



## 7th Annual *song*SLAM Competition

January 13, 2023 at 7pm

Cary Hall, DiMenna Center

MC: Tom Cipullo

### Team 1:

### Welcome to Guntown • Maria Thompson Corley

Performers: AddieRose Brown, soprano & poet & Maria Thompson Corley, composer & pianist

Soprano **AddieRose Brown** brings the heartfelt authenticity of the folk music that drew her to singing to her performance of operatic and art song repertoire. 2022-23 appearances include *Mélisande* (Pelléas et Mélisande, dell'Arte Opera Ensemble), *Zerlina* (Don Giovanni, Teatro Ángela Peralta) and Clarice Jensen's *The Exaltation of Innana* (world premiere) with ACME at The Morgan Library.

Juilliard-trained pianist **Maria Thompson Corley** has appeared as a soloist and collaborator throughout the world. Dr. Corley has recorded for Naxos, Albany, Parma, MSR Classics, and independent labels. Her songs, choral and instrumental works and arrangements have been commissioned, studied, performed and recorded by renowned musicians and major institutions.

#### Text:

Welcome to Guntown,  
    where we tell it like it is,  
where the most prominent building  
    is a funeral biz.  
Here the rain runs red  
off each undeserving head,  
but never you fear —  
    for we don't see colour here...  
Blinded by the bright face of Bureaucracy  
    that laments and condoles,  
beaming through the wrinkles of complacency,  
seamlessly filling its sovereign roles.

Welcome to Guntown,  
where we keep everything unlocked,  
    and though infants go hungry,  
the armory is fully stocked.  
Just one word of warning  
to those who breathe the air:  
    We're told it always seems to bear  
    the cold, metallic taste of fear.  
So welcome to Guntown:  
    The safest place to be is here.

—**AddieRose Brown**

24 May 2022 [written while driving by Guntown,  
Mississippi as the news of the Uvalde shooting  
was breaking]

**Team 2:**

## Let it hurt you then let it heal you/Je peux aimer ● Samuel Beebe

Performers: **Natasha Nelson**, mezzo soprano & **Rebecca Wu**, pianist

Composer and sound designer [Samuel Beebe](#) explores the dramatic possibilities of music and sound. He holds a Ph.D in Music Composition from Stony Brook University, along with degrees from Boston University and Northeastern University. Beebe is a Visiting Lecturer at Salem State University and Merrimack College.

Based in New York, **Sara Costantino** works extensively in theatre and medical simulation. A writer of various forms, she maintains the poetry blog '[Where They Harvest Pluviophiles](#),' and received the Stony Brook University Southampton's Children's Literature Fellowship and holds degrees in Theatre and Public Relations from Pennsylvania State University.

**Natasha Nelson** began the 2022-23 season performing with the Opera Philadelphia Chorus in Festival O22. Natasha has performed in recital at the Dramatists Guild of America and in concert in Austria and Italy. She hosts a radio show featuring contemporary classical music on WUSB 90.1FM/107.3FM, broadcasting to Long Island, NY.

**Rebecca Wu** is a Taiwanese-American pianist and music educator based in New York City. At age 13, she made her concerto debut performing Mozart Concerto no. 20 with the Oakland Civic Orchestra. She is an active performer and has played in venues throughout the US and participated in festivals in Italy and China. Rebecca received a BM in Piano Performance and Recording Arts and MA in Audio Science at The Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. She earned her MM at Mannes in New York under the tutelage of Professor Eteri Andjaparidze and is currently pursuing her DMA at SUNY Stony Brook, studying with Gilbert Kalish.

**Text:**

Let it hurt you then let it heal you

Je peux aimer (I can love)

–**Sara Costantino**

**Team 3:**

## **Cultivo una rosa blanca ● Youngmo Na**

**Performers: Hannah Cho, soprano & Youngmo Na, composer & pianist**

Korean collaborative pianist, vocal coach, and composer **Youngmo Na** is an active performer. He holds a master's degree in collaborative piano and has studied for his PDPL with Cristina Stanescu at Mannes school of music.

**Hannah Cho** is an up and coming young artist with a fascinating musical delicacy, especially in music from the Baroque and Contemporary era and Lied.

**Text:**

Cultivo una rosa blanca  
en junio como en enero  
para el amigo sincero  
que me da su mano franca.

Y para el cruel que me arranca  
el corazón con que vivo,  
cardo ni ortiga cultivo;  
cultivo una rosa blanca.  
-José Martí

**Translation:**

I cultivate a white rose  
In June as in January  
For the sincere friend  
Who gives me his hand frankly.

And for the cruel person who tears out  
The heart with which I live,  
I cultivate neither nettles nor thorns:  
I cultivate a white rose.

**Team 4:**

## Hymn to the Night ● Timothy Morrow

Performers: Josh Lisner, tenor & Timothy Morrow, composer & pianist

**Timothy Morrow** is a composer, pianist, and conductor born in Basking Ridge, NJ. Growing up singing in church, he has long been surrounded by choral and vocal music, later studying piano and composition at Westminster Choir College. Timothy currently resides in Kingston, NY where he studies conducting at Bard Conservatory.

**Josh Lisner** is a tenor, conductor, and music educator from Bridgewater, NJ. As a young vocalist, Josh always knew he wanted to pursue music, and, since graduating from Westminster Choir College, he now teaches at Edison High School in Edison, NJ where he conducts five choirs of various sizes and levels.

**Text:**

I heard the trailing garments of the Night  
Sweep through her marble halls!  
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light  
From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,  
Stoop o'er me from above;  
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,  
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,  
The manifold, soft chimes,  
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night,  
Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air  
My spirit drank repose;  
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there, —  
From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear  
What man has borne before!  
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,  
And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!  
Descend with broad-winged flight,  
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most  
fair,  
The best-beloved Night!  
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Team 5:**

## My Soul is Awakened ● Dina Pruzhansky

Performers: Susannah Stewart, soprano & Maeve Berry, pianist

**Dina Pruzhansky** is an award-winning composer and pianist in NYC. An alumna of the Mannes School for Music and the BMI Advanced Musical Theater Workshop. Highlights: opera-film 'Heroes of New York' (composer), opera 'Shulamit' (composer-librettist), Carnegie Hall debut as composer-performer, Aspen Music Festival, 2019 NYMT festival (finalist), Fred Ebb Award nomination.

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**Susannah Stewart**, soprano, earned her degrees from the Eastman School of Music and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Performed opera roles include Aveline Mortimer (Elizabeth Cree, Puts), The Lady with the Cake Box (Postcard from Morocco, Argento), Alcina (Alcina, Handel), Dido (Dido and Aeneas, Purcell), and Zerlina (Don Giovanni, Mozart).

**Maeve Berry** is a pianist, music theorist, and vocal coach currently based in Rochester, NY. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts with Dr. Andrew Harley at the Eastman School of Music. Ms. Berry has appeared at various festivals including Songfest, Toronto Summer Music, and Source Song Festival.

### **Text:**

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring,  
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;  
For, above, and around me, the wild wind is roaring  
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,  
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;  
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,  
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky.

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing  
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray,  
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing  
And hear the wild roar of their thunder today!  
–Anne Brontë

### **Team 6:**

## **Forsworn ● Laura Brenneman**

**Performers: Kyra Miller, mezzo soprano & Laura Brenneman, composer & pianist**

**Laura Brenneman** is a songwriter, composer, and pianist based in Brooklyn, NY. Recent projects include music and arrangements for Antipodes (Danspace), Martha Clarke's The Threepenny Opera (Atlantic Theatre Company), and the score for Fox vs the Kingdom (St. Ann's Warehouse). In addition to her work as a composer, she also maintains a private studio of piano, voice, and composition students.

**Kyra Miller** is an actor, singer and writer from Brooklyn. Credits include *Rags* at Theatreworks Silicon Valley, *The Light in the Piazza* at the Philadelphia Theater Co., and *The Time of your Life* (Tina Landau dir., Seattle Rep and A.C.T.). Her puppet show *BlueBeardGasLight*, now a film, was a grantee of the Object Movement Festival in 2020.

**Text:**

Behold, great Queene, faire Eues Apologie,  
Which I haue writ in honour of your sexe,  
And doe referre vnto your Maiestie,  
To iudge if it agree not with the Text:  
And if it doe, why are poore Women blam'd,  
Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd?  
**-Emilia Bassano Lanier,**  
**selection from Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,**  
**1611**

Sonnet 152

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,  
But thou art twice forsworn, to me love  
swearing;  
In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn,  
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.  
But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,  
When I break twenty! I am perjur'd most;  
For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,  
And all my honest faith in thee is lost:  
For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep  
kindness,  
Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;  
And, to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,  
Or made them swear against the thing they see;  
For I have sworn thee fair; more perjur'd I,  
To swear against the truth so foul a lie!  
**-William Shakespeare, 1609**

**Team 7:**

**Recorders ages hence ● Zoe Yucong Wang**

**Performers: Sophie Thompson, soprano & Brian Wong, pianist**

**Zoe Yucong Wang** is a composer, pianist, and music entrepreneur based in Beijing and Rochester, NY. Her music has won first prizes in the Antonin Dvorak Composition Competition, Busan Maru International Music Festival Competition, etc., and has been performed by ACO, ESSO, Eastman Double Reed Ensemble. She is currently serving as a collaborative piano faculty member at the China Conservatory of Music and pursuing her dual DMA degrees at Eastman School of Music.

**Sophie Thompson** is passionate about art song and languages. This summer she was a Fellow at SongFest. Competitions include American Traditions Vocal Competition (Audience Favorite), Lotte Lenya Competition (Semifinalist), Jessie Kneisel Lieder Competition (1st), Eastman and CMU Concerto Competitions (Les Illuminations). MM Eastman School of Music; BFA Carnegie Mellon University.

Currently employed at The Juilliard School as staff pianist, **Brian Wong** has been the pianist for the residencies of Lawrence Brownlee, Denyce Graves, Barbara Hannigan and Simon Estes. Highlights of his performances include recital series at Alice Tully Hall and Carnegie Hall. In addition to fellowships at LA SongFest and Aspen Music Festival, Brian holds degrees from Juilliard, Eastman and The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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### Text:

RECORDERS ages hence,  
Come, I will take you down underneath this impassive exterior,  
I will tell you what to say of me,  
Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest  
lover,  
The friend the lover's portrait, of whom his friend his lover was  
fondest,  
Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of  
love within him, and freely pour'd it forth,  
Who often walk'd lonesome walks thinking of his dear friends, his  
lovers,  
Who pensive away from one he lov'd often lay sleepless and dissat-  
isfied at night,  
Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd  
might secretly be indifferent to him,  
Whose happiest days were far away through fields, in woods, on  
hills, he and another wandering hand in hand, they twain  
apart from other men,  
Who oft as he saunter'd the streets curv'd with his arm the shoul-  
der of his friend, while the arm of his friend rested upon  
him also.

–Walt Whitman

### Team 8:

## Baffled for just a day or two ● JL Marlor

Performers: Micah Gleason, mezzo soprano & Gracie Francis, pianist

**JL Marlor** is a multidisciplinary artist and composer known for her narrative-driven vocal works and chamber music. Her work examines the intersections between the collective and the individual as it relates to protest and social change, drawing heavily from Slavic women's music, riot grrrl punk, plainchant, and American protest music.

**Micah Gleason** has been recognized for her diverse abilities as a vocalist and conductor. Interdisciplinary collaboration and community building are at the core of Micah's music-making. She is curious about the most effective ways to disrupt the stasis of the modern concert hall. Based in Philadelphia, she is the current Conducting Fellow at the Curtis Institute of Music.

New Zealand-born **Gracie Francis** (she/her) is a doctoral student in collaborative piano at The Juilliard School, where she also works as a Diversity Advocate. She has broad experience and enthusiasm for vocal and instrumental collaboration, opera, harpsichord, and conducting. Gracie's background is in education and community-focused music-making, especially with youth and queer choirs.

**Text:**

Baffled for just a day or two—  
Embarrassed—not afraid—  
Encounter in my garden  
An unexpected Maid.

She beckons, and the woods start—  
She nods, and all begin—  
Surely, such a country  
I was never in!  
—**Emily Dickinson**

**Team 9:**

**Moonrise ● Laura Nevitt**

**Performers: Regina Stroncek, soprano & Taylor Burkhardt, pianist**

**Laura Nevitt** is a conductor and composer based in Boston. Laura is Founder & Artistic Director of Lilith Vocal Ensemble, and Associate Conductor at Voices Boston. Her compositions have been featured by the Handel & Haydn Society Youth Choruses, Choral Arts Initiative, The Evelyn Duo, Boston Conservatory Choir, and Nightingale. [www.lauranevitt.com](http://www.lauranevitt.com)

Soprano **Regina Stroncek** is a versatile artist with a deep-seated passion for art song. Regina is a two-time Fulbright Brazil alumna, and an alumna of the Barcelona Festival of Song and Source Song Festival. She has performed with ensembles such as the Boston Camerata, Nightingale Vocal Ensemble, and Border CrosSing.

Pianist **Taylor Burkhardt** lives and breathes opera and art song. Based in New York City, she balances a fellowship with the Marcus Vocal Arts Institute at The Juilliard School with professional work at multiple houses. Taylor has previously participated in songSLAM Minneapolis with her song partner, Regina, and is thrilled to be a part of the event in her new city.

**Text:**

Will you glimmer on the sea?  
Will you fling your spear-head  
On the shore?  
What note shall we pitch?

We have a song,  
On the bank we share our arrows -  
The loosed string tells our note:

O flight,  
Bring her swiftly to our song.  
She is great,  
We measure her by the pine-trees.  
—**Hilda Doolittle**



**Team 10:**

## **There Is No Magic Anymore ● Clint Borzoni**

**Performers:** Michelle Trovato, soprano & Clint Borzoni, pianist

Soprano **Michelle Trovato** has garnered praise from Opera News, The New York Times, Washington Post, Operawire, and Musical America for her dynamic interpretations and “silvery, fine-spun sound”. She enjoys bringing new works to the forefront, and has sung World Premieres by such composers as Felix Jarrar, Benjamin Yarmolinsky, Paul Vasile, Sophia Serghi, Stephen Variames, and Clint Borzoni.

**CLINT BORZONI** is an award-winning composer of Ecuadorian and Italian descent. His “highly original yet lyrical music...[and] natural gift for melody and harmonic structure” (The Huffington Post) and “sweeping melodies and emotional and dramatic range” (Opera News) has resulted in international performances and premieres.

**Text:**

“After Love”

There is no magic any more,  
We meet as other people do,  
You work no miracle for me  
Nor I for you.

You were the wind and I the sea —  
There is no splendor any more,  
I have grown listless as the pool  
Beside the shore.

But though the pool is safe from storm  
And from the tide has found surcease,  
It grows more bitter than the sea,  
For all its peace.

—**Sara Teasdale**

**Team 11:**

**Climbing ● Erik Franklin**

**Performers: Claire Galloway, soprano & Edward Rothmel, pianist**

Award-winning composer and clarinetist **Erik Franklin** balances a vibrant career on and off the stage. He has given concerts in nearly all fifty states and internationally in venues ranging from veterans' homes to Carnegie Hall. As a composer, Franklin strives to amplify the voices of his own LGBTQ community through artistic excellence, to the delight of audiences and performers alike.

Scottish-American soprano **Claire Galloway's** theatricality covers the gamut of "palpable pain" and "splendid, funny moments" (B.I.T.R.). A recent Fellow at Songfest, the Nordic Song Festival in Sweden, and the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, Ms. Galloway's innovative recital programming has resulted in the best-attended concert event at the Baltimore War Memorial Arts Initiative.

**Dr. Edward Rothmel** has worked extensively as a pianist, coach, and conductor throughout the U.S. and abroad. As a collaborative pianist, he has appeared in recital at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall with tenor Albert Lee. In preparation for the premiere of Kevin Puts's Letters from Georgia, Edward served as rehearsal pianist and coach to Renée Fleming.

**Text:**

High up in the apple tree climbing I go,  
With the sky above me, the earth below.  
Each branch is the step of a wonderful stair  
Which leads to the town I see shining up there.

Climbing, climbing, higher and higher,  
The branches blow and I see a spire,  
The gleam of a turret, the glint of a dome,  
All sparkling and bright, like white sea foam.

On and on, from bough to bough,  
The leaves are thick, but I push my way  
through;  
Before, I have always had to stop,  
But to-day I am sure I shall reach the top.

Today to the end of the marvelous stair,  
Where those glittering pinnacles flash in the  
air!  
Climbing, climbing, higher I go,  
With the sky close above me, the earth far  
below.

**-Amy Lowell**

**Team 12:**

***To the River* ● Marie Herrington**

**Performers: Emily Tate Daniel, soprano & Timothy Krippner, pianist**

**Marie Herrington** is a half Ukrainian composer and performer based in Baltimore, MD. This year she was seen as a composer at SongFest in San Francisco, CA, and was part of a world premiere of a sound art installation in New Orleans, LA at the Contemporary Arts Center.

**Emily Tate Daniel** is a recent graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she appeared as Tito in *La clemenza di Tito* under the direction of James Darrah and Raviv Ullman. In the 2022 – 2023 season, Emily will cover Alice Ford in *Falstaff* with Opera San José.

Lauded as "a true artist" by the late Aldo Ciccolini, **Timothy Krippner** has won top prizes in the Seattle International and Chicago International Piano Competitions. He has performed with artists such as Midori, played in masterclasses with Emmanuel Ax and Richard Goode, and was a two-year fellow at Da Camera of Houston.

**Text:**

Fair river! in thy bright, clear flow  
Of crystal, wandering water,  
Thou art an emblem of the glow  
Of beauty—the unhidden heart—  
The playful mazziness of art  
In old Alberto's daughter;

But when within thy wave she looks—  
Which glistens then, and trembles—  
Why, then, the prettiest of brooks  
Her worshipper resembles;  
For in my heart, as in thy stream,  
Her image deeply lies—  
His heart which trembles at the beam  
Of her soul-searching eyes.

—Edgar Allen Poe

**Team 13:**

***What Does Freedom Look Like?* ● Robert Gross**

**Performers: Shana Oshiro, soprano & Adam Mahonske, pianist**

**Shana Oshiro** is an alumna of Morgan State University with a BFA in Vocal Performance and is a former Miss Maryland. She has appeared with various opera and theatre companies and received awards in vocal competitions. Shana is also a board-certified music therapist with Masters in Music Therapy from Shenandoah Conservatory. She combines her love for performance and interest in community music therapy to address racism in the US with her barbershop quartet, HALO, and their collective community music therapy initiative. Their program, Race and #RealTalk, guides people through the listening and singing experience of Barbershop music helping them engage in difficult conversations about our country's complex race relations issues.

**Robert Gross** is a composer, music theorist and music therapist. He received his DMA in music composition at University of Southern California. He received an MA in Music for Film, Television and Theatre from the University of Bristol; an MM in Music Composition from Rice University; and a BM in Music Composition from Oberlin Conservatory.

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**Dr. Adam Mahonske** has performed as pianist at the Kennedy Center, the Meyerhoff, the Phillips Collection, the National Gallery, the Roerich Museum, Washington embassies, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore Symphony, Concert Artists of Baltimore, Peabody Conservatory, George Washington University, Catholic University, University of Maryland, and the Endless Mountain Music Festival.

### **Text:**

What does freedom look like?

When I put this question to artist, Shanequa Gay, she told me, “freedom looks like choice making without having to consider so many others when I make those choices.”

I hear In Shanequa’s response a deep cry for space to self actualize— to not be always stuck in survival mode.

A sketch of Shanequa’s painting, “We Were Always Scientists,” appears at the beginning of this book. I commissioned that painting partly because I was trying to figure out my own answer to this question.

I asked Shanequa to envision unnamed Black women scientists under slavery. I wanted to challenge the idea that scientific thought has been the exclusive purview of Euro-Americans and those of us who have been trained in their knowledge systems.

I also wanted something to remind myself that I belonged in my physics department office, and to remind myself that even in the worst conditions, Black women have looked up at the night sky and wondered.

–**Chanda Prescod-Weinstein**

### **Team 14:**

## ***Courage* ● Lauren Spavelko**

**Performers: Jennifer Sgroe, soprano & Eric Sedgwick, pianist**

Soprano **Jennifer Sgroe** has performed across the US, Finland, England and Austria in venues such as Jordan Hall, Radio City Music Hall, Carnegie Hall, Mechanics Hall, Dartington Hall, The Society for Ethical Culture and the United Nations. She is a proponent of new vocal works, especially by underrepresented composers.

**Eric Sedgwick** has performed with many of music’s top talents including Leona Mitchell, Sanford Sylvan, Marni Nixon, Nicholas Phan, Laquita Mitchell, and English hornist Thomas Stacy. He is a staff vocal coach at the Manhattan School of Music and a faculty coach at the Tanglewood Music Center.

**Lauren Spavelko** (b. 1989) is a composer in Columbus, Ohio. In her work, listeners and performers find play, connection, joy, and healing. Her songs have been awarded the Spoleto Festival’s Young Composers Prize (Italy) and placed finals for the NATS Art Song Composition Award.

### **Text:**

It isn’t always comfortable or easy—carrying your fear around with you on your great and ambitious road trip, I mean—but it’s always worth it, because if you can’t learn to travel comfortably alongside your fear, then you’ll never be able to go anywhere interesting or do anything interesting.

And that would be a pity, because (your) life is short and rare and amazing and miraculous, and you want to do really interesting things and make really interesting things while you're still here...I know that's what you want... It's what we all want...

It isn't always comfortable carrying your fear—but you have treasures hidden within you—extraordinary treasures—and bringing those treasures to light takes work and faith and focus and courage and hours of devotion...and the clock is ticking, and the world is spinning...

Life is short and rare and amazing and miraculous...And the clock is ticking, and the world is spinning, and we simply do not have time anymore to think so small.

You have treasures hidden within you. Extraordinary treasure...

It isn't always comfortable or easy—carrying your fear around with you —but it's always worth it. Always...

—excerpts from **BIG MAGIC** by Elizabeth Gilbert. Copyright © Elizabeth Gilbert, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

## 2022 *songSLAM* Commission Prize:

### ***Us Now* ● Shawn Chang**

**Break Away**

**Falling in Love with the Unknown**

**Us Now**

**Performers: Daniel McGrew, tenor & Shawn Chang, pianist**

#### **Text:**

Break Away (2017)

The best part of being  
here and human  
is the way we can make  
our own meaning. Does life  
not feel vibrant in this  
current shape? Shift it  
and weave new forms  
to find freedom. Oh what  
power we hold in our lack  
of control, our choice  
that moves like a wave  
within us, this quiet  
charge that can grow  
louder and become our  
arrow if we let it.

Mystery is ours always  
and so up ahead the world  
blooms wider still

Falling in Love with the Unknown (2018)

Reach out to find  
the sensual curve uncharted,  
let this first touch be  
not an explanation  
but a gesture of desire,  
not a need to know  
but a full arrival  
of attraction for all  
that remains unseen.  
What wow and wonder opens  
like a ghost in space,  
up ahead the throne  
of passion is something  
like a hidden pulse  
and we are only meant  
to aim toward it adoringly,  
with love in our questions.

Us Now (2017)

The grape is not a human,  
but it took human hands  
to cultivate its growth  
and offer sweetness.  
We do know how.  
This is where my fury rises.  
We have all the tools  
for transformation, we can  
become something better,  
and still we sink beyond  
our own capability of light,  
still we set fire to all  
sense and strike love down  
again and again with reason  
that stems from belief,  
which is ours to craft  
and make new as we see fit.

**-Jacqueline Suskin**

**Program Notes:**

I was introduced to the poems of Jacqueline Suskin through hearing Molly Joyce's setting of Redesign Our Time. The music was marvelous and the performance exquisite. I was moved by how effortlessly the words conjured images and sounds. But above all, I was stunned by how the poems asked

questions, questions that reflect our own time. This is true for all of the Suskin poems I have encountered.

This song cycle is my first attempt at consciously trying to develop musical connections between the three Suskin poems, “Break Away,” “Falling in Love with the Unknown,” and “Us Now.” For that reason, these songs are meant to be performed together and in order. To me, the three poems occupy three different points, and therefore points of view, of a linear passage of time. “Break Away” is full of awe and hope for the future. “Falling in Love with the Unknown” revels in the day-to-day discovery of the world and the self. And “Us Now” embodies disappointment and disillusionment after the fact. As a cycle, it is as much my wish to highlight the aspirational as the dispiriting. After all, there would be no disappointments had we not once held hopes and dreams.

I have taken some liberties with Suskin’s lines. In addition to a few instances where I repeat words and sentences that are not repeated in the original poems, I also switch the order of some lines in “Falling in Love with the Unknown.” I must mention that I borrow a motif from Benjamin Britten’s *Phaedra*. Or to be perfectly accurate, I borrow my own variation on that very motif. The origin of said variation traces back to a piano interlude I composed to connect Monteverdi’s *Lamento d’Arianna* to Britten’s *Phaedra* for a voice and piano recital program. Perhaps I always knew that this material would somehow find its way from being in a transient state to a more manifested circumstance. Shift it and weave new forms to find freedom.

**Shawn Chang, composer**