remains open to all explanations of meaning, the music I wrote to accompany this particular poem hopefully conveys the artistry, sensitivity, and emotional depth inherent in *Three Sunsets*. 
INSTRUMENTATION

1 Flute/Piccolo
   1 Oboe
1 Clarinet in Bb
   1 Bassoon

2 Horns in F
1 Trumpet in Bb
   1 Trombone

1 Vibraphone
1 Glockenspiel
1 Set of Chimes
   1 Ocean Drum
1 Set of Wind Chimes
1 Suspended Cymbal
   1 Snare Drum
1 Tam-Tam or Gong pitched at C
2 Tom Toms (high and low)
2 Woodblocks or Temple Blocks
   2 Claves
   1 Cabasa
1 Large Bass Drum

   1 Piano

1 Soprano (preferably a coloratura)

5 Violin I
4 Violin II
3 Viola
2 Cello
1 Bass

Total Musicians: 28 (including conductor)

Approximate Duration: 23 minutes
Three Sunsets

He saw her once, and in the glance,
A moment's glance of meeting eyes,
His heart stood still in sudden trance:
He trembled with a sweet surprise—
All in the waning light she stood,
The star of perfect womanhood.

That summer-eve his heart was light:
With lighter step he trod the ground:
And life was fairer in his sight,
And music was in every sound:
He blessed the world where there could be
So beautiful a thing as she.

There once again, as evening fell
And stars were peering overhead,
Two lovers met to bid farewell:
The western sun gleamed faint and red,
Lost in a drift of purple cloud
That wrapped him like a funeral-shroud.

Long time the memory of that night—
The hand that clasped, the lips that kissed,
The form that faded from his sight
Slow sinking through the tearful mist—
In dreamy music seemed to roll
Through the dark chambers of his soul.

So after many years he came
A wanderer from a distant shore:
The street, the house, were still the same,
But those he sought were there no more:
His burning words, his hopes and fears,
Unheeded fell on alien ears.
Only the children from their play
Would pause the mournful tale to hear,
Shrinking in half-alarm away,
Or, step by step, would venture near
To touch with timid curious hands
That strange wild man from other lands.

He sat beside the busy street,
There, where he last had seen her face;
And thronging memories, bitter-sweet,
Seemed yet to haunt the ancient place:
Her footfall ever floated near:
Her voice was ever in his ear.

He sometimes, as the daylight waned
And evening mists began to roll,
In half-soliloquy complained
Of that black shadow on his soul.
And blindly fanned, with cruel care,
The ashes of a vain despair.

The summer fled: the lonely man
Still lingered out the lessening days:
Still, as the night drew on, would scan
Each passing face with closer gaze—
Till, sick at heart, he turned away,
And sighed "She will not come to-day."

So by degrees his spirit bent
To mock its own despairing cry,
In stern self-torture to invent
New luxuries of agony,
And people all the vacant space
With visions of her perfect face.

Then for a moment she was nigh,
He heard no step, but she was there;
As if an angel suddenly
Were bodied from the viewless air,
And all her fine ethereal frame
Should fade as swiftly as it came.

ix
So, half in fancy's sunny trance,
And half in misery's aching void,
With set and stony countenance
His bitter being he enjoyed,
And thrust for ever from his mind
The happiness he could not find.

As when the wretch, in lonely room,
To selfish death is madly hurled,
The glamour of that fatal fume
Shuts out the wholesome living world—
So all his manhood's strength and pride
One sickly dream had swept aside.

Yea, brother, and we passed him there,
But yesterday, in merry mood,
And marveled at the lordly air
That shamed his beggar's attitude,
Nor heeded that ourselves might be
Wretches as desperate as he;

Who let the thought of bliss denied
Make havoc of our life and powers,
And pine, in solitary pride,
For peace that never shall be ours,
Because we will not work and wait
In trustful patience for our fate.

And so it chanced once more that she
Came by the old familiar spot:
The face he would have died to see
Bent o'er him, and he knew it not;
Too rapt in selfish grief to hear,
Even when happiness was near.

And pity filled her gentle breast
For him that would not stir nor speak,
The dying crimson of the west,
That faintly tinged his haggard cheek,
Fell on her as she stood, and shed
A glory round the patient head.

x
Ah, let him wake! The moments fly:
This awful tryst may be the last,
And see, the tear, that dimmed her eye,
Had fallen on him ere she passed—
She passed: the crimson paled to gray:
And hope departed with the day.

The heavy hours of night went by,
And silence quickened into sound,
And light slid up the eastern sky,
And life began its daily round—
But light and life for him were fled:
His name was numbered with the dead.

Lewis Carroll, Nov. 1861.
Three Sunsets
for Soprano and Chamber Orchestra

Somberly $\frac{j}{80}$

Text by Lewis Carroll
Music by Adam Reifsteck
the western hemisphere blue and red, Lost in a drift of purple cloud - chanted on his like a funeral
in dream... num... that moment to roll through the dark chamber of his soul.
With constant motion \( \frac{d}{dt} = \tau \)
Hauntingly $J = 98$
With a sense of longing $J = 88$
Hauntingly $j = 98$
Somberly \( \frac{1}{2} = 80 \)
Hauntingly $j = 98$
With a sense of longing \( \frac{d}{\text{beat}} = 88 \)
Hauntingly $\dot{f} = 80$
Fl./Pno.

The heavy hours of night went by, and silence quickened in its sound, and lighted up the eastern sky, and