

"Songs from South of the Equator: Lampard and Penberthy "

IDRS Online Virtual Conference 2021

The Songs

Emily on Life (00:13)

Three Songs for Soprano, Oboe and Piano by Michael Lampard
Poems by Emily Dickinson (1830 -1886)

This song cycle was originally composed in 2016 for my friend, soprano Lee Abrahmsen, scored for soprano and piano, but yet to be premiered. When the opportunity came about to work on something for oboist Anne Gilby as part of a song cycle program for 2021 International Double Reed Society Virtual Symposium, these songs were the perfect candidate to revise with the inclusion of the oboe. I played oboe a little growing up, and one of my musical mentors was a leading oboist, so I was so pleased to be able to write for the instrument. I wanted there to be a conversation between voice and oboe in this work, a shared experience, and at times a juxtaposition that allows each instrument to comment on the sentiment of each poem. When I initially had the chance to compose something for Lee, I turned to one of my favourite poets, the 19th Century American poet Emily Dickinson. Her poetry is beautiful, using clean poetic lines, balanced and elegant. They suggest clean vocal lines, melody and an open texture, while saying something about the journey of life.

Michael Lampard



"Hope" is the thing with feathers (00:18)

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

There's something quieter than sleep (03:38)

There's something quieter than sleep
Within this inner room!
It wears a sprig upon its breast—
And will not tell its name.

Some touch it, and some kiss it—

Some chafe its idle hand—
It has a simple gravity
I do not understand!

I would not weep if I were they—
How rude in one to sob!
Might scare the quiet fairy
Back to her native wood!

While simple-hearted neighbors
Chat of the "Early dead"—
We—prone to periphrasis
Remark that Birds have fled!

On this wondrous sea (06:56)

On this wondrous sea
Sailing silently,
Ho! Pilot, ho!
Knowest thou the shore
Where no breakers roar—
Where the storm is o'er?

In the peaceful west
Many the sails at rest—
The anchors fast—
Thither I pilot thee—
Land Ho! Eternity!
Ashore at last!

Six Pastorals (08:43)

for Soprano, Oboe and Piano by James Penberthy

Poems by Gwen Harwood (1920 - 1915)

Six Pastorals was composed in 1987 (originally for soprano, flute and piano) by Gwen Harwood's friend James Penberthy. Harwood, the centenary of whose birth was celebrated in 2020, is recognised as one of Australia's finest poets. A trained musician, she collaborated as a librettist of note with Australian composers including Penberthy, Larry Sitzky, Don Kay and Ian Cugley. Harwood's poems reveal her love of music, her acute perception and complex inner world. In 1976 she and her husband Bill moved to a five-acre property at Kettering on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel south of Hobart. The Pastoral poems, taken from her volume *Bone Scan*, take their inspiration from her environment there—the seaside at Oyster Cove, her property and the nearby countryside. **Anne Gilby**



I Feral cat (08:58)

I met death in the field, cold-eyed,
Conservative business-man, soft-soled,
Grey-striped suit unobtrusive.

No boring dialogues on the nature of this life:
He wants my pretty chicks.
Does their mother have them safe?

Twilight has rustled gold
From pale wattles and water's sunset shield.
Great pines shiver.

Darkness falls on the cool cat who will wait
For feather and pulsing fur.
Darkness comes, soon or late.
For him the night is rapture.

II Reflections (11:22)

Two worlds meet in the mirror
Of the quiet dawn. The trees
Lift stem and crown above
Their own calm images.

Rest, in the heart's dry season,
Where the green reeds stitch light
To light, where water levels
Unendingly the bright

Ripple of leaf or wind-breath;
Inverts the bowl of sky
To a cup of deep enchantment,
As if some perfect eye

Saw memory and substance
As one, and could restore
In depth, in flawless detail,

Time as it was before.

Why does the body harbour
No memory of pain,
While a word, a name unspoken
In the mind cuts to the bone?

When time is turned to anguish,
Lastborn of nature, rest,
Where shade and water offer
Solace to all who thirst.

III Carapace (14:09)

Hold in the hollow of your palm
This carapace so delicate
One breath would send it spinning down,
Yet strong enough to bear the stress
Of ebb, flow, metamorphosis
From skin to shell.
Seasons have scoured
This beautiful abandoned house
From which are gone eyes, sinews, all
Taken-for-granted gifts.

I hold

In my unhoused continuing self
The memory that is wisdom's price
For what survives and grows beneath
Old skies, old stars.
Fresh mornings rim
The carapace of night with gold.
The sandgrains shine, the rockpools brim
With tides that bring and bear away
New healing images of day.

IV Autumn rain (17:35)

Chill rain: the end of autumn.
A day of somber music,
A raindrop army drumming

To the plover's haunting cry.
Grief under a gold mask,
Perhaps? More likely, joy

At the delicate abundance
Stirring in sodden paddocks
To nourish generations

Of spurred grey wings. A day
For the householder to listen
In peace to his tanks filling,

Or watch the mushrooms making
Themselves from almost nothing
In their chosen place, a domed

City among the pines;
But to any eye beneath them
Dark suns with rays extending.

A day to think of death,
Perhaps, or of children's children
Inheriting the earth.

V Winter afternoon (21:08)

A sun too mild to challenge
Frost in the shady hollows
Honours this afternoon
With light so sharp the gulls
A mile away flash silver.

Cold underfoot, how cold
The touch of air on hand
And face in lengthening shadows
By the dam's hoof-churned rim.
Explicit darkness stamps

And snorts. Two young bulls wheel
Away, return and circle
Like boys at play exploding
With aimless energy,
Then stand stock-still exhaling

A sour sweet mash of grasses.
Clear light glosses their blackness.
Taut flank, keel-curving breast,
Bold eyeball, glistening muzzle
Plumed with the warmth of breath.

(Credits 28:28)

No word that makes us mortal
Touches their strength, or glints
On their secret horizon:
This winter's day, this field
Where earth has set their table.

VI A Welcome – Fowls and Flowers (24:16)

Field of the cloth of gold!
Random as stars, the dandelions
Crowd in their constellations.

A day of muted brightness
But for these blazing flowers
Through which, at first by ones

And twos, then all at once,
A friendly host comes running.
Two beauties walk together,

Moorish princesses, distant
From the common flock; a few
Are glossed with autumn colours,

Bronze, sepia, russet brown.
All gather close and turn
Their sharp archaic profiles -

You should have come with gifts
To us of ancient lineage.
We scratched the dust of Egypt.

Caesar carried us North.
We voyaged with Columbus.
I walk on empty handed

Through taller reeds and grasses.
"O happy living things" –
As Coleridge says, the heart

Must bless them to be blessed.
And when at last I leave,
The flock, in benediction,

Waits in the field of gold.
Seed of the seed of grasses
They fossick in will flourish.

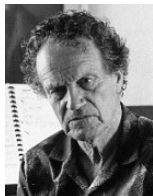
Beyond the net of language
They know themselves immortal
As grassblade and grasshopper,

As the gods who fill their dishes.

The Composers



Michael Lampard studied classical voice and composition at the University of Tasmania, and with the IHOS Opera Laboratory in Hobart, before relocating to Melbourne to pursue a career as a professional opera singer. A leading young baritone, he has sung principal roles with Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Melbourne Opera and has toured internationally in opera and concert. Primarily a composer of vocal music, Michael has composed a number of chamber operas and operas for children, several of which were performed in Tasmania. His songs and instrumental music have been performed all over Australia by artists including Suzanne Shakespeare, Sally-Anne Russell, the Quartz Quartet, Rhodri Clarke and the Art of Sound Orchestra. He has also had works performed in the USA, Japan, Italy, and the United Kingdom. For more information about Michael, please visit www.michaellampard.com



James Penberthy was born in Melbourne in 1917 and received his early music training from his father. After attending the universities of Western Australia and Melbourne he became a schoolmaster where he taught music and formed orchestras. Following active war time service with the RAN, he obtained first class honours in composition at the University of Melbourne. He later studied composition with Nadia Boulanger in France and conducting with Sir John Barbirolli in England. For many years he worked in Western Australia where he founded the West Australian Opera Company and was co-founder of the West Australian Ballet Company.

He was a prolific composer and his major works number over 100. Although he wrote in many different genres, his intense interest in the theatre resulted in 22 ballets and 11 operas, and it is in this body of work, which displays his strong dramatic and lyrical gifts, that his importance in Australian music lies.

In 1975 Penberthy moved to live on the North Coast of NSW, where he founded the School of Arts at Southern Cross University.

He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Music from Melbourne University in 1975 and the Order of Australia in 1986.

James Penberthy died on 29 March 1999.

Australian Music Centre: <https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/penberthy-james>

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Many thanks to Mary Harwood and Cassandra Atherton for their assistance with the Penberthy/Harwood songs, and our video recordist and editor, Tom Campbell. Also to St Leonards Uniting Church Brighton for making it possible for us to have a recording venue during Melbourne's covid restrictions, post lockdown.

The Performers



Anne Gilby enjoys a distinguished career as performer and educator. Together with a wide repertoire as a concerto and recital soloist, her orchestral positions include Principal Oboist of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Städtisches Orchester Bremerhaven and the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra as well as Guest Principal with all the major Australian symphony orchestras. Anne has held academic appointments at the Edith Cowan and Monash Universities and the Victorian College of the

Arts. The founding President of the Australasian Double Reed Society, Anne co-hosted the 2004 International Double Reed Society Conference in Melbourne. She has chaired the Artistic Committees of the Youth Music Australia and the Victorian Opera and sat on the Australia Council Music Board. Her teaching practice has seen her work in such diverse countries as Taiwan and Afghanistan. Her own performance builds on her studies with Jiri Tancibudek, Leon Goossens, Helmut Winschermann and Maurice Bourgue.



Australian soprano Lee Abrahmsen is a multi-award winning soprano both on the operatic stage and concert platform.

Lee was recipient of the prestigious Herald Sun Aria, Opera Awards Royal Overseas League Award and the Acclaim Awards first prize. She has performed as soloist in Australia with Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, Melbourne Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Queensland Symphony, Omega Ensemble, Melbourne Opera, Victorian Opera, and

internationally at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, St Martin in the Fields in London, in China and Japan.

She has sung over 30 principal roles including Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Opera Australia), Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*, Senta in *The Flying Dutchman*, Die Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, CioCioSan in *Madame Butterfly*, Konstanze in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Mimi in *La Bohème* (for Melbourne Opera), and title role in *Tosca* (Australian Discovery Orchestra).

Lee received the Opera Chaser's Outstanding Female in a Lead Role for Isolde in 2018 and received Greenroom Awards Nominations for *Die Marschallin* and *Valencienne*. Lee appeared on Qantas In-Flight Entertainment singing Richard Strauss *Four Last Songs* with Omega Ensemble and sang the National Anthem at the Ashes Cricket Tests in Sydney and Melbourne.



Sam is a pianist, composer, conductor, and tutor based in Melbourne. Sam studied piano with Professor Ian Holtham at the University of Melbourne (2013), during which time he was the recipient of numerous faculty, university, and college awards. Following his undergraduate studies, he went on to complete a graduate law degree (Juris Doctor, University of Melbourne), before working as a management consultant.

Resuming full time work and study in music in 2018, Sam relocated to the United Kingdom to undertake an MPhil in Music Studies at the University of

Cambridge (2019). Since returning to Melbourne, he has worked as a pianist for several choral and opera organisations, including the Victorian Opera, Australian Children's Choir, Melbourne Chamber Choir, and more. As a composer, he has released several albums of original piano works, recorded at Move Records. Sam is also the conductor of The Melbourne Chinese Choir.