

***Venus* by Becca Stevens**

Becca Stevens wrote “Venus” for her album entitled *Regina* which was released in 2017. Stevens created this album by using different depictions of the word “queen.” The whole idea of what a queen means to her grew to be its own entity and eventually a part of her own identity. As she developed *Regina*, Stevens pictured this entity to be not a literal queen on a throne but one from another world. “Venus” was inspired by the feeling of battling the norms from another world entirely and embodies a virtuous creature, “a manitou in a labyrinth,” being both good and evil.¹

Venus’s journey is exemplified in Stevens’ writing of the piece which includes a repeated, fast-moving figure within the background vocals and the drums that makes the listener feel like the song is in mixed meter of 5/4 switching to 7/4, but it is actually cut-time throughout the whole piece. The lead melody is then placed on top of that figure which is opposite in that it holds out a lot of longer notes to help reiterate the lyrics and message of the song. Within the chorus, the background vocals have harmonic clusters that are aligned with the lead melody. This lines up with the lyrics where in the verses, Venus is battling different obstacles that are pushing away the person she wants to be, and the chorus exemplifies the “rising above” from all the backlash with such clarity within the band and vocal parts. The ending exemplifies the fight and ending with her victory to be who she wants to be. In Stevens’ studio recording, it features background vocals by Laura Mvula whose music will also be included in today’s performance.

Becca Stevens is a Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter who has established her career in the pop, jazz, indie-rock, and Appalachian folk music idiom. Her most recent album, *WONDERBLOOM*, included a song entitled “Slow Burn” which was nominated for a Grammy for Best Arrangement, Instruments and Vocals back in 2020. Stevens’ compositions weave together her influences of classical and Appalachian folk music as well as her love for rich jazz harmonies. She is a highly respected collaborator who has worked with musicians such as Jacob Collier, Michael League (Snarky Puppy), Brad Mehldau, Esperanza Spalding, Chris Thile, Laura Mvula, Jose James, Antonio Sanchez, Cory Wong, Vince Mendoza, Metropole Orkest, Timo Andrews, and Attacca Quartet.²

¹ “Regina Revisited: Becca Stevens Speaks.”

² Stevens. “Becca Stevens - Home.”

***I'm Hip* by Bob Dorough & Dave Frishberg**

“I’m Hip” was written in 1966 by Bob Dorough with lyrics written by Dave Frishberg. This song is a perfect representation of the sardonic wit that was the lyrical and melodic writing of Dave Frishberg. His writing was known to be hyper-literate that referenced back to the writing of Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Mercer.³ Frishberg’s writing was intended for a mature audience, but he often attracted a much younger audience due to his contributions as a composer for the ABC-TV’s animated show “Schoolhouse Rock!”

Frishberg’s lyrical writing in “I’m Hip” is intentionally poking fun at this self-congratulatory hipness. “I’m Hip” is considered to be a classic standard with a theme of clueless with-it-ness that the performer embodies. Blossom Dearie is the most notable performer of this song. Her character as a “jazz pixie” perfectly embodies the playfulness within the song even though it is from a man’s point of view.⁴ Dearie, Dorough, and Frishberg all played a role in a long-term collaboration with some of the best songs on “Schoolhouse Rock!” including “Three Is a Magic Number” and “Figure Eight.”

***What'll I Do?* by Irving Berlin**

Irving Berlin wrote the song “What’ll I Do?” in 1923, published in 1924, and ended up selling more than a million copies of the sheet music. Although there is speculation as to the motivation behind Berlin’s writing of this particular song, according to his daughter, the song’s meaning is not directly related to the issues he faced with his wife back before they were officially together. His wife, Ellin McKay, was sent away by her father to Europe for a year to try breaking off the engagement since her parents didn’t approve. The song “What’ll I Do?” did in fact become McKay’s anthem during her time away from Berlin since the song’s theme stems from the questioning of how one will be able to go on without their loved one, and the two did end up getting married anyway.⁵

The song’s meaning is a perfect depiction of the conflicted feelings one has when a relationship is just ending particularly due to a separation or long distance. “What’ll I Do?” has been performed by many famous artists including Johnny Mathis, Frank Sinatra, Bob Dylan, and Kim Nazarian. This particular arrangement has both a waltz/shuffle and 12/8 feel that aims to represent that inner turmoil that one has while their loved one is away. This arrangement includes a vamp at the end restating the words “what’ll I do?” to reiterate the longing to be with that beloved person and to represent that feeling always being present.

³ Singer, Barry. “Dave Frishberg, Writer of Songs...”

⁴ Muscarella. “Song of the Week Revisited – I’m Hip, Blossom Dearie.”

⁵ Songfacts. “What'll I Do? by Irving Berlin - Songfacts.”

***Pennies From Heaven* by Arthur Johnston & Johnny Burke**

In 1936, Arthur Johnston and Johnny Burke wrote the song “Pennies From Heaven” for Bing Crosby’s film also entitled *Pennies From Heaven*. This film was based off of the novel *The Peacock Feather* which was written by Katharine Leslie Moore. The film’s main theme creates a series of unfortunate events that leads the characters into tough situations such as prison, welfare, jail, or being sent to an orphanage. In the end, the problems are resolved. This song sends a message to those listening that things will turn for the better no matter how bad things get. Burke’s lyrics to the song “Pennies From Heaven” aim to also convey that same message with an underlying lesson stating that “storms may bring us fortune, but with that fortune we must buy what we used to get for free.”⁶

There have been many notable recordings done of this particular song including: Bing Crosby, with Jimmy Dorsey and His Orchestra, Teddy Wilson and His Orchestra, Louis Prima, Count Basie, Stan Getz, and Veronica Swift. Today’s performance is an arrangement featuring a transcription of Stan Getz’s arrangement and solo with added lyrics to his solo written by Veronica Swift. Stan Getz’s arrangement of “Pennies From Heaven” was included on the album *Stan Getz and The Oscar Peterson Trio* in 1957, and Veronica Swift’s version is included on the duo album from 2017 entitled *Let’s Sail Away* by Jeff Rupert and Veronica Swift.

***Speak Low* by Kurt Weill & Ogden Nash**

Kurt Weill and Ogden Nash wrote “Speak Low” in 1943 for the musical comedy entitled *One Touch of Venus*. This Broadway show was based on the book *The Tinted Venus* written by F. Anstey which was a romance novella. Within the production’s story, a barber had slipped an engagement ring that was for his girlfriend onto a statue of Venus which allowed her to come to life. Venus, the goddess of love, then attempts to win over the barber by seducing him through singing the song “Speak Low.”⁷ The musical was then adapted for film in 1948. In this film, Ava Gardner plays Venus and Robert Walker plays the barber.

“Speak Low” was also featured within the Off-Broadway revue entitled *Berlin to Broadway with Kurt Weill* in 1972. Other renditions of this song were performed and recorded by Carmen McRae, Lotte Lenya, Nat “King” Cole, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, and the Hi-Lo’s. This performance will feature a guitar and voice duo inspired by the guitar/vocal duo of Joe Pass and Ella Fitzgerald.

⁶ “Pennies From Heaven.”

⁷ “Speak Low.”

***Honeysuckle Rose* by Thomas Waller & Andy Razaf**

Thomas “Fats” Waller and Andy Razaf wrote “Honeysuckle Rose” for a revue, a theatrical skit, entitled *Load of Coal*. The song was first introduced as a dance number in 1929 which Waller performed at Connie’s Inn in Harlem. Connie’s Inn was known to be a Harlem speakeasy that featured song and dance revues located at the intersection of 131st Street and 7th Avenue. Before integrating, the club was originally segregated to blacks who were only allowed in after everyone who was white had gone home for the night. Connie’s Inn was the second most popular nightclub with the Cotton Club just ahead of them. Mildred Bailey was the first to perform “Honeysuckle Rose” on Paul Whiteman’s radio show, but Fletcher Henderson’s rendition of this song in 1932 was what truly made it famous when it reached up to number 18 on the Pop charts.⁸

“Honeysuckle Rose” is known to be one of the most enduring compositions written by the amazing collaboration of Waller and lyricist Andy Razaf. Other notable songs written by this duo include “Ain’t Misbehavin’”, “Gee Baby, Ain’t I Good To You?” and “Stompin’ at the Savoy.” Some of the most notable recordings of this song include Jane Monheit, Eva Cassidy, Red Norvo and His Orchestra featuring Mildred Bailey, Fats Waller, and Fletcher Henderson. Tonight’s performance is highly influenced by the rendition given by Jane Monheit including a voice and bass duo.

***Rainy Days and Mondays* by Roger Nichols & Paul Williams**

“Rainy Days and Mondays” was written in 1971 by Roger Nichols and Paul Williams for The Carpenters, a popular vocal and instrumental duo consisting of siblings Karen and Richard Carpenter. Their recording of “Rainy Days and Mondays” was included on their third album entitled *Carpenters*. This album, released in 1971, also included the hit songs “For All We Know” and “Superstar.” *Carpenters* was nominated for four Grammy Awards that year, and they won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Vocal Performance by a Duo, Group, or Chorus.⁹ Two of the album’s featured instrumentalists, Joe Osborn and Hal Blaine, were members of a band called The Wrecking Crew. This band was a highly sought after group of studio musicians who appeared on thousands of popular records in the 1960s and 1970s, and they are known to be the most-recorded band in history. Along with the Carpenters’ albums, The Wrecking Crew has also been featured with many famous artists such as The Beach Boys, The Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Elvis Presley, Miles Davis, and Simon and Garfunkel.¹⁰

This song depicts a lot of very dark feelings that can come to the surface due to loneliness, loss, depression, or simply just from the rain. The words reference something that means a lot more

⁸ “Honeysuckle Rose.” *Jazz Standards*...

⁹ “The Carpenters.”

¹⁰ Chilton, Martin. “Who Were the Wrecking Crew?”

than just the “blues” or wanting to quit. They are relatable but also leave the listener wanting to know more. Then, the bridge reveals that the right person can be the answer to the gloominess. Love can shine the light again. Where there’s love, there’s hope; and where there’s hope, there’s a future. The arrangement being performed today is quite different from the original version by The Carpenters. This arrangement will be performed as a piano/vocal duo that is out-of-time in the first and last 8 measures of the form. This performance will exemplify the push and pull between piano and voice with most of the original chord changes with added extensions. The arrangement being performed today has a lot of influence from Sarah Vaughan’s interpretation which she performed live in Bruxelles in 1974 and was included on her remastered album *Live in Japan Vol. 2* released in 1991.

***When She Loved Me* by Randy Newman**

Randy Newman wrote “When She Loved Me” in 1999 for the Disney/Pixar animated film, *Toy Story 2*. The song’s perspective is through the eyes of Jessie, a doll, who was once cared for by a young girl who eventually grew up and forgot about her. Newman wrote two new songs for the film including “When She Loved Me” and “Woody’s Roundup.” The song is considered to be one of the saddest songs in Pixar films, and Newman was initially worried about how the song would be received by children. He worried that children would be disinterested until he witnessed their reactions for the first time where they stayed attentive throughout the entire song.

Randy Newman is best known as a film composer for Disney-Pixar. Along with all four *Toy Story* films, he has also written songs for *A Bug’s Life*, *Monster Inc.*, *Cars*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *The Princess and the Frog*. Newman has won two Academy Awards and has been nominated twenty-two times in the Best Original Score and Best Original Song categories. He has been recognized by the Walt Disney Company as a Disney Legend, and he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2002 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2013.¹¹

“When She Loved Me” was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Song in 2000, but it lost to the Disney song “You’ll Be in My Heart” from the movie *Tarzan*.¹² However, the song did win a Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media that same year. The message of this song grows a lot deeper than just what it was meant for in the movie. Most listeners can often identify with what the song’s character is feeling- feeling loved or feeling lonely. Because of that, this song can be related to many things, and the interpretation being performed of “When She Loved Me” for today is related to motherhood and the relationship between mother and daughter.

¹¹ “Randy Newman Biography, Songs, & Albums.”

¹² “When She Loved Me.”

***Garby the Great* by Rosana Eckert**

“Garby the Great” is the second song from Rosana Eckert’s album entitled *Sailing Home* which was released in 2019. Rosana Eckert is a singer, songwriter, arranger, and educator. Her album *Sailing Home* includes 11 original songs that vary in style and emotion with themes of life and love, hope and loss. The song “Garby the Great” was written for Eckert’s husband, Gary, who she often calls “Garby” because his brother used to call him that when they were children. This song is a medium swing style that features Peter Eldridge on piano in the original recording, and he also produced her latest album *Sailing Home*.

This song was written as a 32-measure form that is structured as AABA. The A sections include chord changes that are very similar to standard rhythm changes which follow the progression of Imaj7 VImaj7 iimin7 V7 iimin7 VI7 iimin7 V7 for the first 4 measures. However, these chord changes are within a minor key unlike the standard rhythm changes which are in a major key. Also, the rate at which the chords change in “Garby the Great” are at half speed. The melody is following the minor sounding chords by drawing upon notes typically found within the blues scale. This creates an overall minor blues sound which follows the lyric of being “mellow” and “melancholy.” The B section has rhythmic hits for the band that are instructed to play a pedal on the IV chord. This pedal puts the entire B section in a different key which is a popular method used in jazz chart writing. Eckert’s lyrical writing includes a lot of alliteration. For example, she has written “mellow and moaning’,” “simmerin’ steady,” and “real and ready.”

***Breathe Again* by Sarah Bareilles arr. Kerry Marsh**

Sarah Bareilles released “Breathe Again” onto her second studio album entitled *Kaleidoscope Heart* in 2010. This song’s meaning stems from the inability to move on from a recent break-up. She questions everything about the relationship and realizes too late that her partner did actually love her and she didn’t see it. The song aims to find that truth and understanding for how to live without their partner.

This arrangement was done by Kerry Marsh, a well renowned vocal arranger and composer of over 250 compositions and arrangements. His approach to this song adds even more intricate parts to the song’s storyline. The background vocals add tension and release during the first verse and chorus. The five voices join as an ensemble starting at the second verse and create a steady build to the chorus both in dynamics and in the voicing. The voicing is inverted higher in the second chorus and is treated as an a cappella break. Then, the rhythm section joins back in at the bridge, background vocals are in, and a duet is included on top of that. This creates a “false climax” within the arrangement that has a lot more tension and release. Then, the true climax is made during the final chorus where the five vocals are singing as an ensemble in the highest range of the piece. Kerry Marsh’s arrangement stays true to a lot of the motives within the

original recording, but he includes a lot more reharmonization and extensions to create a more jazz-sounding arrangement. He also makes use of adding in or dropping out layers of the band for more musical interest. This arrangement of “Breathe Again” encompasses a lot of the experiences that have resulted in the creation of this recital.

***My Stove’s in Good Condition* by Lil Johnson**

“My Stove’s in Good Condition” was written by Lil Johnson around 1935. Much of her career is unknown, but it seems as though she only made recordings between 1929 and 1937 in Chicago. Unfortunately, there’s no record of Johnson’s whereabouts after 1937 since it seems she left the public eye. There is also no record of where she lived or died, but she did record all of her sessions in Chicago. She wrote some very risqué songs that were considered to be slightly “raunchy.” Some of her other songs include “Get ‘Em from the Peanut Man (Hot Nuts),” “Anybody Want to Buy My Cabbage?,” and “New Shave ‘Em Dry.” Johnson is known to be solely a blues singer recording over 40 songs in a span of just 2 years.¹³

During her studio recording sessions, Johnson formed a partnership with Black Bob, a ragtime-influenced pianist. His real name is unknown, like Lil Johnson’s, but he was known in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s for accompanying many performers in the studio. Charlie West, another Chicago pianist of that time, believed he lived in Cincinnati, Ohio under the name Black Jack before moving to Chicago. He is featured on most of Lil Johnson’s recordings emphasizing the abrasiveness that comes from Johnson’s interpretation of the lyric. Black Bob was known for being a Chicago blues pianist recording for mainly the Bluebird and Vocalion labels.¹⁴ “My Stove’s in Good Condition” was one of many songs Lil Johnson and Black Bob recorded together which has a lot of blues and ragtime approaches throughout. The performance today is heavily influenced by Lil Johnson’s version as well as a version done by the artist Brianna Thomas.

¹³ “Complete Works in Chronological Order, Vol. 2...”

¹⁴ “Blues Piano Ghost Notes : Piano Kid Edwards & Black Bob.”

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