Poetry in Music: Texts Quoted in Class 5

Friedrich Schiller: from "Ode to Joy"

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Wem der große Wurf gelungen
Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
Wer ein holdes Weib errungen
Mische seinen Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

Joy, beautiful spark of the gods,
Daughter from Elysium,
We enter, drunk with fire,
Heavenly One, thy sanctuary!
Your magic binds again
What convention strictly divides;
All people become brothers,
Where your gentle wing abides.

Who has succeeded in the great attempt,
To be a friend's friend,
Whoever has won a lovely woman,
Add his to the jubilation!
Indeed, who calls even one soul
Theirs upon this world!
And whoever never managed, shall steal himself
Weeping away from this union!

— translator unknown (Wikipedia)

John Milton: from "L'Allegro"

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.
But haste thee, Mirth, and bring with thee
The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty.
And if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free;
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night;
Then to come in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good morrow.
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

Antonio Vivaldi: "Spring" from "I Quattro Stagioni"

Allegro

Giunt' è la Primavera e festosetti
La Salutan gl' Augei con lieto canto,
E i fonti allo Spirar de' Zeffiretti
Con dolce mormorio Scorrono intanto:
Vengon' coprendo l' aer di nero amanto
E Lampi, e tuoni ad annuntiarla eletti
Indi tacendo questi, gl' Augelletti;
Tornan' di nuovo al lor canoro incanto:

Largo

E quindi sul fiorito ameno prato
Al caro mormorio di fronde e piante
Dorme 'l Caprar col fido can' à lato.

Allegro

Di pastoral Zampogna al suon festante
Danzan Ninfe e Pastor nel tetto amato
Di primavera all' apparir brillante.

— see over for translation

Allegro

The Spring is here with all that pleases;
The little birds rejoice in festive song.
The murmuring streams, caressed by gentle breezes,
Run merrily their joyful course along.
Now thunder roars as herald of the season,
And lightning splits the somber skies in twain.
But they give o'er, and earth returns to reason;
The birds take up their charming songs again.

Largo

When flower-strewn field and shady grove beguile him,
And leafy branches rustle overhead,
The goatherd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.

Allegro

Now summoned by the bagpipes' festive measures,
Nymphs and shepherds dance in rustic style,
In Spring's decor, agleam with floral treasures.

— translated by r.b.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: from "To a Skylark"

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run;
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of Heaven,
In the broad day-light
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight […]

Rita Dove: two poems from "Sonata Mulattica"

1.

IF was at the beginning. If
he had been older, if he hadn' tbeen
dark brown eyes ablaze
in that remarkabl face;
if he had not been so gifted, so young
a genius with no time to grow up;
if he hadn't grown up, undistinguished,
to an obscure old age.
If the piece had actually been,
as Kreutzer exclaimed, unplayable—even after
our man had played it, and for years
no one else was able to follow—
so that the composer's fury would have raged
for naught, and wagging tongues
could keep alive the original dedication
from the title page he shredded.

Oh, if only Ludwig had been better-looking,
or cleaner, or a real aristocrat,
von instead of the unexceptional **van**
from some Dutch farmer; if his ears
had not already begun to squeal and whistle;
if he hadn't drunk his wine from lead cups,
if he could have found True Love. Then
the story would have held: in 1803
George Polgreen Bridgetower,
son of Friedrich Augustus the African Prince
and Maria Anna Sovinki of Biala in Poland,
traveled from London to Vienna
where he met the Great Master
who would stop work on his Third Symphony

to write a sonata for his new friend
to permiere triumphantly on May 24,
whereupon the composer himself
leapt up from the piano to embrace
his “lunatic mulatto.”

Who knows what would have folowed?
They might have palled around some,
just a couple of wild and crazy guys
strutting the town like rock stars,
hitting the bars for a few beers, a few laughs…
instead of falling out over a girl
nobody remembers, nobody knows.

Then this bright-skinned papa’s boy
could have sailed his fifteen-minute fame
straight into the rocord books—where
instead of a Regina Carter or Aaron Dworkin or Boyd Tinsley
sprinkled hee and there, we would find
rafts of black kids scratching out scales
on their matchbox violins so that some day
they might play the impossible:
Beethoven’s Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47,
also known as The Bridgetower.

2.

He frightens me. I’ve never heard music
like this man’s, this sobbing
in the midst of triumphal chords,
such ambrosial anguish,
jigs danced on shimmering coals.
Oh, I can play it well enough—hell,
I’ve been destined to travel these impossible
switchbacks, but it’s as if I’m skating
on his heart, blood tracks
looping everywhere, incarnadine
dips and curves . . .
I’m not making sense.

You're making ultimate sense
he seems to say, nodding
his rutted, heroic brow.

Jan Zwicky: Brahms' Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115

That we shall not forget to honour
brown, its reedy clarities.

And, though the earth is dying
and the name of its diseases
spread from the fencelines, Latinate:
a bright field
ribboned with swath.

That the mind's light could be filtered
as: a porch, late afternoon,
a trellised rose,
                which is to say
a truth in nostalgia:
if we steel ourselves against regret
we will not grow more graceful,
but less.

That a letter might honestly
begin, *Dear Beloved*.