

Unexpected Shadows

Jamie Barton

JAKE HEGGIE MATT HAIMOVITZ





UNEXPECTED SHADOWS

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Total playing time: 66. 40

Jamie Barton, mezzo-soprano

Jake Heggie, piano

* **Matt Haimovitz**, cellist



Jamie Barton
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One of the great joys of singing is collaboration — working with great colleagues on exciting projects that matter and make a difference. And though the meat of my career is singing big roles in operas by Verdi, Donizetti, Wagner and others, there's a special place in my heart for the intimacy and immediacy of recital work.

Unlike opera, there are no characters up there onstage — just me and a pianist. Together, we can explore a range of work, vibrations, and perspectives from all kinds of composers; a range that isn't always possible on the opera stage. I am a die-hard feminist, so work by and about women is very important to me. In recital, we can explore poetry and music by and about women, and I can work with living composers.

Jake and I met and became friends in 2008 when I was in the Houston Grand Opera studio. The opportunity to collaborate appeared in 2015 with a joint commission from Carnegie Hall and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Jake is also a die-hard feminist and suggested poetry by his late friend Laura Morefield. That cycle, *The Work At Hand*, was

transformative for all of us involved and we knew we had to record it. I've also sung Jake's cycle *Of Gods and Cats* a number of times, and earlier in 2019 sang the role of Sister Helen in his opera *Dead Man Walking*. When the possibility to make the *Unexpected Shadows* recording presented itself this year, we decided to bring together voices of the powerful women represented in many of Jake's songs and operas.

Recording sessions at Skywalker were a total joy. We had the rare luxury of TIME! Time to explore the many nuances of the poetry and music and find what felt authentic and true to us. It was a memorable, fun, and deeply meaningful collaboration — and I'm very excited to share it on this recording.

- Jamie Barton -

UNEXPECTED SHADOWS

note by Jake Heggie

"Music" from *The Breaking Waves* texts by Sister Helen Prejean

The amazing Sister Helen Prejean is best known for her book *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty*. In it, she shares the harrowing journey of accompanying two convicted murderers to their state-sanctioned executions. The book was turned into an award-winning movie and in 2000 became the subject for my first opera, to a libretto by Terrence McNally. It has since become one of the most-performed American operas with more than 70 productions on five continents. Jamie Barton sang the role of Sister Helen in Atlanta Opera's 2019 production. In the years since the premiere of the opera, Sister Helen has joined me in creating two song cycles: *The Deepest Desire* (2002), composed for

Susan Graham, and *The Breaking Waves* (2011), composed for Joyce DiDonato. The song "Music" comes from the latter cycle and describes the transformative, healing, humanizing power of music. It was premiered by Joyce DiDonato and pianist David Zobel at Carnegie Hall on March 6, 2011.

***The Work at Hand* poetry by Laura Morefield**

In 2008, the gifted American poet Laura Morefield was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. She was just 47 years old. During her extraordinarily brave three-year fight, she wrote dozens of "post-diagnosis" poems, including *The Work at Hand*. It describes the difficult and deeply human experience of knowing it is time to say goodbye and let go: resenting, fighting, struggling to find grace and peace. The language and imagery she chose is particularly striking: origami, the



Jake Heggie
July 2019 © James Niebuhr

Warrior yoga position, and a shimmering connection to nature. Laura died in 2011 at the age of 50. I wanted to set the poem to honor her, but also the many — too many — friends we have all lost to cancer. The opportunity to compose *The Work At Hand* presented itself just a few years later, when Jamie Barton requested a new piece for her Carnegie Hall recital, and cellist Anne Martindale Williams asked for a new composition to perform with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. I suggested we combine it into a piece that exists as a chamber and an orchestral work. The premiere of the chamber version took place at Carnegie Hall on Feb 17, 2015 with Jamie Barton and Ann Martindale Williams joined by pianist Bradley Moore. The orchestral version received its premiere May 15 that year in Pittsburgh at Heinz Hall, conducted by Michael Francis.

**“Ice Cube Aria”
from the opera *If I Were You*
libretto by Gene Scheer**

The 2019 opera *If I Were You* is a modern take on the Faust story in which the devil is an ever-present shape shifter named Brittomara. In an incarnation as a bartender, she meditates on a cube of ice melting slowly in a glass. For her, it is a perfect metaphor for the delicious predictability of human nature: she doesn’t have to do a thing — just watch and wait.

***Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*
texts by Gene Scheer**

In 2015, Vocal Arts DC invited me to create a song cycle for mezzo-soprano Susan Graham to celebrate its 25th anniversary season at the Kennedy Center. In previous cycles, Gene Scheer and I have sought out meaningful artistic connections

within a city. For example, the baritone cycle “A Question of Light” (2011) was commissioned by the Dallas Opera, so we based it on objects in the Dallas Museum of Art. In this case, we wanted to connect the songs to iconic objects in the Smithsonian. During his research at the museum, Gene saw the mink coat Marian Anderson had worn when she sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial — an occasion made possible by Eleanor Roosevelt. It was a landmark civil rights event. That’s when the idea emerged to find iconic objects in the Smithsonian associated with First Ladies. In addition to the Eleanor Roosevelt–Marian Anderson connection, Gene wrote about Mary Todd Lincoln and the hat Lincoln wore the day he died. Specifically, the mourning band on the hat, placed there after the death of their child William. That is followed by a song about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and the White House Christmas card she and her husband signed just hours before his assassination. We close the set with a

tribute to Barbara Bush’s literacy campaign and the beloved Muppets. The premiere took place Sept 12, 2015 at the Terrace Theater of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Of Gods and Cats **poetry by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard**

This fun pair of songs was composed in 1996 at the request of my friend Vija Hovgard. The texts are by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard, who was her gardener at the time. He has written numerous collections of poetry, as well as lyrics and librettos. These songs are parodies of religious allegories. In the first song, we learn how the almighty cat found its purr. In the second, a naughty little boy God creates and destroys planets and peoples no matter how he is scolded by his mother. The songs were first performed by mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall on May 1, 2000.

Statuesque **texts by Gene Scheer**

Statuesque was inspired by five iconic sculptures of women and the deeply human stories within them. From works by Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso and Alberto Giacometti, to an ancient Egyptian statue of the Queen/Pharaoh Hatshepsut and the famous Winged Victory, Gene Scheer’s texts describe real experiences both funny and tragic as each statue yearns for clarity and connection. With a strong “film noir” feeling, the piece was originally created for voice and seven instruments (flute, clarinet, alto sax, violin, cello, bass and piano). The cycle was composed for mezzo-soprano Joyce Castle and received its first performance on December 4, 2005 at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Music

(from **The Breaking Waves**,
text by Sister Helen Prejean)

For almost a year I didn't know
He could have music on death row
When I found out
I sent the tape player and headphones
And the next day, he told me:
"I listened to music all night long"
He drank music like a thirsty man
He joined the land of the living that night
I felt his joy. I feel it still.

The Work at Hand

(poetry by Laura Morefield)

Part One: Individual Origami

Some moments:
I feel compelled to start my long goodbye –
folding advice

until it reveals hope, creasing resilience side
by side with laughter
tucking courage into the pocket made by
joy – making
the message of my life into individual
origami.

I want to start this project early because
there are so many
(nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters,
parents,
friends) who enfold my life with grace and
song.

(And then there is also and always you.)

Part Two: Warrior One

Other times:
The work of goodbye seems a betrayal,
a prediction of defeat – inappropriate to
my
interior pose of being.
A warrior keeps her back leg strong, –
connected

to the earth. She faces her hips forward.
She lifts hands and face skyward as
her front leg leans into the territory of the
enemy
as far as, as long as, her breath will take
her.

Part Three: The Slow Seconds

And then:
there are slow seconds like these,
when the single square of window reveals
pine tree needles bursting into branches,
making their stubborn way through a
furrowed trunk.
When the wind moves
like a feathered thing over my waiting skin.
When all I want is to unfold a small quilt
of sunlight onto the cool green and sit very
still,
to let the light of heaven flow over me like
honey
until my bones are on fire with the beauty
of it all.

Ice Cube Aria: "I don't have to do a thing"

(from the opera **If I Were You**,
libretto by Gene Scheer)

Brittomara (The Devil):

I take a cube of ice,
rigid, cold, perfectly formed,
a hard little fortress.
Shall I breathe on it?
Hold it in my hands?
No, I don't have to do a thing.
I just watch and wait.

Everything wants to change,
to melt, dissolve, disappear.
Soon, I will drink it down
and no one will ever know
that it ever existed at all.
I don't have to do a thing.
Not a thing.
I just watch and wait.

Soon, every trace is gone.

Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian

(Texts by Gene Scheer)

6

I. Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson's Mink Coat

Listen! Listen!
Marian Anderson is singing of thee.
Beyond compromise,
Beyond recrimination,
Beyond the anger of a divided nation
Marian Anderson is singing.

Wearing this elegant mink,
she stood on the steps beneath Lincoln's
stony stare,
intoned our nation's hymn
and let freedom ring and ring and ring.
Oh what a sound!
Of thee I sing.

There are some paths no map will ever
trace.

But, from Lincoln's steps
to Charleston's "Amazing Grace"
With every step on the way
I think about what she showed us that day:
No one can make you feel inferior
without your consent. No one.

Who are we?
Beyond compromise,
Beyond recrimination,
Beyond the anger of a divided nation
Marian Anderson is singing of thee.

7

II. Mary Todd Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln's Hat

Your measured gestures mock me.
Words of kindness feel like crimes.
In a world where this can happen
Only madness rhymes.

I am drowning, but will not die.
Rip the stars from out the sky.
The ship is lost and you pretend

We'll find our way, the pain will end.

Your measured gestures mock me.
Words of kindness feel like crimes.
In a world where this can happen
Only madness rhymes.

He wore this hat the day he died.
A grieving nation cried.
But long before – for me –
He wore it as an elegy.

Around his hat he tied a mourning band.
Spoke through tears, but – somehow –
Did not understand.
"Oh, husband! Oh, my Abraham!" I said
"Our son, our world, our William is dead."

I am drowning, but will not die.
Rip the stars from out the sky.
The ship is lost and you pretend
We'll find our way, the pain will end.

Your measured gestures mock me.
Words of kindness feel like crimes.

In a world where this can happen
Only madness rhymes.

8

III. Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy: White House Christmas Card, 1963

Jack walked into the room and said:
"Diamonds! Minks and diamonds!
That's what they'll be wearing in Dallas."

I looked up from signing a Christmas card:
"What would you like me to do?"
He said: "Let me help you choose."

I was delighted! We'd never done this
before.
The beige and white dress? No?
The blue and yellow suit? Maybe?
The pink Chanel?

"Yes! Yes!" he said "Wear that.
With the hat."

Before I left the room, I said:
"Jack, I just started the Christmas cards.
There... add your name."

Fifty hours later, I walked back into the
bedroom
Wearing the pink Chanel suit he had
chosen
Covered in his blood.

And there it was, signed by both of us:
A Christmas card propped on the table
Like a question mark.

Oh Jack, what would you like me to do?

9

IV. Barbara Bush: The Muppets

This is Pete. He looks like a piano, but
wait...
It's magic!
A squiggle, a curve, a line
blossoms into a letter,
a letter into a word.

Then words that rhyme
and phrases like "Once upon a time."

It's magic! The phrase becomes the
mountain
you're climbing that – oh, my goodness! –
might not be a mountain at all!
But an incredibly fleet, not petite,
very sweet dinosaur named Pete,
who wakes and takes you on his shoulders
where the water splashes and flows
and tickles the end of your nose
with a drip, drip, drop and a tiny tap.
And all of this happens from your mother's
lap.

Imagine! You can travel anywhere.
And it all begins with "Once upon a time."
Four little words.
Imagine you could not read them to your
child.

Something must be done, I thought.
Which is how I made my way to Sesame
Street.

Surrounded by dozens of muppets
you discover your cup it's
overflowing with possibility.
Fabric, buttons and thread.
Dreams woven from Jim Henson's head.
An alphabet of riffs and dreams.

And suddenly you're on
the incredibly fleet, not petite,
very sweet dinosaur named Pete
whose feet treat you to a ride
to the gate through a berry patch.
There's a sign on the latch.
And for the first time – all by yourself –
You read the words: "Once upon a time."
(Thanks, Pete!)

Of Gods and Cats

(poetry by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard)

10

I. In The Beginning

In the beginning was the cat
and the cat was without purr,
the ethers stirred and there was milk,
and the cat saw that it was good;
a hand stretched forth across the milk
and scratched behind the cat's ears,
and it felt good;
then the firmament shook
and there was produced a paper bag,
and the cat went forth into the bag
and seeing that it was good,
she fell asleep, purring.

11

II. Once Upon A Universe

Once, when God was a little boy,
his mother caught him breaking his toys,
then gluing them back together again

with prayers and incantations.
Don't play with your creations,
she admonished him. (amen)
But, he went right on building temples
only to destroy them with vast armies
of ant-like peoples, creating new planets,
then wiping them out with their own
ignominious
waste products.
(Allelu)

At the end of eternity, his mother shook her
cosmic finger
and insisted that he clean up his universe:
Or there'll be no bliss for you, young God!
(amen)
He swept the entire mess into the nearest
black hole
and fell asleep, sucking his diving thumb.
(Allelu. Alleluia.)

Statuesque

(Texts by Gene Scheer)

————— 12 —————

I. Henry Moore: Reclining Figure in Elmwood

I am filled with unexpected shadows.
There is no perfect geometry,
No known. No given. No algorithm to
explain
What has evolved so randomly.

I am a mystery to myself.
A shifting landscape in a storm.
A hillside cliff, a hidden cave,
Nature's rhythm, nature's form.

Convex, concave curves of light,
Waves and particles reflected.
The paradoxical condition –
I am alone and yet connected.

Reduced, released as I recline,
Embrace what I can not explain.

From Elmwood nurtured by the sun,
Blessed by the spirit of the rain.

I am a mystery to myself.
A shifting landscape in a storm.
A hillside, cliff, a hidden cave.
I am filled with unexpected shadows.

————— 13 —————

II. Pablo Picasso: Head of a Woman 1932

"Mademoiselle."
Oui.
"You have an interesting face."
Merci.
"Would you like to come with me? I am
Picasso.
Can you keep a secret?"

His name meant nothing to me.
But his tie was beautiful.
And he was so charming.
He looked at my figure,
Studied my face.
I did all he asked me to do.

"Can you keep a secret?"

It was utterly thrilling.
Covered with love, kisses, admiration.
My life with him was always hidden,
quiet and peaceful..
I thought we had all we needed.

"Can you keep a secret?"

No.

————— 14 —————

III. Hatshepsut: The Divine Potter

Formed by the Divine Potter's two hands.
Held like the fertile river between two
banks.
Poised between what I was and what I shall
be,
I sit as though before an altar, and wait for
the moment
When the past and future dissolve, blow
away like sand.
And I embrace a soul beyond the world

Of kings and queens, of sunrises and
sunset.
And I become the divine potter.
Right now. Forever.

15

IV. Alberto Giacometti: Standing Woman 1948

He sculpted me from memory.
In a crucible extinguished
The details, every feature
By which I could be distinguished.

There's a sadness pulling at my flesh,
An anguish we all know.
He has burned away the surface
To the bedrock far below.

I do not see myself,
But who I am is there.
The beauty of the spirit
In an elegiac prayer.

He makes me feel that I am linked

To a distant, bygone age.
An unearthed ancient drawing,
A volcanic cry of rage.

Life's unforgiving rhythm.
The loss of innocence.
I feel my heart explode
As I am drowned in silence.

I do not see myself,
But who I am is there.
The beauty of the spirit
In an elegiac prayer.

16

V. Winged Victory (We're Through!)

The wet gossamer fabric
Barely cloaks the sinewy flesh thrust
forward
By the force of powerful wings.

No questions? No curiosity?
No interest in what I'm thinking or
dreaming?

A nightgown slips off my shoulders,
Billows, wraps itself 'round my taut, forty-
three inch legs.

No questions. No curiosity?
No interest in what I'm thinking or
dreaming?
My short and long term goals?
You don't even know where I was raised.

For every word uttered, thousands are left
unspoken.
Each replete with yearning as you ponder
All of the possibilities of a moist, angelic
nike.

You study me, notice every nuance:
My impatient breasts and my wings
Poised to launch me to the heavens.

Still no questions? No curiosity?
No interest in what I'm thinking or
dreaming?
My short term and long term goals?

Or how my father will always be
The most important man in my life!
That I'm not able to completely
Get my bearings now that he is dead!

No, how could you notice anything,
You sick self centered son of a bitch!
Since you don't even seem to notice or care
I don't have a head.
No head! No head! No head!

You don't care. You don't care. It's true!
Well, I need someone who cares.
Not someone who obsessively stares.
It's over. It's done. We're through!
Now get out.

Acknowledgments

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