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PROGRAM NOTES

Ogden Nash is often cited as our country's best-known author of humorous poetry. His style emphasizes unconventional rhyming schemes and invented words, both features of the three poems included in my set "Three Settings of Ogden Nash." These three poems express a loose narrative of experiences and images from civilized urban and suburban life in mid-century America. "Tin Wedding Whistle," is a marriage proposal. "Pretty Halcyon Days" is a humorous sketch of a day at the beach. "A Lady Who Thinks She is Thirty" explores the fears of growing old.; the narrator wisely reassures the lady that "beauty is timelessness for you." To capture this tone musically, I strove to find a style that incorporated aspects of popular music, including gentle syncopations and jazz-influenced harmonies, integrated with the conventions of American classical Art Song.

Sheri Greenawald, beloved singer and teacher at the San Francisco Opera, first suggested to me Nash's poems and their potential for musical setting. I composed "A Lady Who Thinks She Is Thirty" in 2005. When my colleague and dear friend mezzo soprano Catherine Cook asked me for a set of songs to celebrate her ten years of teaching at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, I decided to add two more settings. She premiered the set at the San Francisco Conservatory on April 18th, 2018 at the annual Kristin Pankonin Art Song Showcase Concert. I have prepared simultaneously an edition for High Voice for my longtime collaborator tenor Brian Thorsett.

—David Conte

AVAILABLE EDITIONS

High Voice and Piano	8635
Medium Voice and Piano	8636

I. Tin Wedding Whistle

Though you know it anyhow
Listen to me, darling, now,
Proving what I need not prove
How I know I love you, love.
Near and far, near and far,
I am happy where you are;
Likewise I have never learnt
How to be it where you aren't.
Near and far, near and far,
I am happy where you are.

Far and wide, far and wide,
I can walk with you beside;
Furthermore, I tell you what,
I sit and sulk where you are not.
Visitors remark my frown
Where you're upstairs and I am down,
Yes, and I'm afraid I pout
When I'm indoors and you are out;
But how contentedly I view
Any room containing you.

In fact I care not where you be,
Just as long as it's with me.
In all your absences I glimpse
Fire and flood and trolls and imps.
Is your train a minute slothful?
I goad the stationmaster wrathful.
When with friends to bridge you drive
I never know if you're alive,
And when you linger late in shops
I long to telephone the cops.

Yet how worth the waiting for,
To see you coming through the door.
Somehow, I can be complacent
Never but with you adjacent.
Near and far, near and far,
I am happy where you are;
Likewise I have never learnt
How to be it where you aren't.
Then grudge me not my fond endeavor,
To hold you in my sight forever;
Let none, not even you, disparage
Such a valid reason for a marriage.

"TIN WEDDING WHISTLE" by Ogden Nash
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II. Pretty Halcyon Days

How pleasant to sit on the beach,
On the beach, on the sand, in the sun,
With ocean galore within reach,
And nothing at all to be done!
No letters to answer,
No bills to be burned,
No work to be shirked,
No cash to be earned,
It is pleasant to sit on the beach
With nothing at all to be done!

How pleasant to look at the ocean,
Democratic and damp; indiscriminate;
It fills me with noble emotion
To think I am able to swim in it.
To lave in the wave,
Majestic and chilly,
Tomorrow I crave;
But today it is silly.
It is pleasant to look at the ocean;
Tomorrow, perhaps, I shall swim in it.

How pleasant to gaze at the sailors
As their sailboats they manfully sail
With the vigor of vikings and whalers
In the days of the vikings and whale.
They sport on the brink
Of the shad and the shark;
If it's windy, they sink;
If it isn't, they park.

It is pleasant to gaze at the sailors,
To gaze without having to sail.

How pleasant the salt anesthetic
Of the air and the sand and the sun;
Leave the earth to the strong and athletic,
And the sea to adventure upon.
But the sun and the sand
No contractor can copy;
We lie in the land
Of the lotus and poppy;
We vegetate, calm and aesthetic,
On the beach, on the sand, in the sun.

"PRETTY HALCYON DAYS" by Ogden Nash
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III. A Lady Who Thinks She Is Thirty

Unwillingly Miranda wakes,
Feels the sun with terror,
One unwilling step she takes,
Shuddering to the mirror.

Miranda in Miranda's sight
Is old and gray and dirty;
Twenty-nine she was last night;
This morning she is thirty.

Shining like the morning star,
Like the twilight shining,
Haunted by a calendar,
Miranda is a-pining.

Silly girl, silver girl,
Draw the mirror toward you;
Time who makes the years to whirl
Adorned as he adored you.

Time is timelessness for you;
Calendars for the human;
What's a year, or thirty, to
Loveliness made woman?

Oh, Night will not see thirty again,
Yet soft her wing, Miranda;
Pick up your glass and tell me, then--
How old is Spring, Miranda?

"A LADY THINKS SHE IS THIRTY" by Ogden Nash
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—Ogden Nash
(1902–1971)

Three Settings of Ogden Nash

for High Voice and Piano

I. Tin Wedding Whistle

Ogden Nash
(1902–1971)

David Conte
(b. 1955)

Gentle waltz tempo, not too slow ♩ = 96 *mf*

Voice

Piano

mf *mp*

Though you know it

an - y - how — Lis - ten to me, darl - ing, now, —

8

Prov - ing what I need not prove How I know I love you, love. —

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12 *f* Near and far, _____ near and far, _____ *mf* I am hap - py

16 where you are; _____ Like - wise I have nev - er larnt

20 How to be it where you aren't.

24 *rit.*

Near and far, near and far, I am hap - py where you

rit.

28 **In tempo** ♩ = 96 *p* *mf*

are. Far and wide, far and wide,

In tempo ♩ = 96 *mf* *mp*

32 *cresc.*

I can walk with you be - side; Fur - ther-more,

II. Pretty Halcyon Days

Ogden Nash
(1902–1971)

David Conte
(b. 1955)

Gently swaying ♩ = 96 *mf*

Voice

Piano

mf

How

5

pleas-ant to sit on the beach, On the beach, on the sand, in the sun, With

mp

9

o - cean ga - lore with - in reach, And noth - ing at all to be

3 3

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12

done! No let - ters to an - swer, —

r.h. *l.h.*

This system contains measures 12 through 15. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 12, followed by the lyrics "done!" in measure 13. Measures 14 and 15 contain the lyrics "No let - ters to an - swer, —". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with chords and moving lines in both the right and left hands, with specific markings for *r.h.* and *l.h.* in measures 14 and 15.

16

No bills to be burned, No work to be shirked,

This system contains measures 16 through 19. The vocal line has the lyrics "No bills to be burned," in measure 16 and "No work to be shirked," in measure 17. Measures 18 and 19 are instrumental. The piano accompaniment continues with dense chordal textures and melodic lines in both hands.

20

No cash _____ to be earned, It is pleas - ant to sit on the beach, _____ with

rit. **In tempo** ♩ = 96

rit. **In tempo** ♩ = 96

This system contains measures 20 through 23. The vocal line has the lyrics "No cash _____ to be earned, It is pleas - ant to sit on the beach, _____ with". The piano accompaniment features a *rit.* (ritardando) in measures 20 and 21, followed by a **In tempo** section starting in measure 22. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 96. The key signature changes to one flat (B-flat major) in measure 22. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a "3" in measures 20, 22, and 23.

24

noth - ing at all to be done!

mf

28

poco rit. A bit faster, undulating ♩ = 104 *mf*

poco rit. A bit faster, undulating ♩ = 104

How

32

pleas - ant to look at the o - cean, — Dem - o crat - ic and damp; in - dis - crim - i - nate; It

mp

III. A Lady Who Thinks She Is Thirty

Ogden Nash
(1902–1971)David Conte
(b. 1955)

Freely, with great good humor ♩ = 92

Freely, with great good humor ♩ = 92

mf *p*

*hesitating**mf*

In tempo ♩ = 92

4 *hesitating* *mf* In tempo ♩ = 92

Un - will - ing - ly Mi - ran - da wakes, Feels the sun with

hesitating In tempo ♩ = 92

mp

8 *f*

ter - ror, One un - will - ing step she takes,

f *r.h.* *mp*

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12

Shud - d'ring to the mir - ror.

16

mf

Mi - ran - da in Mi - ran - da's sight Is old and gray and

20

f dirt-y; *mf* Twen - ty - nine she was last night; This

f *mp*

r.h.

24 *f*

morn - ing she is thir - ty. _____

28 *mf*

Shin - ing like the morn - ing star, _____

mp *l.h.*

32

Like the twi - light shin - ing, _____ Haunt - ed by a cal - en - dar, _____ Mi -