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# Beautiful Things

*Soprano, Violin, and Piano*

Paul David Thomas

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Paul David Thomas (b. 1981)

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## Program notes

Each song of this work sets an essay from *Beautiful Things*, a collection of twenty-eight short essays by author Michelle Webster-Hein first published in *River Teeth Journal*. According to Webster-Hein, the goal of each of these essays was “to pinpoint one beautiful thing each day and write a meditation that enabled me truly to see it.” I was drawn to her writings because, despite their brevity, each of the essays were filled with vivid imagery, insightful observations, and surprising thoughtfulness. The goal in composing each of these songs was to capture the depth of meaning conveyed in the text and to compose a beautiful musical thing, as it were, to reflect the essay. Since each song gives a singular view of a different topic, this set may be sung in any order or individual songs may be performed apart from the whole.

—Paul David Thomas

### Beet

I sliced a beet in half and discovered that it has rings. Rings like you would find on a tree stump to mark its age—one ring, one year.

But beets are young, have only known one spring, one summer, one early fall, perhaps also one winter passed inside in a dark, dry box. So what could each ring represent? Each season? Each snap of cold? Each grub that has burrowed blindly around its girth in the cool black soil?

It makes me much less serious to think about how much happens, silently, under my feet.

### Cardinal

Had it not been for the vainglorious crimson cardinal strutting up and down the branches of our lilac tree, I might not have noticed the discreet female who landed on a nearby branch and pretended to be interested in something else.

She reminded me of myself at sixteen—plain but curious, aloof, the kind of girl who imagined much more than she actually lived. When he flitted off and she followed, I had an urge to call after her, assure her that, in a few years, she would be grateful.

### Dandelion

We have a carpet of dandelions over our front lawn—bright yellow heads peppering the cushions of moss and tufts of grass.

I don't understand why they garner so much resentment, these cheerful and persistent volunteers. I admire them, their spirit. I admire that no other flower over the course of my life has bent so kindly to the plucking, or to the painting of cheeks and noses, or, in its final days, to the flourish of a child's wish.

### Hymn

This morning at church I plunked out the four parts of an old hymn while above my chords the congregation's voices took flight. And I thought of geese bursting up together from the edge of a pond where they had been napping and squabbling and pecking for fish.

Sometimes it is hard for me to believe in God, heaven, restoration, but it is easy on Sundays, when the Mennonites sing, to suspect that goodness is always paddling about at the edges of things.

Catalog No. 8767

written for Jennifer Youngs

# Beautiful Things

for Soprano, Violin, and Piano

## Beet

Michelle Webster-Hein

Paul David Thomas (ASCAP)

Curiously ♩ = 100

Soprano

Violin

Piano

5

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the Soprano part starting with a whole rest, the Violin part with a half note G4, and the Piano part with a half note G3. The second system continues the instrumental parts, with the Violin and Piano parts featuring melodic lines and dynamic markings. The third system, starting at measure 5, shows the Soprano part with a whole rest, while the Violin and Piano parts continue their respective parts. A large diagonal watermark 'Copying is illegal only' is overlaid across the entire score.

10 *p* **A** *mf*

I sliced a beet in half and dis -

*p* *mf*

sul D gliss.

13

cov - ered that it has rings. Rings like you would

*8va*

*ped.* \*

16

find on a tree stump to mark its age -

*pizz.*

*8va*

*p sub.*

# Cardinal

Michelle Webster-Hein

Paul David Thomas (ASCAP)

Playfully ♩ = 62

Soprano *mf* Had it not been

Violin *pizz.* *mf*

Piano *mf*

3  
for the vain - glo - ri - ous - crim - son car - d'nal -

5 A

strut - ting up and down — the branch - es of our

*detached*

7

li - lac tree, I might not have

9

no - ticed the dis - creet fe - male who land - ed on a

arco pizz. arco pizz.

*light Ped.*

# Dandelion

Michelle Webster-Hein

Paul David Thomas (ASCAP)

*Con rubato* ♩ = 63 *freely*

Soprano

Violin *mf*

Piano *mf*

Ped. (1/2 Ped.)

3 *mf*

We have a car - pet of dan - de - li - ons

Ped. sim.)



6

o-ver our front lawn—

*f*

*p* *f*

9

bright yel-low heads pep-per-ing the cush-ions of moss and tufts of

*p*

*p*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

11

grass. I don't un-der - stand Why they gar - ner

*mp*

*mp* *p*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

*mp*

3

3

# Hymn

Michelle Webster-Hein

Paul David Thomas (ASCAP)

In 2  $\text{♩} = 80$

Soprano

Violin

Piano

*p*

*con Fed.*

7 *mp* **A**

This morn - ing at church I plunked out the four parts — of an

*mp*

13

old hymn — while a - bove my chords the con - gre - ga - tion's

*p* *cresc. poco a poco*

*cresc. poco a poco*

18 *accel.* *f*

voic - es took flight. And I thought of geese burst - ing up to -

*accel.* *f*

24 *rall.* *mf* *freely*

geth - er from the edge of a pond where they had been

*rall.* *mp* *colla voce* *freely*

*mp* *colla voce*

30 **B** *a tempo*

nap - ping and squab - bling and peck - ing for fish.

*sul pont.* *mf*

*a tempo* *mf*