

Robert Russell Bennett
Chamber Music



Three Chaucer Songs (1926)

Merciless Beauty

for Soprano and String Quartet

Janet Schlein Somers and Paul Mack Somers, editors



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The *Three Chaucer Poems* (1926) are dedicated “to Percy E. Fletcher”, who was the music director of His Majesty’s Theatre in London. Bennett indicates that it is “for women’s voice or voices.” It was composed and first performed by the Société Musicale Indépendante in Paris, where Bennett, his wife, and daughter were living. In America it was performed on the evening of 13 April 1932 at the first Yaddo Festival of Contemporary Music in Saratoga Springs, NY. Soprano Ada Mac Leish was accompanied by the Hans Lange String Quartet. Also on the program was music by Roy Harris, Marc Blitzstein, Oscar Levant, George Antheil, and Nicholas Berezowsky. In December of that year a performance using women’s voices was given in New York by the Women’s University Glee Club. Bennett simultaneously produced a version with piano accompaniment instead of string quartet.

The text is *Merciless Beauty* by Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343 - 1400).

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Three Chaucer Songs (1926)

for Soprano and String Quartet

Duration: c. 7'16"

GEOFFREY CHAUCER (1343-1400)

ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT
(1894-1981)

*Edited by Janet S. Somers
and Paul M. Somers*

1. Captivity

Semplice ♩ = 80

The first system of the musical score for '1. Captivity' features five staves. The Soprano staff is empty. The Violin I staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violin II staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Viola staff begins with an alto clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violoncello staff begins with a bass clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The string parts consist of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines.

The second system of the musical score for '1. Captivity' features five staves. The Soprano staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *mezza voce*. The lyrics are: "Your ey - en two wol slee me so - den - ly, I may the beaut-tè of hem". The Violin I staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violin II staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Viola staff begins with an alto clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The Violoncello staff begins with a bass clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a dynamic marking of *p*. The string parts continue with rhythmic patterns and melodic lines.

8

Sop. not sus - ten - e, So wound - eth hit through - out my hert - e ke - ne.

Vln. I *mf* *dim.*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

12

Sop. And but your word wol hel - en hast - i - ly My hert - es wound - e, whyl that hit is

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

15

Sop. gren - e, Your ey - en two wol slee me sod - en - ly, I may the beau - tè of hem not sus -

Vln. I *fpp*

Vln. II *fpp*

Vla. *fpp*

Vc. *fpp*

2. Rejection

Andante ♩ = 60

Soprano *pp*
So hath your beau-tè fro your her-te chac-ed

Violin I *con sord.*
pp

Violin II *arco, con sord.*
pp

Viola *arco, con sord.*
pp

Violoncello *arco, con sord.*
pp lamentoso

5
Sop. Pit-ee, that me ne a-vail-eth not to pley - ne For daun-ger halt your mer-cy in

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

9 *mp*

Sop. his cheyn - e Gilt - les my deeth thus han ye me pur - chac-ed; I

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

13

Sop. sey you sooth me ded-eth not to fay - ne; So hath your beau-tè fro your her-te cha-ced Pit-ee, that me ne a -

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

17 **Animato** *mf*

Sop. vail-eth not to pley - ne Al - las! that na - ture hath in yow - com - pas -

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

3. Escape

Allegro deciso ♩ = 132

Soprano

f Sin I fro Love es - cap - ed am so

Violin I *f* senza sord.

Violin II *f* senza sord.

Viola *f* senza sord.

Violoncello *f* senza sord.

7

Sop. fat, I nev - er thenk to ben in his pri-son le - ne; Sin I am free, I

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

13

Tranquillo ♩ = 100

Sop. coun-te him not a be - ne. He may ans - were, — and se-ye this or that;

Vln. I *p* pizz. arco

Vln. II *p* pizz. arco

Vla. *p* pizz. arco

Vc. *p* pizz. arco

18 *sempre tranquillo*

Sop. I do no fors, I spek-e right as I me - ne. Sin I fro Love es - cap - ed am so

Vln. I pizz. arco

Vln. II pizz. arco

Vla.

Vc.

24

Sop. fat, I nev - er think to ben in his pri - son le - ne. Love hath my name y - strike

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

30 *rall.*

Sop. out of his sclat, And he is strike out of my bok - es cle - ne For ev - er mo; ther

Vln. I *fp*

Vln. II *fp*

Vla. *fp*

Vc. *fp*