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CONTENTS

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. The Saint and the Monk | 5 |
| 2. Something in the Paper | 14 |
| 3. The American League for the Circumvention of Bores | 18 |

Duration: 10:00

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TEXTS

The Saint and the Monk

Saint Peter stood at the gates of heaven,
displaying the tools of his awful trade;
the key to the gate, a scowl as pitiless as night,
and curled at his side, interrogation points.
Now, straight up the shining cloud-way a solitary soul advanced.
A fat and jolly fellow, with laughter lines upon each rosy jowl.
He was a monk, with a smile so prepossessing
that the saint admired him instantly, and without pause,
forgot his scowl, and all his questions,
and even failed to ask this gentleman, "Who are you?"
And instead, he threw wide the gate with a friendly grin
and said, "Welcome, friend! Please come in."
The monk smiled pleasantly, and peering past the saint, said
"Excuse me, sir, but who's in there?"
This impudence dispelled the Saint's esteem.
A frown began to blacken on his brow.
"Oh, I meant no offense," the Monk explained,
"it's just that I'm a little, you know, particular. That's all."
"How dare you, sir!" replied the Saint, with anger swelling in his
chest.
"No one questions orders issued from the throne of God!"
The Monk merely sighed, and calling up a smile,
said, "Forgive me, sir. Put up your chain and bar.
I'm going, if it please you, where the pretty women are."

Something in the Paper

Ah, what's in the paper? Hmm, let's see.
Nothing much ever seems to happen.
Ah, someone's wife killed by her lover with, hmm, a knife.
Oh, a fire on Blank street and some bodies found.
How many? Two? Three?
Ah, four.
The same old story.
Here's another little item, a shooting in town.
Bullet in the groin.
Ouch!
What else have we?
Here's a flood, hundreds homeless.
Here's a shipwreck, no one saved.
Everyone's afraid some bank will fail.
They always fail, except when they don't.
Ah, a suicide.
Some fool lost all his money, and took his own worthless life.
Well, it serves him right.
As I've often said, it's better to...
Wait!
That bastard owed me seven hundred dollars.
Never has there has never been such a damned disastrous day.

The American League for the Circumvention of Bores

Bore. B-O-R-E. Definition: A person who talks when you wish him to listen.

I am the proud and happy founder

of the American League for the Circumvention of Bores.

With a view to enlisting your interest, and hopefully, obtaining your initiation fee,

I shall explain the ends and means of our organization.

The American League for the Circumvention of Bores

works within the law.

Bores cannot be killed,

for with each dead bore,

there arises a swarm of other bores;

reporters, lawyers, judges, jurors...

Did I mention lawyers?

And it is simply too time-consuming to kill them all.

Therefore, the League plan is simple and humane: it leaves the bore alive,

to suffer the interminable torments of his own company.

The American League has all the customary machinery of any fine organization;

a special handshake, a secret sign,

solemn ceremonials, mystic rituals.

But for practical use, we employ the Signal of Eminent Distress.

It is a law that any member duly accepted into the secret

tribunals of the League, must respond promptly

to any fellow member in distress.

The plan works this way:

I am, say, on a ferry boat.

Carelessly glancing about, I see... yes, it must be, ah!

The Signal of Eminent Distress!

A brother of the League has been cornered by a bore,

and is in desperate need of rescue.

I leap into action, employing one of the forms of relief

I have memorized from the ritual.

"Ah, my dear fellow."

I say to the victim, whom I may have never seen before,

"I have been looking all over the boat for you.

It appears that a gentleman on the lower deck,

who says he is your uncle, has fallen down and broken a great many bones.

You must come at once, if your friend..."

(looking at the baffled bore who's been talking to him nonstop),

"will have the goodness to excuse you."

As an added measure, I lay my hand on the bore's arm.

"Excuse me, sir, but the physician prescribes absolute quiet,

and the splendor, charm, and vivacity of your conversation might

unduly excite the patient."

Before the wretch can round up his faculties,

the brother in distress and I are walking away,

unconcerned, without a care, free at last!

Applications for membership to the ALCB must be made in person,

for that is the only way in which the Grand Dictatorial Committee

can determine that you, yourself, are not a bore.

PROGRAM NOTES

The texts for these songs come from Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914), one of America’s most fearless and biting satirists. (For the uninitiated, check out his *Devil’s Dictionary*.) It is a delight working with such a master, especially since he is dead, and can not hound me for royalties. It dawned on me that I had not seen much of Bierce’s work set to music. Further analysis has disclosed the reason; it is not very singable stuff. It is clever, full of wit and insight, but his satire can be overly wordy. So, while adapting the work of this esteemed man of letters, I have moved words around, plucked some out, inserted some of my own and, in general, sliced, diced, mangled, stuffed, crammed, delicately manipulated, and unceremoniously mutilated his texts. Forgive me, purists. I did not seek to improve the brilliant work of one of America’s greatest satirists, but it has to be singable, and that can require some creative tweaking. (I also removed some of his references to politicians and other notables of the day; a bit too specific.) I apologize for retaining Mr. Bierce’s “this impudence dispelled the Saint’s esteem.” It is a nasty line to sing, but it has a certain punch. Keep a mop handy to swab the stage when you’re through.

It’s safe to say that these songs are probably not for every performer. They require a good dose of theatrical dash and a bit of raw nerve; not exactly your formal recital staples. While they do have a suggestively masculine tone, a female singer with the right irreverence and attitude could certainly bring them off. (I suggest these three songs be performed as a set as opposed to individually. They were constructed to achieve a certain balance as a set. Just a suggestion.)

Properties: The singer will need a newspaper or cell phone to read while singing *Something in the Paper*. If one were inclined, an easel and ALCB poster could enhance the “pitch” of *The American League for the Circumvention of Bores*. Perhaps even a Microsoft® PowerPoint presentation!

—Steven Mark Kohn, 2010

Three Impudent Arias

for Medium Voice and Piano

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914)
Adapted by Steven Mark Kohn

Steven Mark Kohn

1. The Saint and the Monk

With good, robust storytelling ♩ = 92

f

Voice

Saint Pe - ter stood at the gates of heav - en,

With good, robust storytelling ♩ = 92

Piano

f bell tone

5

dis - play - ing the tools of his aw - ful trade;

mp

9

the key to the gate, a

f **mp sub.**

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 92 and a dynamic of **f**. The voice part starts with the lyrics 'Saint Peter stood at the gates of heav - en,'. The piano accompaniment features a 'bell tone' in the right hand. The score continues with the lyrics 'dis - play - ing the tools of his aw - ful trade;' and 'the key to the gate, a'. The piano part includes dynamics of **mp** and **f mp sub.**. The score is marked with measure numbers 5 and 9. A large watermark 'Copyright's illegal only' is overlaid on the page.

13

scowl as pit - i - less as night, and

rit. poco

17

curled at his side, *pp* spoken freely
interrogation points.

rit. poco

20

a tempo *rit. poco* **A bit slower**
mp more lyrically
Now, straight up the shin - ing cloud - way —

24

a sol - i - tar - y soul ad - vanced. A fat and

28

jol - ly fel - low, with laugh - ter lines up - on each ros - y jowl.

trquillo

33 *rit. poco*

a tempo

mp

He was a monk, with a smile so

rit. poco *a tempo* *mp*

38

spoken freely

cresc. poco a poco

pre - pos - sess - ing, that the saint admired him instantly, and without pause, forgot his scowl,

spoken freely *cresc. poco a poco*

43

and all his questions, and even failed to ask this gentleman, "Who are you?"

2. Something in the Paper

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914)
Adapted by Steven Mark Kohn

Steven Mark Kohn

Open a newspaper or cell phone and begin reading. **With great emotional detachment, bored beyond belief**
♩ = 112–120

Ah, what's in the paper?

With great emotional detachment, bored beyond belief
♩ = 112–120

p

5 *rit.* *a tempo* *p quasi recitativo* *a tempo*

Hmm, let's see. Noth - ing much ev - er seems to hap - pen.

rit. *a tempo* *a tempo*

pp *p*

9 *Continue reading.*

Ah, some - one's wife killed by her lov - er

3. The American League for the Circumvention of Bores

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914)
Adapted by Steven Mark Kohn

Steven Mark Kohn

With noble and pompous conviction, as one huge sales pitch
♩ = ca. 96 *ff* spoken freely, with gusto *rit.*

Bore.

With noble and pompous conviction, as one huge sales pitch
♩ = ca. 96 *ff* *rit.*

3 *più p*

B - O - R - E. Definition: A person who talks when you wish for him to listen.

5 *A tempo f sub.*

I am the proud and hap - py found - er of the A -

A tempo f

7

mer - i - can League for the Cir - cum - ven - tion of Bores.

marc. sempre

mf *più p*

10

mp

With a view to en - list - ing your in - terest, and, hope - ful - ly, ob - tain - ing your in -

mp *dolce*

12

f sub.

i - ti - a - tion fee, I shall ex - plain the ends and means of our or - gan - i - za - tion. The A -

f sub.

15

più p lightly

mer - i - can League for the Cir - cum - ven - tion of Bores works with - in the law.

mp lightly

18

poco p

Bores can - not be killed, for with each dead bore, there a - ris - es a swarm of

mf

21

spoken *cresc. poco a poco*

oth - er bores; - re - port - ers, law - yers,

cresc. poco a poco

24

judg - es, ju - rors... Did I men - tion law - yers?

26

p subito *A bit slower p with repose*

And it is simply too time-consuming to kill them all. Therefore, the League plan is sim - ple and hu -

sfz *A bit slower p with repose*