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#### PROGRAM NOTES

*Song of the Silkie (String Quartet No. 2)* is a dramatic work for high baritone (or baritone and soprano, or mezzo-soprano, or countertenor) and string quartet. The music is based on a folk song which appears in various ways throughout the piece, beginning with this text: "I am a man upon the land."

—Elena Ruehr

Based on the folk tale about a seal who sheds her skin and becomes a woman and her ensuing desire to return to the wild.

—Laura Harrington

**DURATION: 17:00**

#### PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Full Score and Parts	8484
Piano/Vocal Rehearsal Score	8484A

#### **Elena Ruehr (b. 1963)**

For biographical information visit:  
[www.elenaruehr.org](http://www.elenaruehr.org)

#### **Laura Harrington (b. 1953)**

For biographical information visit:  
[www.lauraharringtonbooks.com](http://www.lauraharringtonbooks.com)

LIBRETTO  
*SONG OF THE SILKIE*

Libretto by Laura Harrington

Music by Elena Ruehr

*Commissioned by the Rockport Chamber Music Festival, 2000*

**James**

Where is she?  
Has she found her skin?  
And slipped away?  
Oh, Sula, Sula, silkie,  
Have you left me?  
Oh, Sula, Sula silkie,  
Have you gone to live inside the sea?  
Have you gone forever?  
Are you leaving me?  
Sula!

She says...

**Sula**

"I am a woman on the land,  
I am a silkie on the sea,  
And when I'm far from every strand,  
My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie."

**James**

How can you leave me?  
Isn't my love inside your blood now,

Stronger than the call of the sea?

The skin you take so eagerly  
Lift in your arms like a child  
The skin you take so greedily  
The skin, your skin, so wild.

What I stole from you,  
What I kept from you,  
Now exacts its price.  
I held you captive,  
I held you dear,  
I took you for my wife.

Stay my love, my lovely one,  
My creature of the sea,  
Stay, oh my wife, my precious one,  
I beg you, stay by me.

**Sula**

Who hears the silkie when she cries,  
Searching for her skin.  
Who hears the silkie when she cries,  
To free the seal within.

**James**

Sula, take me with you,  
Sula, take me in,  
Sula, take me to the heart of the sea,  
In the folds of your magic skin.

**Sula**

You cannot be a silkie man,  
You cannot follow me.  
You cannot live your life inside the secrets of the sea.  
And if you steal my skin again,  
You'll be the death of me.

**James**

I am a man upon the land,  
I am a man upon the sea,  
And when you're gone from where I stand,  
My heart will never be free.

I'll rig my boat,  
I'll set my sails,  
I'll follow where you flee.  
I will follow you, Sula,  
Into the green heart of the sea.

Look how you rise and fall in the wedge of  
the wind, in the sighing of the sea.  
You turn your dark eyes,  
Rising out of the black waves,  
Flying far away,  
Beyond the path of heaven.  
This perfect animal freedom,  
Joy beyond bearing.  
What will I do,  
When the waves snap shut over your blue gray head,  
When you finally leave this shore?

Did you dream the ocean, Sula,  
The embrace and freedom of the sea?  
Will you dream of me, Sula,  
Now that you are free?

**Sula**

The song you make for me,  
At what unknowable cost,  
From what unknowable loss,  
The song from Sule Skerrie.

**James**

I will wait for you, Sula.  
Wait for the voice I hope to hear,  
And know I never will,  
I plunge into memory, come up for air,  
and plunge again.

Your silence follows me,  
Your silence is my own vanishing song.

I am a man upon the land,  
I am a man upon the sea,  
And when you're gone from where I stand,  
My soul will yearn for thee, my Sula.

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for Stephen Salters and the Shanghai Quartet

# Song of the Silkie (String Quartet No. 2)

for High Baritone (or Baritone and Soprano, or Mezzo-Soprano, or Countertenor) and String Quartet

Laura Harrington

Elena Ruehr

$\text{♩} = 72$

Voice(s)

Piano  
(for rehearsal only)

*l.h. pp through m. 33*

*poco espr.*

*p*

*Red. ad lib. throughout*

6

*p*

*poco*

11

James

*p*

*p*

*poco*

Where is she? Has she found her

*pp*

20 *p espr., legato*

skin? — And slipped — a-way? — Oh, Su - la, —

25 *pp*

— Su - la sil - kie, — Have you left —

30 *p mp p*

— me? — Oh, Su - la, Su-la sil - kie, Have you

34 *mf*

gone to live in-side the sea? — Have you gone for-ev-er? — Are you leav - ing

*p mp*

37  $f$   $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$  ( $\text{♩} = 108$ )

me? Su - la, Su - la!

*mf*

43  $f$  *Sula p falsetto (if high baritone)*

She says... "I am a wo - man on

*sub. p*

*p*

50

the land, I am a silk - ie on the sea, And when I'm far from

*r.h.*

57

ev - 'ry strand, My dwell - ing is in Sule - Sker -

63

rie.”

*mp* *mf*

68

71

James *p*

How can you

*p* *mp*

75

leave me? Is-n't my love in-side your blood now, Strong -

*mp* *pp*

78

- er than the call \_\_\_\_\_ of the sea? The skin \_\_\_\_\_

*f* *pp* *breve* *breve* *r.h.*

82

\_\_\_\_\_ you take so eag-er - ly \_\_\_\_\_ Lift in your

*pp* *p*

85

arms \_\_\_\_\_ like a child The skin you take so

*mp* *pp* *p*

88

greed-i - ly \_\_\_\_\_ The skin, your skin, \_\_\_\_\_ so wild. \_\_\_\_\_

*mf* *f* *\* (f)* ♩ = ♩. (♩ = 162)

\* In mm. 90-113, more notes appear at times in rolled chords than can reasonably be played. They appear for harmonic context. Play whatever you can.