



# POETRY in MUSIC

Class 1

February 20, 2023

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## Class 1: The Sound of Words

*Note:* The organization of this first class roughly follows the outline syllabus for the whole course; similar topics and others will be developed later in the classes indicated. Because this is intended as an overview, most of the pieces played or read in it will be short excerpts rather than complete works.

### A. The Music of Poetry

[INTRODUCTION] Start by thinking of poetry, not as meaning, but as sound. In the first part of the class, we will hear the opening lines of two poems, solely for the music they contain. We shall then see how others have responded to these texts with actual music or in other media.

- **TS Eliot:** *Four Quartets*, opening of *Burnt Norton* (1936): (a) read by Sir Alec Guinness, and (b) in a tribute video by Satty VerbArt.
- **Baudelaire:** "L'invitation au voyage" from *Les fleurs du mal* (1857). First stanza: (a) read by Dana Andreea Nigrim, (b) translated by William Aggeler, (c) sung by Gérard Souzay in the setting by Henri Duparc, and (d) sung by Léo Ferré in his own setting.
- **WH Auden:** "The Composer." Sonnet (see [attachment](#)). Also quotations by Leonardo da Vinci, William Blake, Paul Verlaine, and Joan Miro.

### B. The Sacred in Text and Song

[CLASS 2] Examples of sacred poetry generating music, not as an end in itself, but as something to carry it, making it audible in vast spaces, the liturgical chanting found in many religions. In the Christian Church, this resulted in the Gregorian Plainchant that developed during the 9th and 10th centuries, and continued through the Middle Ages.

- **Etienne de Liège:** *Deum verum* (c.900), Gregorian plainchant, performed by Psallentes.
- **A Worcester Ladymass** (c.1400), MSS fragments from Worcester Cathedral performed by Trio Medieval.

## C. Songs of the People

[CLASS 3] Probably even before there was church music there was folk music in the streets and fields—rhymes and ditties attached to tunes that have persisted in one form or another for centuries. And folk music remains as a “flavor capsule” taking us back to the spirit of its particular region.

- **Traditional: “Sumer is icumen in.”** Folk round from the 13th century or earlier, sung by the Hilliard Singers.
- **Gjendine's Lullaby.** Norwegian folk song performed by Trio Medieval, notated by Edvard Grieg but probably much earlier.
- **Traditional: “The fox went out on a chilly night.”** Performed by Amanda Powell with Apollo's Fire. An Appalachian narrative song that can be traced back to the 15th century.
- **Luciano Berio: “Loosin Yelav.”** Armenian melody from *Folk Songs* (1964), sung by Magdalena Kožená, with Sir Simon Rattle.

## D. Songs of the Poets

[CLASS 4] Art Song, or the vocal settings of the work of poets who publish their poetry in its own right. The term may seem pretentious (like “classical” in “classical music”), but it makes the point that we are dealing with the marriage of two separate artists, the poet and the composer. Indeed, more like polygamy, since a great poem may be set by numerous composers, whereas the composer's work belongs to that text only.

- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “Der Erlkönig.”** (a) Illustration to the 1782 poem by Moritz von Schwind; (b) translation by Richard Wilbur; (c) performance of Franz Schubert's 1815 setting by Matthias Goerne with Andreas Haefliger.
- **William Blake: “The Sick Rose”** (1794). The poem as: (a) illustrated by Blake; (b) read by Martin Harris; (c) set by Benjamin Britten in *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings* (1943), here performed by Nicholas Phan and John Thurgood; and maybe (d) in a music video with music by Samy Moussa.

## E. Conversations Between the Arts

[CLASS 5] Two poems inspired by the experience of listening to music, but intended to be read independent of it. See [attachment](#) for texts.

- **Mary Stewart Hammond: “Seeing Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-flat Major in the Old Whaling Church, Edgartown.”** An interesting poem, making the

point that the writer *cannot* turn the sound of music into words. Coupled with a video performance of part of the Mozart first movement by the Leopold Quartet at the New England Conservatory.

- **Grace Schulman: “Blue in Green.”** Poem describing a track on the Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* LP (1959), with saxophone solo by John Coltrane; read by the author with added images by William Baziotes.

## F. Words for Music

[CLASS 6] Finally, words written expressly for musical setting. A sample only, but the sixth class will go further into the American Songbook and Broadway.

- **William Walton: Tango-Pasodoble from *Façade*** (1923) with words by Edith Sitwell. Performed by Stephanie Blythe and Raymond Menard.
- **Cole Porter: “You're the top” from *Anything Goes*** (1934), with the composer himself singing.
- **Lin-Manuel Miranda: *Hamilton*** (2015). Opening scene.

## Artists Mentioned in the Class

Wystan Hugh **Auden** (1907–73, *British American poet*), Charles **Baudelaire** (1821–67, *French poet*), William **Baziotes** (1912–63, *American painter*), Luciano **Berio** (1925–2003, *Italian composer*), William **Blake** (1757–1827, *English poet*), Benjamin **Britten** (1913–76, *English composer*), Gustave **Courbet** (1819–77, *French painter*), Salvador **Dalí** (1904–89, *Spanish painter*), Miles **Davis** (1926–91, *American musician*), Henri **Duparc** (1848–1933, *French composer*), Thomas Stearns **Eliot** (1888–1965, *American English poet*), **Etienne** de Liège (850–920, *Burgundian composer*), Léo **Ferré** (1916–93, *French composer*), Johann Wolfgang von **Goethe** (1749–1832, *German poet*), Mary Stewart **Hammond** (1940–2022, *American poet*), **Leonardo** da Vinci (1452–1519, *Italian painter*), Henri **Matisse** (1869–1954, *French painter*), Joan **Miró** (1893–1983, *Spanish painter*), Lin-Manuel **Miranda** (b.1980, *American playwright and composer*), Samy **Moussa** (b.1984, *Canadian composer*), Cole **Porter** (1891–1964, *American composer*), Franz **Schubert** (1797–1828, *Austrian composer*), Grace **Schulman** (b.1935, *American poet*), Edith **Sitwell** (1887–1964, *English poet*), Paul **Valéry** (1871–1945, *French poet*), William **Walton** (1902–83, *English composer*)

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