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# THE SONGS FOR SOLO VOICE AND PIANO OF META OVERMAN (1907–1993)

DAVID WICKHAM

david.wickham@mac.com

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[www.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.adelaide.edu.au)

## Introduction

Neglect of their creative work is both the most common and most cruel of fates accorded to composers. This study opens discussion on the songs for voice and piano by Meta Overman and aims to demonstrate the musical and literary quality and sensitivity in the best of them, offering the view that their neglect is not due to any defect. It also aims to set Overman in a broader context: firstly, in Dutch musical history from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s (when Overman could be said to have reached compositional maturity), and secondly, to offer a comparison across German, French and English song composers working in the 1930s. Overman's music received very few performances in Australia and she remained in relative cultural isolation there where she wrote the bulk of her mature songs. It is therefore hard to place her in a meaningful Australian context.

It is also important to acknowledge the important work of a woman composer, one of many who, as Cat Hope reminds us, 'are challenged in the music industry at almost every turn — in terms of their income, inclusion, decision making, mentoring, education, and the very nature of their workplace' (Hope 2018). Restoring to public view the best work of a woman as gifted as Overman is a contribution that I am glad to make.

Meta Overman was born in Rotterdam, the second city of the Netherlands, in 1907 into a musical and well-connected family. She showed early promise as a pianist and quickly turned to composition. Guided by composers Edward Flipse (1896–1973) and especially Willem Pijper (1894–1947), she produced a broad catalogue of works for forces ranging from solo piano to full orchestra, generally preferring chamber music. In 1947, she and her husband, accompanied by their young son, left the Netherlands for Australia where she maintained her compositional output until the late 1980s. Though Overman's music was regularly performed in her native country, she did not achieve widespread recognition of her work in Australia despite some high-profile performances and the forming of friendships in a select group of composers and other musicians in Melbourne during the 1960s. The interested reader is directed to a biographical thesis by Patricia Thorpe (Thorpe 1988), and the piano music has recently been edited (Overman 2016e), studied (Carrigan 2016) and recorded by Jeanell Carrigan (Carrigan 2014).



Overman's twenty-three songs for voice and piano on texts in Dutch, West Flemish, German and English are the focus of this article. I recently edited them for publication by Wirri pang, from neat manuscripts held by the University of Western Australia ([Overman 2016c](#)). They show a gift for flexible prosody, a marked preference for short, even aphoristic, texts and a concentration on harmony as the principal shaping influence. From the beginning, Overman is concerned with avoiding commonplace diatonic harmony without moving towards atonality. She prefers, in common with leading composers of the early decades of the twentieth century, structural procedures such as employing median relationships, modal scales, frequent use of ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords, and voice leading to soften diatonic outlines and to obscure cadences. She later made some use of the octatonic scale with its attendant possibilities of bitonality.

There are a further two sets of songs for high voice and harp. Overman was a competent harpist, accomplished enough to take part in a performance of Grainger's *The Warriors* in Melbourne ([Hyner, pers. comm. 2017](#)), and to write idiomatically and effectively for the instrument, adding the requisite pedaling directions. The two sets are *Children's Animal Stories* (four songs) ([Overman 2016a](#)), and *Nursery Rhymes: Folksongs from Different Countries* (seven songs) ([Overman 2016b](#)). Also of interest is the 1949 work, *Coplas*, for contralto and string quartet. These sets do not form part of this study.

The songs will be discussed in chronological order of composition, so far as can be determined. It will be useful to think of the songs as being in two loose groups: the first containing those written before 1932, as the young composer searched for her individual voice and authority, and the second from 1947, after which time the songs are marked by precisely those two qualities, as well as a refined relaxed technique. The simplest of harmonic analysis is employed to illustrate the essentials of Overman's style and in the interests of concision.

## Background — Dutch Song in the Preceding Two Generations

To set Overman's emerging style in context, a brief summary of concurrent trends in Dutch song-writing and its European context is useful here: from the composers of the 1880s until the end of the 1930s when she had finished her formal training and was acquiring her own individual voice.

Dutch song was, of course, an established genre before Overman. The dominant musical influence in the nineteenth century was from Germany naturally enough, given the widespread influence of the Lied, and Germany's geographical and linguistic proximity. Musicologist Frank Hoogerwerf explains that 'Dutch musicians studied at German conservatories, German textbooks and pedagogic methods were adopted wholeheartedly, and German and Austrian composers and performers were venerated as stylistic and interpretative models' ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 61](#)). Wagner and Mahler obviously had enthusiastic disciples, a following amounting to a 'cult' ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 2](#)). In the twentieth century, Johan Wagenaar (1862–1941) and Bernard Zweers (1854–1924) were among the most distinguished figures of the generation. They espoused a decidedly Wagnerian romanticism, but Zweers especially chose patriotic titles proclaiming his proud musical nationalism. Wagenaar had written thirteen songs before 1932, and one of his important contributions overall was that he brought a welcome vein of humour into the weighty textures that predominated at that time. Together Wagenaar and Zweers taught most of the important Dutch composers of the early twentieth century. Indeed, Alexander Ringer wryly asserts that 'Dutch music might well have continued along the road of pleasant mediocrity had it not been for the sudden emergence of [these] two genuinely artistic and intellectual personalities ...' ([Ringer 1955: 430](#)).

Alphonse Diepenbrock (1862–1921) wrote some sixty songs to Dutch, German, French and Italian texts, the most successful being to poetry by Goethe, Baudelaire and Verlaine. They are mellifluous and characterful, sometimes being limited by an air of being well mannered and emotionally restricted, not unlike the tone of Mendelssohn's songs without the latter's gift for breathtaking invention and deftness in scherzos. Nevertheless, Diepenbrock became, in turn, the outstanding Dutch composition teacher of the first decades of the twentieth century. His grounding in the classics 'reopened the literary world of antiquity as an aromatic fountainhead of ideas from which Dutch composers have been benefiting ever since' ([Ringer 1955: 431](#)). More importantly still, his adoption of techniques and sonorities from Debussy 'restored the historical balance required for the growth of a new "Netherlands school"' ([Ringer 1955: 431](#)).

Because of his stature and bearing on Overman and her generation, a brief representative sample of Diepenbrock's songs are here examined. His earliest songs are uneven. Some, like 'Entsagung' from 1883, are clear examples of what a contemporary critic meant



when he wrote that '[Diepenbrock's] individuality is somewhat lost in the worship he shows for the master of Bayreuth' (Staverman, in [Diepenbrock 1998: v](#)). However, the same critic also rightly recognised that 'A noble melodiousness is apparent throughout, without hint of triviality nor sentimentality' (Staverman in [Diepenbrock 1998: v](#)). Indeed, these qualities are best reflected when Diepenbrock's harmony is more his own than Wagner's. Initially, then, the young Dutchman is finding his voice, unable to abandon the models that inspire him and fill him with genuine admiration, thereby suppressing the best of his own instincts.

Others, like 'Der Abend kommt gezogen' of 1884, are more restrained, a trait perhaps suggested by the leanness of Heine's poetry. The structure is a loose rondo, suiting the recurring mysterious scene setting, the evolving picture of the mermaid, the increasingly urgent conversation of mermaid and mortal and the rising tension accompanying the expectation of an unhappy dramatic end, left unstated. The haunting, suggestive, largely unprepared juxtaposition of the tonic E minor with the neighbouring major supertonic is only the most prominent of a variety of arresting harmonic turns ([Ex. 1](#)).

Diepenbrock's 1909 setting of the Verlaine poem, 'Puisque l'aube grandit' ([Diepenbrock 1993](#)) is a substantial work, symphonic in conception, with chains of aching appoggiaturas, and a striking punctuating, dotted bass line figure. It is multi-sectional, in the manner of early Debussy, yet at the same time the most Germanic of the five Verlaine settings because of its restless harmonic ground plan, carried out through voice leading. In both of these songs, one remembers that Debussy was able to appreciate much in Wagner's music, translating it into French for his *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, taking what he needed but retaining his individual convictions. The poem is set to a syllabic wide-ranging melody.

Such structural looseness, understatement and unconventional harmonic devices will be seen to be fingerprints of Overman's best songs. A marked preference for syllabic text setting is notable in her work. Wit is another piquant feature of Overman's writing, and indeed irony and humour also have a part to play in Diepenbrock's music: 'Zelebriät' of 1908 is a setting of Goethe's wry commentary on the memorialisation of undeserved fame. It was withheld from publication by the composer, who (rightly) regarded it as a joke (Staverman in [Diepenbrock 1997: v](#)). He perhaps underestimated the effect of humour on the weighty Germanic musical textures of his heritage and the song shows a consistently deft talent for caricature. It recalls the side of Wolf that revelled in picaresque portraits in the *Eichendorff Lieder*.

However, Diepenbrock, along with many other Dutch composers, also sought a less theatrical, more detached and inward expressive authority. Another Verlaine text, 'Clair de lune' (1898), is carefully headed 'Le mouvement très libre, molto tranquillo, senza tempo' ([Diepenbrock 1993](#)). Allied to frequent short pauses and lots of flexible tempo indications, this supports a most effective French-inspired flexible syllabic word setting. The piano textures are again of Debussy, in particular his *Quatre chansons de jeunesse*. The song is characterised by patient, delicate chromatic movement, with frequent colouration by scalic chains of parallel chords: a couple of notable shifts of a third confirm the Debussyan aesthetic. While Overman eschews virtuosic accompaniments, the open suggestive textures of her piano parts and the harmonic preferences described above mark her work strongly.

The succeeding generation boasts a handful of fine composers striking out in various directions. Matthijs Vermeulen (1888–1967) was taught by Daniël de Lange (1841–1918) and later Diepenbrock, and cited his principal inspirations to be Debussy, Mahler and Diepenbrock himself. Vermeulen had written a handful of songs by 1930, simpler than his larger-scale and later work but nonetheless highly individual. They are driven by melodic invention, often quite heterogeneous, after his principal of 'free declamation'. In other works, the melodic strands combined into an effectively atonal whole, but these early songs are not so bold. In most, the voice is used in a declamatory fashion, the piano parts correspondingly muscular. However, in 'La Veille' (1917) there is a much more original and engaging somberly threatening atmosphere, and a ghostly chant-like quality to the vocal line. The harmony is more chromatic than in previous songs, with abundant seconds coloured by changing larger intervals, phrased in sinister rocking pairs. Different pitch centres are established, for example Eb for the opening and C for the entrance of the voice ([Vermeulen 1917](#))([Ex. 2](#)). These are qualities recalled in Overman's *Island Songs*, discussed below.

Daniël Ruyneman (1886–1963) identified with the avant garde, notably the Second Viennese School, but also enthusiastically performed Debussy, Milhaud and others. Three sets of songs had been written before 1932, to German, French and Chinese texts (the latter in translation). His early work shows a gift for colour and an obvious debt to Debussy, whom he met in 1914, receiving the master's



Example 1. Diepenbrock 'Der Abend kommt gezogen', bb1-3

Anfangs sehr ruhig  $\text{♩} = 72$

Example 2. Matthijs Vermeulen 'La Veille', bb1-33

Poème de François Porché  
Le Poème de la Traversée (Op. 23, 24, 25, 26)  
Très lent et silencieux. ( $\text{♩} = 40-45$ )

*La Veille* Matthijs Vermeulen



considered advice on his work. Ruyneman is content to let a chord stand for some time, achieving a monumental quality emphasised by both rhythmic reiteration and great stillness. While there is no evidence of a direct influence upon Overman, the description of her as ‘Queen of tone colour and fantasy’ has been noted by Carrigan ([Carrigan 2014](#)).

Henri Zagwijn (1878–1945) taught theory at the Rotterdam Conservatory from 1919, where Overman may well have encountered him. His 1922 *Galgenliederen* settings of the celebrated poems of Christian Morgenstern are also individual and distinctive. A Berg-like frozen stillness alternates with chromatic and rhythmic vigour, the unconventional piano writing perhaps due to Zagwijn’s self-taught status. It is notable that Zagwijn, in the early years of the twentieth century, also set the verses of Guido Gezelle several times. One is tempted to assume that Overman heard performances of both of these works, noting the suitability of Morgenstern and Gezelle for her own settings, and appreciating at least the ‘frozen stillness’ of Zagwijn as a colouristic feature of her own *Galgenlieder*.

Henriëtte Bosmans (1895–1952) was taught by Willem Pijper, who was to become Overman’s mentor. At this point she had set the Verlaine poem ‘Mon rêve familier’ (1921) and *Drie Liederen op Duitse Tekst* (1927) neatly encapsulating the new balance in cultural influence on the Dutch. The Verlaine song is moody and mysterious, appropriately for the delicate mockery of the poem. Bosmans and Overman share a lightness of touch, an avoidance of calls upon virtuosity and a blend of ironic humour with a suggestion of self-effacement in their work.

Willem Pijper (1894–1947) emerges as the most important Dutch composer of his day, often lauded in studies as being the greatest Dutch composer since Sweelinck. The Netherlands had begun to ‘reassert ... her cultural vitality and autonomy’ over several decades from 1839 ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 430](#)), and during World War I a government policy of neutrality in practice ‘made the individual Dutchman suddenly quite conscious of his cultural allegiances’ ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 432](#)), leading to a political and artistic shift to embrace all things French. Pijper, as we shall see, chose astutely from a range of musical concepts, principally from Debussy, and, avoiding empty mimicry, formed a considered individual voice of great authority and clarity.

He wrote lucidly on important differences between German and French musical aesthetics, which Frank Hoogerwerf summarises as follows (quoting Pijper):

German music ... is a ‘matter of conviction’ in which philosophic and religious influences are important ... For the Frenchman, however, music is a game, a problematic diversion, like a ‘crossword puzzle.’ Pijper points out the Frenchman’s fondness for equilibrium, for a refinement of fine points and eloquence. The German, says Pijper, looks for the innermost secret of a composition, searching for the key that will unlock its complex relationships. The Frenchman, on the other hand, looks for order, listens to the ‘sound.’ Pijper then goes on to describe the Dutch musical character, which to some extent seems a compromise of the German and French attitudes after all: ‘The Dutch mentality differs from the German, differs from the French. In musical matters we are less skeptical than the French, less passionate than the Germans. We regard art as a serious game, but not as a religion. We too are not satisfied with a superficial examination, we too ask the ‘why’ of a work of art ...’ Elsewhere, Pijper mentions certain other attributes of Dutch music, namely compression, restrained feeling, and a sense of humour (Pijper in [Hoogewerf 1978: 430](#)).

I will argue that this applies equally neatly to Meta Overman’s work, and not only as a result of Pijper’s teaching. Overman, based in Rotterdam, had ample opportunity to hear the best new music from across Europe. Her teachers, Flipse and Pijper, had made determined efforts to ‘turn their city into a citadel of modern music’ ([Ringer 1955: 432](#)), with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, thoughtful programming of recitals and the whole tone of their work at the conservatorium.

There are elements of Pijper’s style that bear on Overman’s, some of which are present or latent in her work before lessons with Pijper in 1937. Firstly, there is the concentration of form in the choice of aphoristic texts and in Overman’s tight discipline over material. Her texts are set syllabically and the melodic lines shun what she would have regarded as overwrought, expressionistic contours approaching cadences. She shares Pijper’s French-derived fondness for relations of a third and for chromatic chains of parallel thirds or fifths. Perhaps most importantly, cadences or ‘points of juncture are skillfully blurred or elided’ ([Ringer 1955: 432](#)).



Debussy bequeathed them increased possibilities of using pentatonic and whole-tone scales. Pijper's use of the octatonic scale was also later taken up by Overman: so closely was he identified with it that, in the Netherlands, it is referred to as the Pijper scale. In jazz theory, the collection of alternating tones and semitones of the octatonic scale is known as the 'diminished symmetric', made up as it is of two interlocked diminished seventh chords. It therefore lends itself to bitonality, and this, along with its distinctive aural flavour, is of great benefit to composers trying to extend their language beyond conventional tonality. She would already have been familiar with the use of the octatonic scale by Debussy and Ravel. Pijper's music often sounds bitonal as harmonic progressions lose functionality: chords are essentially a by-product of the movement of independent parts, as in early polyphony ([Ringer 1955: 434](#)). While Overman's music is not bitonal, the non-functional progressions are a recurring favoured device. Conventional changes of tonality are described in Pijper's technique as being non-existent ([Ringer 1955: 437](#)). This would be an exaggeration in Overman's music, but we do hear in the songs a very fluid harmonic organisation. Pijper's metrical organisation is also very fluid: Overman's is more conventional and, as we will see, sometimes deliberately naïve, though as the songs develop she uses a greater variety of rhythmical values in shaping the vocal lines. Both composers required of themselves a sensitive response to the text, searching for natural speech rhythms in the prosody. From Pijper she also learned to handle sensitive fluctuations of texture and dynamics, two more traits that one might trace back at least to Debussy.

Everything in Pijper's music is related by motivic resemblance, particularly in his highly individual germ-cell technique, though Overman's use of motivic generation is more relaxed and pragmatic. In any case Pijper, in his essays and reviews, praised Janáček, Bartók and Milhaud for their logical structure and sense of order. In a memorable phrase he goes on to describe how their 'expression is no longer bound to the drone of cadences' ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 72](#)). He then draws all these threads once more back to Debussy, whose melody is the precursor of his harmony, 'complete unto itself' with everything latent ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 72](#)).

Finally, she shares with Pijper a temperamental avoidance of virtuosic display or showmanship, ([Ringer 1955: 437](#)) though, as will be seen, her later songs acquire a more personal voice and she has already demonstrated a sympathetic tenderness that is not characteristic of Pijper's music. Pijper, indeed, aspired to a kind of spiritual asceticism, where Overman was fascinated by Buddhist and Hindu philosophies as intuitive, communal, generous and serene. Both musicians shared the quality of independence of mind and certainty of goal: neither was a blind disciple of their masters. Pijper's idealism and precision of expression were also ideal qualities in teaching. In an obituary piece for *The Musical Times*, Herbert Antcliffe draws a parallel to Stanford, another fine composer with an important list of pupils. Rather than having produced clones, or disciples, '[h]is boast might be ... that "I made them be themselves"' ([Antcliffe 1947: 173](#)).

Reports of Pijper's piano-playing only confirm the impression of a musician with a fastidious grasp of detail, a powerful intellect but a gift for communication without dry theorisation. Hoogerwerf quotes Henriëtte Bosmans, describing 'a cultivated lightness of touch, a clean and transparent sound with rather discreet use of the pedal and constant concern for the continuity of the melodic line' ([Hoogerwerf 1978: 63](#)). Once again, these are ideal qualities for interpreting Overman's music, as well as that of Bosmans, Henk Badings and others.

Pijper himself had, by 1932, written several songs. Indeed, most of his song output was by then completed, barring two sets from 1934 and 1935. 'Allerseelen' (1914) is to the poem made famous by Richard Strauss, and Pijper's youthful songs have a pronounced Romantic leaning. The most interesting songs are the *Fêtes galantes* from 1916 and *Romance sans paroles* of 1919, both settings of Verlaine, that most musical of poets. They are for mezzo-soprano and orchestra, and display many of the above-listed qualities in Pijper's rapidly maturing style.

Pijper, in common with influential songwriters such as Grieg and Vaughan Williams, found significant inspiration and technical insights in four sets of folk-song arrangements. Pijper wrote in 1938 that:

The true folk-song is an expression of civilization as genuine as a symphony, a cathedral, a drama. As long as folk-songs are sung, they live and are more than museum-pieces, known only to the initiated. Our age is just beginning to realize the significance which the living folk-song can have for us all ([Hoogerwerf 1976: 368](#)).

This fascination was, as is well known, shared by emergent national schools across Europe. The point to be made is that the best composers, taking folk material, extracted different aspects of its DNA and enriched their own musical languages thereby, as with



the selective use of elements of Debussy's rich legacy. Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in 1934, Pijper cautioned against 'allowing nationalism to degenerate into provincialism, which would cut itself off from all foreign contacts and influence' ([Hoogerwerf 1976: 372](#)): advice that the cosmopolitan Dutch musicians of his circle heeded to the full.

## Overman's Early Songs written in the Netherlands

We can begin to examine Meta Overman's songs individually, now within their proper context.

### Poem entitled 'Kerstnacht', 1924 (original poem 'Kersttijd', J.H. Leopold)

In de donkere dagen van Kerst[tijd]  
is een kind van licht geboren.  
De maan scheen helder over de dijk  
en ijzel hing aan de boomen.  
Onder de doeken in een krib  
daar lag dat lief Jezuskindelij.  
En spelearmde en van zijn hoofd  
ging af een zuiv're lichtschijs.  
En buiten in de bittere kou  
en de stille Kerstnacht laat  
de heilige drie koningen kwamen van ver  
door de diepe sneeuw gewaad.  
De heilige drie koningen in den stal  
verwonderd zijn binnen getogen;  
Het licht, dat van het kind afging  
schijnt in hun klare oogen.  
De heilige drie koningen staren het aan  
en weten zich niet te bezinnen;  
En't kind ligt al te kijken maar,  
en tuurt in een denkbeginnen.

In the dark days of Christmas[tide]  
a child is born of light.  
The moon shines clear over the dike  
Frost hangs on the trees.  
Under the cover in a crib  
there lies the dear little Christ-child,  
A halo around his head  
Gives off a silvery gleam.  
Outside in the bitter cold  
In the silent Christmastide  
The Three Wise Men are come from afar  
Robed in deep snow.  
The Three Wise Men stare at him  
Amazed, venturing inside;  
That light, given off by the child  
Shines in their clear eyes.  
The Three Wise Men gaze upon him  
And know not what to think;  
A child lies merely looking at them all,  
And gazes in contemplation.

'Kerstnacht', [Christmas Eve] dates from 1924, when Overman was only seventeen ([Overman 2016c](#)). She chose a remarkable and potentially problematic poet, J.H. Leopold (1865–1925), for this, her first mature song. Rutger H. Cornets de Groot memorably describes Leopold as the 'poet of hearing', 'where breaking the silence has a huge impact' ([Cornets de Groot 2017](#)). It is noteworthy that Leopold, like Beethoven whom he revered, grew increasingly deaf: he seemed to share the composer's gift for listening to his inner voice.

'Kerstliedje', to give the poem Leopold's original title, is from his first set of published poems, the *Christus-Verzen* [Christ Verses]. An unnamed writer for the Dutch Foundation for Literature describes them as being 'characterised by ambiguity and a complex wealth of linguistic components' ([Anon n.d.](#)). Leopold set a 'stream of thoughts', something he himself referred to as 'dreaming thinking' ([Anon n.d.](#)).

The website of the Royal Library of The Netherlands explains that 'Leopold was primarily a poet of songs and smooth and generous flowing rules of euphony and intimacy' ([Koninklijke Bibliotheek 2017](#)). In this sense, he is perhaps an ideal poet for a composer. As well as being a keen amateur musician, his language has pronounced musical qualities. Leopold later used Arab and Persian verse forms, as Friedrich Rückert had before him, giving Mahler in particular such wonderful material to work with. Leopold also published articles on Beethoven and played the piano. He had a 'penchant for four-hand compositions by Schubert and Smetana, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Dvorak, Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, later César Franck' ([Brouwer 1925](#)).



Literary historian Jacqueline Ringer (now Bel) says of Leopold's early poems that they represent 'a completely new poetry', where for the first time in Dutch poetry the influence of Mallarmé was felt ([Bel 2015](#)). This is where the potential difficulty arises for such a young composer. Mallarmé is notoriously difficult to set successfully to music. Graham Johnson writes that 'Mallarmé measures the length of a syllable and the effect of assonance' ([Johnson 2000: 101](#)), setting challenges to a musician, who must have the most disciplined of ears for this task. Overman, even at this young age, has a carefully controlled sense of prosody, particularly in a willingness to let the poet determine the rhythmical shape of the word setting. Also evident is her melodic contour that successfully enters the dream state that Leopold cultivated.

Challenges aside, Johnson goes on to add that there is the advantage that 'Mallarmé seems to have been a poet who encouraged his musicians to time-travel forwards rather than backwards' ([Johnson 2000: 101](#)). Overman was at this time studying with Edward Flipse, who, as a teacher and composer, was most strongly influenced by the language and techniques of Debussy and Ravel and one would therefore expect a strong French influence: a concern with sonority and texture as structural devices, soft natural speech rhythms, and the use of whole-tone and other non-diatonic scales. Overman, Flipse, and her later mentor, Pijper, were never of the avant-garde, but were nonetheless always concerned with crafting new modes of musical speech out of the outdated conventions of tonality. (It seems to have been a necessary project: in the 1920s the great Dutch conductor, Willem Mengelberg, characterised Dutch music of those days as 'either ... watered-down Wagner, watered-down Debussy, or watered-down Mahler' ([Zuidam 2010](#))).

The requisite patient observation and awed respect in the poem are conveyed with easy-flowing crotchet movement, animated and softened by triplet quavers in the piano. The word setting is almost exclusively syllabic but marked by fluid paragraphing and weightless irregular phrase lengths. There is also a Berg-like naïveté, with melody being another strand of the harmony rather than possessing its own forceful character. There are other specific harmonic procedures that rise to Mallarmé's challenge and would perhaps avoid Mengelberg's disdain.

While none of the vertical pitch combinations are in themselves unique or radical, and while there are chords that are functionally related, Overman achieves a low-key fluency of line without an overarching function. Local relations and implications may as often be teasingly denied as employed. The six opening bars serve to demonstrate this: observe how the A $\flat$  appoggiatura in bar 1 begins a common thread through the loosely related chords in bars 2 and 3, and how voice leading contrives to generate series of passing chords ([Ex. 3](#)).

In bar 17, a mediant shift to F major heralds a fragment of chorale-like simple directness (for the Christ-child in the crib). Most of the chords are softened with sevenths, ninths, and elevenths. There follows another mediant side-step to D major ([Ex. 2](#)). Movement via thirds, avoiding traditional fourth and fifth steps are certainly not new, but were widely used in English song at this time, and in the work of fellow young Dutch composers.

From bar 22, a chain of parallel descending unrelated seventh chords, followed by a chromatically ascending chain of thirds is a skillfully and succinctly employed device to illustrate Christ's halo, with its other-worldly silvery light ([Ex. 4](#)). The shade of Delius presides over such passages: harmony employed principally for its colour, conventional chords used non-functionally, and sinuous part-writing obscuring the remaining functional lines and weakening their gravitational pull are valuable lessons for a young composer developing her own style ([Ex. 4](#)). Overman establishes a clear tonal centre of A throughout, mostly coloured as minor, but as functionality is weak or suspended she is able to exploit minor and major ambiguity expressively. Bar 38 begins a fluttering between A major and minor. The softly obscured outlines and relatively weak sense of any diatonic structural sense of direction match the image of deep snow robing the Three Wise men, and slowing their journey ([Ex. 5](#)). Cadences are still present, the strophic verse structure being articulated in the music by just such punctuation. However, the patient, undramatic succession of images is reflected musically by softening or obscuring of cadential outlines. In bar 43 the piano sings alone a version of the vocal melody in A Dorian with an approach to what one imagines will be a perfect cadence E–A. The G# is enharmonically changed to A $\flat$  (an appoggiatura to G) to momentarily achieve C major, recalling the very opening of the song ([Ex. 6](#)).





**Example 3. Overman 'Kerstmacht', bb1-6**

2 3 4 5 6

In de

**Example 4. Overman 'Kerstmacht', bb17-30**

17 18 19 20 21 22

On-der de doe-ken in de krib daar lag dat lief Je-zus-kin-de-lijn en spe-le-arm-de`en van zijn hoofd

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

ging af een zui-v're licht-schijn. En bui-ten in de

**Example 5. Overman 'Kerstmacht', bb38-41**

38 39 40 41

hei - li - ge drie ko-ning-en kwa-men van ver door de die - pe sneeuw ge-waad.



### Example 6. Overman 'Kerstnacht', bb42–7

Without resort to aggressive dissonance, the diatonic pull of tonal centres is considerably weakened by just the elements we expected: a preference for median relationships, a teasing avoidance of or quasi-modal obscuring of traditional cadences; a fondness for the mollifying qualities of sevenths, ninths and elevenths; drifting parallel movement of pastel-toned chromatic shapes and scales that hint at modality. Colouristic motifs, such as a peal of high repeated triplets, are deployed only twice. A duplet-quaver variant that grows out of the melody makes bars 51–9 memorable, bright stars over a landscape curvilinear under its mantle of snow.

De Groot's summation of Leopold as a 'poet of hearing' seems justified in this silent landscape, where the poem makes not a single reference to a sound, but only to stillness and contemplation ([Cornets de Groot 2017](#)). It is technically, but also emotionally, a remarkable song début for a seventeen-year-old composer. At well-judged patient tempo the prosody is plausibly lulling, and the gentle chromatic additions give the right preternatural clarity and crispness of a still snowy night. If the over-dramatic octave leap at 'de diepe sneeuw gewaad' (bar 40) seems out of place, such a miscalculation might be overlooked for one so young. Secure on the piano stool, the teenage Overman unrolls a canvas of restricted colour tones with great authority, allowing the melancholy Leopold's textual music all the space it requires.

## Four Flower Songs, c.1925

The manuscript score of *Four Flower Songs* is not dated, but Thorpe includes it in a list of early songs after having interviewed Overman. The *Flower Fairies* books by Cicely Mary Barker are based around her detailed and charming paintings, finely observed and painted from specimens. They became very popular after publication of the first book in 1925, and respond to a fashion for fairies, reinvented as eternal children by J.M. Barrie, Arthur Conan Doyle and Australian Ida Rentoul Outhwaite. The paintings show the influence of Kate Greenaway, though Barker does not maintain the freshness and vitality of Greenaway's illustrated children, tending toward a cloying cuteness. The accompanying verses, brief captions for the pictures, are not fine poetry: they are sentimental doggerel, but Overman responds with obvious affection.

As a teenager Overman served a useful compositional apprenticeship writing children's operas. Of these, *Inde soete suikerbol* [Of the sweet sugar-bun] from 1923, has been edited and published by Wirripang in Australia ([Overman 2016d](#)). She later complained at the work-to-order, lamenting that it gave no outlet to her own musical personality: 'Your own inclinations are not acceptable. These works sound like others of the time, although I did not like it. Your own personality does not count' ([Thorpe 1988: 3](#)).

Nevertheless, *Inde soete suikerbol*, the sixteen-year-old's tiny numbers cantata is full of crisply sprung rhythms, a healthy dose of irony and gleeful grotesquerie, understated modal harmony alongside parodistic diatonic music and a clear understanding of the technical limitations and expressive possibilities of children's voices.

Emphasis has so far been placed on the central influence of early twentieth century French music, but the galvanising force of Hindemith and especially Stravinsky upon Dutch music in the 1920s and 1930s should not be understated. The clean lines and compact energy of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and neoclassicism seem also to have played their part in Overman's development. *Inde soete suikerbol* is perfectly



Example 7. Overman 'Snowdrop', complete song

2 3 4 5 6

Deep sleeps the Win-ter, cold, wet and grey; Sure - ly all the world is dead;— Spring is far a- way, far\_ a-way.

7 8 9 10 11 12

Wait! the world shall wa-ken; it is not dead, for lo, The Fair Maids of Fe - bru-a-ry stand in the snow!

serviceable Gebrauchsmusik, all written in small-scale closed conventional forms, but with confident prosody and a lightness of touch. The sense prevails of someone with respect for children and their stories, a gift for entertainment, and an empathy that does not stoop to sentimentality.

The *Four Flower Songs* benefit from these qualities, the closed forms, the deft prosody and the empathy for children, despite the shallowness of the verse. They also suggest a familiarity with, and sympathy for, English literature, and are set in the original English. The brevity of the texts is respected (there is no mileage in extending the sentimental verses by imposed repeats) resulting in disciplined miniatures.

'Snowdrop', no. 1, is, as mentioned, limited in its emotional scope by the text, felt firstly in the warm piano part, glowing with higher dominant chords. The voice is in C Phrygian, the piano preferring Lydian, though several of the modal inflections are passing notes. The second half of the song is based on a chromatic descent, tending to the flat side, especially for mention of dreary 'February' before the only clear cadence in the song, G<sup>9+13</sup>-Cm<sup>7</sup>. Mediant relationships are preferred, notably Em for the promise of spring. The text is mostly set syllabically, the melody being again another strand of the harmony (Ex. 7). 'Windflower' also begins in Phrygian, on D, in a folk-like lilt. The key switches to D major when the fairies step into the frame, though added ninths colour each chord throughout. A feeling of innocent simplicity prevails, despite little awkward features such as a melisma on the word, 'Wind'.

'The Daisy Fairy' is the weakest of the four poems in its rather cloying sentimentality, but Overman remains committed and genuine, in the manner of Cecil Armstrong Gibbs, who had a particular flair for childlike magic in the poetry of Hilaire Belloc, admittedly with more quality to work with. Added sixths and a couple of delightful chromatic inflections lend it sweetness, though the straightforward repeat of the whole song means that it outstays its welcome.

'The Wild Arum' is more interesting, though: basically Mixolydian, flexibly varied, it presents an altogether richer and more supple texture and line. A tonic pedal tethers colourful, well-paced chromatic wrangling, before a neat chain of loosely parallel sixths, sevenths and ninths over a chromatically descending bass line, as fairies negotiate the dense undergrowth by night. When the arum lilies, likened to candles, shine in the moonlight Overman resists obvious high register twinkling, instead setting the text to slender, marble-pale suspended fourth chords in parallel, with mediant relationships again favoured, ending in two open fifth chords, before warmly-inviting sevenths,



**Example 8. Overman ‘The Wild Arum’, complete song**

2 3 4 5 6  
Fai-ries, when you lose your way, From the dance re-tur-ning, In the dar-kest un-der

7 8 9 10  
growth See my can-dles bur-ning! These shall make the path-way

11 12 13 14  
plain, Home-ward to your beds a-gain.

ninths and a thirteenth to represent home and fireside. ‘The Wild Arum’ also offers the freest prosody, though nothing melismatic: a feature of all of Overman’s songs (Ex. 8).

**‘Het was slechts een zonnige glimlach’, 1931–1932**

Het was slechts... een zonnige glimlach,  
 Het was slechts... een vriendelijk woord.  
 En toch... ’t verdreef droevige gedachten,  
 Heeft sombere gedachten verstoord.  
 Het kost U zoo weinig, to geven  
 Zoo’n glimlach, dien haddruk, dat woord.  
 Wordt zoo niet Uw eigen leven  
 Door d’adem der lefde bekoord?

It was only a sunny smile,  
 It was only a friendly word.  
 And yet, it drove out gloomy thoughts,  
 It dispersed sombre thoughts.  
 It will cost you so little, to give  
 Such a smile, your handshake, that word.  
 But is not your own life  
 Enriched by the love of the other?

The manuscript for this little song was found among Overman’s papers only in March 2017 ([Overman 1924-1993](#)), too late for inclusion in the *Collected Songs* edition. The text is a ditty, in the popular style, written for sale on the street, by an unknown author, and is a brief homily on altruism and kindness. The melody follows a gentle ballad- or hymn-like curve, the words set entirely syllabically. The prosody begins awkwardly, twice stressing ‘It was only a sunny smile/It was only a friendly word’. Nevertheless, a benevolent glow settles over the song from the harmonisation, and from warm sixth and seventh chords.



(A footnote reads: ‘Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Forced by long-term unemployment, a family man hereby takes the liberty to politely offer this little poem for sale, that you may wish to give him the opportunity in these difficult times to care for his wife and child. Price at your discretion.’ ([Anon 1933](#)) – perhaps Overman bought one?)

## Zes Kleengedichtjes, 1932

In 1932, by now a mature and experienced performer on the piano, Overman returned to more exploratory song with the intriguing *Zes Kleengedichtjes*, to texts by Guido Gezelle (1830–1899), every bit as tiny as those of Barker. There the comparison ends: Gezelle was an infinitely more complex and interesting writer. He championed the dialect of his native West Flanders but also has interesting affinities with noted English writers. Paul Vincent picks out five poets who might be counted in this group, beloved of song composers for the music of their verse.

With [Gerard Manley] Hopkins ... he shares not only a dual vocation for the priesthood and lyric poetry, but also a troubled sexuality... and, more importantly, an eclectic experimentalism. Against Hopkins’ Welsh-derived ‘sprung rhythm’ we can set Gezelle’s explorations of his native Flemish canon as well as the Anglo-Saxon tradition represented by [Henry Wadsworth] Longfellow, whose *Hiawatha* he translated (1886). His reading of Robert Burns (1759–1796), a gardener’s son like himself, must have confirmed ... his attention to minute detail in nature ... and the defiant use of dialect speech in his verse. Finally, he shares with John Clare (1793–1860) an almost Franciscan sense of the brotherhood of nature ... while a poem like ‘Sleeping Buds’ has an Emily Dickinson-like conciseness. ([Vincent 2016: vi](#)).

In the six texts that follow we can immediately observe the proud use of dialect and the concision of expression.

The list of names above is certain to attract the attention of a song lover. It is sad that no good translations of Gezelle, or perhaps none at all, were available to English composers for so long. Given the popularity of Burns and of William Barnes (who wrote affectionately in Dorset dialect) with songwriters, one wonders what other music might have eventuated. Vincent notes that two successful recent translations have used Glaswegian and Yorkshire vernaculars to great effect. Gezelle, interestingly, was always drawn toward English, becoming priest to the English Convent in Brugge.

### ‘Kleengedichtje’

<p>Tokt op eene ijdele ton ton ton, ze rolt, ze bolt, ze bommelt; volt ze tot ane den bom bom bom, ze’n spreekt niet, of g’er op trommelt: die vroed is heft, alvast, mijn tonnen toegepast.</p>	<p>Strike up an idle pom-pom-pom, that rolls, raps and booms; The dead donkey takes up the bom bom bom, he doesn’t speak, but he drums away, He who is wise can lift my barrels.</p>
--	--

The first song, ‘Kleengedichtje’ [Little song], achieves a naïve simplicity through the neat device of leaving the rumbustious childlike rhythm to the voice, keeping the piano figuration open with swinging dotted crotchets in 6/8. Prominent thirds in the vocal melody, typical of children’s songs the world over, prompt harmonic movement by thirds in the piano ([Ex. 9](#)).

### ‘Die geen taal heft’

<p>Die geen taal heeft is geen naam weerd, waar geen taal leeft is geen volk!</p>	<p>He who has no language Has no name, Where no language lives There is no nation!</p>
---	--

‘Die geen taal heft’ is an obvious linguistic call-to-arms, generations before proud regional identity was valued or tolerated by central governments throughout Europe. With the direction, ‘Robust’, from the composer, the poem is simply stated twice. The texture is hymn-like, as the voice proceeds by regular minims, animated by a much more active bassline with a great deal of harmonic invention. Numerous pairs of semitones wrangle in inner parts, lending a slightly ominous air, or perhaps a feeling of serious-minded muscularity.



**Example 9.** Overman 'Kleengedichtje', complete song

The melody itself resists any obvious harmonisation, leaving Overman scope for gnarly voice leading and elusive suspensions. Some two-thirds of the way in, an arresting Am–E–D#, A $\flat$ m–E $\flat$ –D, sequence, also coloured by suspensions, commands attention with a lesser aftershock in the shape of an abrupt shift to B $\flat$  (Ex. 10).

**Example 10.** Overman 'Die geen taal heft', complete song



## ‘Snee’

De snee lag op de daken,  
 De snee lag achter 't land,  
 Langs wegen, landen, straten,  
 't was snee al dat men vand, al snee,  
 't was snee al dat men vand!

The snow lay on the rooftops,  
 The snow lay over the land,  
 Along paths, fields, roads,  
 There was snow wherever one turned, just snow,  
 There was snow wherever one turned.

‘Snee’, the earliest of the six poems, is marked ‘Puur’ [pure], and could scarcely be simpler. Blanketed by the soft curve of a melody, whimsical rolling piano quavers outline a nicely unpredictable course, the whole song gleaming and affectionate. The vocal melody’s scale is initially modal, perhaps incomplete F Dorian with a B $\flat$  passing note, but harmonised unconventionally in A flat major, once again with mediant relationships favoured, as well as bassline steps of a semitone. As in ‘Die geen taal heft’, just over halfway through there are surprising unprepared harmonic sidesteps of a semitone (bb5–6), and a minor third (bb7–8). The final perfect cadence is greatly softened by the E $\flat$  being coloured as E $\flat$ <sup>7#9</sup> with voice leading melting back to E $\flat$  from the added notes. But the expected piano RH melody is left incomplete, the only gesture to the predicted A $\flat$  being in an arpeggiated chord in a cloud of pedal at the end of the bar it should have begun (Ex. 11).

## ‘De zonne gaat op’

De zonne gaat op,  
 de zonne gaat neer,  
 de zonne gaat op  
 en gaat onder;  
 standvastiglijk heen,  
 standvastiglijk weer,  
 standvastiglijk werkt zij dat wonder.

The sun rose,  
 The sun sank,  
 The sun rose  
 The sun set;  
 Steadfastly far away,  
 Steadfastly new,  
 Steadfastly the miracle repeats.

Example 11. Overman ‘Snee’, complete song

1 De snee lag op de da - ken, de snee lag ach - ter't land; langs we - gen, lan - den,  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6 stra - ten, 't was snee al dat men vand, 'twas snee al dat men vand!  
 7  
 8  
 9  
 10  
 11  
 Ped.



'De zonne gaat op' [The sun rose] opens in the manner of Grieg: 'clear in tone' as the composer directs, with a well-sprung rhythm for the voice that betokens a folk influence but the melody beautifully harmonised to pursue the metaphysical, aphoristic poem.

Like 'Snee', the phrase periods are in 4-, 4- and 3-bar groupings. The first group is in a symmetrical 2+2 arrangement: the melody curves up through the sharp side on the dominant, falls through the flat side most surprisingly through  $B\flat^{11(69)}$  and  $E\flat^{7(65)}$ , repeats its climb over the dominant and hangs briefly on  $B\flat^7$ , mediant relationships again being to the fore. All this, of course, matches the simple images of the poem. Reflecting the unknowability of the mystery of daily renewal, and by implication Redemption, an undulating chain of parallel sevenths with flattened fifths moves in semitone steps back to  $B\flat^7$ , which has gained unexpected prominence by its reiteration at phrase ends (Ex. 12).

Example 12. Overman 'De zonne gaat op', complete song

The musical score for 'De zonne gaat op' is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 2-6) features a vocal line starting with a rest, followed by the lyrics 'De zon - ne gaat op, de zon - ne gaat neer, de zon - ne gaat op en gaat on - der; stand'. The piano accompaniment begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section. The second system (measures 7-9) continues the vocal line with 'vas - tig - lijk heen, stand vas - tig - lijk weer, stand vas - tig - lijk werkt zij dat'. The piano accompaniment maintains the *mf* dynamic. The third system (measures 10-13) concludes the vocal line with 'won - der, stand vas - tig - lijk werkt zij dat won - der.'. The piano accompaniment features a forte (*f*) section followed by piano (*p*) and pianissimo (*pp*) dynamics.





### 'Komt en'n beidt niet meer'

Komt, en 'n beidt niet meer,  
jeugdige kringen;  
op leet het herte en de  
tonge nu springen;  
uit is de winter en  
groene is de wei;  
los laat de tale en de  
tonge: 't is mei!

It comes, and stays no longer,  
youthful world;  
Let the heart and  
the tongue burst out anew;  
Winter is gone  
and the meadow is green;  
Let the valleys and the tongue  
proclaim: It is May!

'Komt en'n beidt niet meer' might be dialectically rendered as 'Comes in and bides nae mair' and is another poem of earthly renewal. The coming of spring is beloved of lyric poets chosen by Lied composers: Mörike, another clergyman-poet excelling in evocative short verses in plain but expressive language and metaphysical hints, comes to mind. The song's direction is 'Juichend' [jubilant] but an earthy, heavier jubilation rooted in the soil of West Flanders, as it were.

The melody is in C major, in a swinging dotted folk rhythm and short regular phrases suited to the apparently plain poem. Its diatonic qualities are again diluted by being initially harmonised in the relative minor and by Overman's recurring device of an arresting chromatic surprise two-thirds of the way through. Here an 'affectionate squeeze' of a familiar V–I–(VI)–II phrase throws up a parallel C<sup>9</sup>–C#<sup>9</sup>–D<sup>9</sup> (Ex. 13).

### 't En gaat geen een verloren'

't En gaat geen een verloren  
geen dingen dat bestaat,  
't en wordt geen een geboren  
dat heel en al vergaat.

Not one thing is lost  
That has been created,  
Not one thing is born  
That shall not pass away.

The final poem is also the last of the six to have been written. The two editions of his collected works differ on the date of 'De zonne gaat op', or perhaps refer to a revision (Gezelle 1949–1950 and Gezelle 1999). But, if it is from 1896, and 't En gaat geen een verloren' from 1897, the two finest verses of the set perhaps owe their compact strength to Gezelle's maturity. The earliest poem, 'Snee', dates from 1855, a working lifetime before. Honest simplicity has become sublime aphoristic gold. 'Not one thing is lost/That has been created,/Not one thing is born/That shall not pass away.'

A patient tempo ('not too slow' counsels the composer, suggesting two in a bar, actually contributing to a feeling of ease and reflection) and a loosely pentatonic scale, flattened sevenths and use of pedal points keep the song grounded. A Brahmsian folk-like warmth pervades the music, the impression enhanced by Overman's setting of duplet against triplet crotchets in the accompaniment. Indeed, the use of the Flemish dialect poems recalls Brahms's fondness for Wendish and Serbian texts in his own songs. Bar 11 contains the by-now-established procedure of an unexpected harmonic twist, in this case a detour to the flattened tonic. The seventh of the local dominant of F<sub>7</sub>, B $\flat$ , is enharmonically respelt as A, allowing an F<sup>9</sup> chord, neatly stepping back within range of the tonic. Frequent use of sharpened or flattened fifths, plus sevenths and ninths again obscure diatonic procedures (Ex. 14).

To be sure, Overman is no Hugo Wolf, a composer whose distillation of emotional and intellectual content into tiny forms is almost unparalleled and who set four volumes of somewhat analogous poetry by Eduard Mörike. Nor is she a Johannes Brahms, who made folk-like music speak for every soul by his passionate identification with the protagonists of the poems. To be fair, few are. In these songs her own personality remains slightly withheld, as she pays perhaps a little too much respect to the Flemish master, Gezelle. Honouring his simple rhyme and verse structures, she hardly allows even the briefest of preludes or postludes to comment upon the verse or address anything left unspoken by the poet.



Example 13. Overman 'Komt en'n beidt niet meer', bb9–12

9 10 11 12

uit is de win - ter en groe - ne is de wei;

This musical score for Example 13 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 3/8 time and features a melodic line with lyrics: "uit is de win - ter en groe - ne is de wei;". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs and accents, and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Example 14. Overman "t En gaat geen een verloren", complete song

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

't En gaat geen een ver - lo - ren, geen ding-en dat be - staat, 't en wordt geen een ge - bo - ren, dat heel en al ver -

8 9 10 11 12

gaat. 't En gaat geen een ver - lo - ren, 't En wordt geen een ge - bo - ren, geen

13 14 15 16 17

ding - en, dat be - staat, dat heel en al ver - gaat.

This musical score for Example 14 is the complete song, spanning 17 measures. It is in 3/8 time and features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "'t En gaat geen een ver - lo - ren, geen ding-en dat be - staat, 't en wordt geen een ge - bo - ren, dat heel en al ver - gaat. 't En gaat geen een ver - lo - ren, 't En wordt geen een ge - bo - ren, geen ding - en, dat be - staat, dat heel en al ver - gaat." The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with many triplets and slurs, and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.



Nevertheless, there are things to appreciate. Gezelle's use of dialect speech, and of straightforward rhythms are matched by a *Volkstümlichkeit* in musical rhythm and phrase structure, as mentioned already. Crucially, Overman avoids patronising the verse by equating *Völkisch* with kitsch. The authoritative brevity of the verses is maintained in concise music, enlivened by a quirky and intelligent use of chromatic harmony and discreetly animated propulsive rhythm in the piano.

Though songs are by no means in the majority in Overman's catalogue ([Thorpe 1988: 82](#)), it is nonetheless interesting that a promising young composer with a developing style containing elements of *Gebrauchsmusik*, neoclassicism, and French harmonic language should pursue songs as a medium at this time. The Lied had, with the exception of the concentrated miniatures of Webern, become more of an orchestral medium by this time. She is more akin to those French and English composers renewing the song idiom through clarity, original harmonic invention and striking word setting.

There are elements, then, in Overman's musical language from similar sources as her predecessors and contemporaries, Diepenbrock having perhaps given them the discernment and encouragement to explore and adapt what they heard and read. As an avid and intelligent listener, she had had ample opportunity in pre-war Rotterdam to hear and learn from a range of composers. Her post-war music shows a marked maturation, where influences absorbed and lessons learned are lightly yet deeply applied, subsumed into a rich and individual voice.

## Mature Songs Composed in the Netherlands

Fifteen years elapsed before Overman returned to song, years initially marked by study with Willem Pijper, from 1937, and latterly the invasion and occupation of the Netherlands by Hitler's Germany. The war slowed Overman's output somewhat. Nevertheless, Overman produced two or three piano sonatas, a piano sonatina, a string quartet, a sextet for wind quintet and piano, all listed as 'Conservatorium Attempts' by the composer and subsequently some individual piano character pieces, a trio for flute, viola and piano, a piano concerto, a ballet and a piano four-hands piece ([Thorpe 1988: 82](#)). Jeanell Carrigan has written extensively about Overman's piano music, which lies outside the scope of this study ([Carrigan 2015](#)).

### *Galgenlieder*, 1947

The *Galgenlieder* [Gallows songs] are our first opportunity to observe any stylistic development in songs. The five poems were chosen from Christian Morgenstern's most popular 1905 volume perhaps the best example of his elegant nonsense verse. Inspired by English examples, principally Lewis Carroll, 'he invented words, distorted meanings of common words by putting them into strange contexts, and dislocated sentence structure, but always with a rational, satiric point.' ([Lettvin 1962: 12–20](#)). Overman possessed a vivid sense of humour, particularly for a certain type of English nonsense. This ancient strain runs through such diverse examples as fantastical marginalia in medieval illuminated manuscripts up to Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Monty Python and beyond. Like Guillaume Apollinaire, he also experimented with the printed layout of his poems: 'Die Trichter' [The funnels] is shaped to suggest a funnel, running out to infinity on the words 'and so on', while 'The night song of the fish' uses only the marks used to indicate stress and unstress in poetic meter in a fish-like visual arrangement ([Morgenstern 1964](#)).

It is certainly possible, as previously mentioned, that Overman would have heard the *Galgenliederen* of Henri Zagwijn, who, after all, taught at the Rotterdam conservatoire. If she did, she was not tempted to mimic the muscular pianism or ecstatic vocal line of Zagwijn's songs. Indeed, she takes the opposite approach, emphasising the delicious, subtle and surreal humour of the verse. One might venture that this is a more English approach.



## ‘Das Gebet’

Die Rehlein beten zur Nacht,  
hab acht!  
Halb neun!  
Halb zehn!  
Halb elf!  
Halb zwölf!  
Zwölf!  
Die Rehlein beten zur Nacht,  
hab acht!  
Sie falten die kleinen Zehlein,  
die Rehlein!

The does, as the hour grows late,  
med-it-ate;  
med-it-nine;  
med-it-ten;  
med-eleven;  
med-twelve;  
midnight!  
The does, as the hour grows late,  
meditate.  
They fold their little toesies,  
the doesies.

The first song, ‘Das Gebet’ [The prayer], is an intricate fine line drawing, typically playing upon a pun. Deer pray to the night, ‘hab acht’[watch out], at ‘halb acht’ [half past seven], and the hour grows later, ‘Halb neun!/Halb zehn!’ etc. Much of the prayer is little above a whisper, except for the feeling of mounting fear at ‘Zwölf!’ and the final ‘hab acht!’. The text is set syllabically apart from two tiny two-note melismas.

The notes C and D $\flat$  vie for centrality, the voice however beginning and ending on G: G also asserts itself through being the prominent highest vocal pitch. The mode employed is G Locrian, the voice spelling out its scale clearly, by expanding almost didactically through a semitone, minor third, fourth, diminished fifth, minor sixth, minor seventh to the final octave, usually returning to G in between each interval. A Brittenesque bitonal tussle between C and D $\flat$ , superimposed and oscillating in their cross-relationship in bars 13–19 is coloured by the deepest bass voicings of the song, suggesting the nameless fears of night, weightlessly ascending to stars and a higher pitch of terror. The hypnotically rocking regular crotchet rhythm is freely divided in the voice and piano right hand into quavers, triplet quavers, semiquavers and triplet semiquavers, no grouping predominating or lasting long (Ex. 15).

The economy of means, the new feeling of space and the slightly ironical balance of sweetness and chilliness that result are remarkable.

## ‘Der Schaukelstuhl (auf der verlassene Terasse)’

Ich bin ein einsamer Schaukelstuhl  
und wackel im Winde, im Winde.  
Auf der Terrasse, da ist es kuhl,  
und ich wackel im Winde, im Winde.  
Und ich wackel und nackel den ganzen Tag,  
Und es nackelt und rackelt die Linde.  
Wer weiß, was sonst wohl noch wackelen mag  
im Winde, im Winde, im Winde.

I am a lonely rocking chair  
and I swing in the breeze, in the breeze.  
Out on the terrace, so cool is the air,  
and I swing in the breeze, in the breeze.  
And I’m swinging and swaying the live long day,  
as are swaying and playing the trees.  
Who knows, I wonder, what else may sway  
in the breeze, in the breeze, in the breeze.

The slightly ominous tread of C–C $\flat$  from ‘Das Gebet’ is here transmuted into a slow, heavy rocking of D $\flat$ m $^7$ –G $\flat$ . The chair is characterised as lonely and, musically, somewhat stupid in an arresting evocation of an out-of-season summer house.

Diatonicism remains remote, or at least tangential, from the aural experience. The important harmonic arrangements are the D $\flat$ m $^7$ –G $\flat$  pairing, unprepared jumps, and of movement through thirds, D $\flat$ –F–A $\flat$ . A later D $\flat$ 7–G $\flat$  cadence in bar 13 is so occluded by the bitonal application of another rocking E–C figure that the only sense of diatonic procedure is the constant feeling of being guided by an authoritative ground plan (Ex. 16).

Example 15. Overman 'Das Gebet', complete song

The musical score is presented in a standard format with a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into systems, with measure numbers 2 through 30 indicated above the vocal line. Performance markings such as *p*, *f*, *mf*, *sfz*, *ppp*, *cresc. poco a poco*, and *cresc. molto e poco accel.* are placed throughout the score. The lyrics are written below the vocal line, with some words appearing in a smaller font or as a separate line. The piano accompaniment features various textures, including triplets and sustained chords.

2 3 4 5 *p* *cresc. poco a poco* 6 7 8  
 Die Reh-lein be-ten zur Nacht, hab acht! Halb neun! Halb  
 9 10 11 *f* 12 13 14 *mf* 15 16 17  
 zehn! Halb elf! Halb zwölff!  
 18 19 20 *p* 21 22 23 *f*  
 Die Reh-lein be-ten zur Nacht, hab acht! hab acht!  
 24 25 26 *pp* 27 28 29 *ppp* 30  
 Sie fal-ten die klei-nen Zeh-lein, die Reh-lein.

Example 16. Overman 'Der Schaukelstuhl' bb1-14

*mf*  
Ich bin ein ein-sa-mer Schau-kei-stuhl, und wac-kei im Win-de, im Win - de, im Win - de.

*mf*

8 *cresc. poco a poco*  
Auf der Ter - ras - se, da ist es kuhl, und ich wac - kei im Win - de, im

*cresc. poco a poco*

12 *f*  
Win - de, im Win - de.

*f* *p sub.*

It should be said that the song wears its new structural authority lightly: the aural effect is affectionately grotesque, the limited range of piano figures throwing attention onto the text and effective prosody. The text setting is again almost exclusively syllabic, with key words extended in duration and this appropriately Lied-like folksy melodic shape is subjected to a sophisticated tension with the underlying harmony. The pianist-composer still refrains from any extended preludes or postludes but there is here no feeling of their lack: the brevity and concentration she has always possessed has seemingly been sharpened and given conviction by working with Pijper.



## ‘Der Tanz’

Ein Vierviertelschwein und eine Auftakteule  
trafen sich im Schatten einer Säule  
die im Geisten ihres Schöpfers stand.  
Und zum Spiel der Fiedelbogenpflanze,  
reichten sich die zwei zum Tanze  
Fuss und Hand.

Und auf seinen dreien rosa Beinen  
hüpfte das Vierviertelschwein graziös,  
und die Auftakteul auf ihrem einen  
wiegten rhythmisch ihr Gekrös.

Und der Schatten fiel,  
und der Pflanze Spiel  
klang verwirrend melodiös.

Doch des Schöpfers Hirn war nicht von Eisen,  
und die Säule schwand, wie sie gekommen war;  
und so musste den auch unser Paar  
wieder in sein Nichts zurücke reisen.

Einen letzten Strich  
tat der Geigerich —

und dann war nichts weiter zu beweisen.

A fourfourpig and an upbeatowl  
met in the shadow of a column  
that stood in the mind of their creator.  
And to the playing of the fiddlebowplants,  
they joined hands and feet to dance.

And on his three pink legs  
he gambolled graciously,  
and the upbeatowl on his own  
shook his ruff rhythmically.

And the shadows fell,  
And the playing of the plants  
sounded weirdly melodic.

But the creator’s mind was not made of iron,  
and the columns disappeared as quickly as they had come;  
and so must our couple too  
journey back to their Nothingness.

A last stroke  
from the I-violin —

and then there was nothing more to prove.

The set continues with the delightful notion of the meeting of a nonsensical ‘fourfourpig’ and an ‘upbeat owl’. Overman marks her score ‘Andantino burlesco’, if any further encouragement to a sense of gleeful play were needed. With piled-up fifths, or their inversions, fourths, and the drily-articulated dance rhythm, the spirits of Stravinsky and Hindemith preside over the song. In particular, the open fifths recall violin tuning and *The Soldier’s Tale*. Giggling piano triplet quavers soften the masculine, duplet outlines, and the range of rhythmic values in the vocal line has become noticeably greater (Ex. 17). Longer values are not really lyrical in intention, a tendency noted in the earlier songs: there are parodistic suspended starts to phrases, like a long intake of breath and the picking-up of skirts before dancing off again. There is plenty of deft manipulation of colour within a narrow range of piano figurations.

At the mention of the omnipotent Creator (bar 30), the texture descends and thickens, and from bar 33 a whole-tone scale hints at the impossibility of locating or defining Him. Once again, chords that could have a diatonic context are more often than not used non-functionally, or with their functional direction greatly weakened or obscured (Ex. 18). The voice breaks off abruptly at the end and is left to declaim *parlante* ‘Und dann war nichts weiter zu beweisen’. At several points through the song, drawn-out phrase beginnings outweigh the abrupt phrase endings as images or ideas are whisked away (Ex. 19).

## ‘Der Seufzer’

Ein Seufzer lief Schlittschuh auf nächtlichem Eis  
und träumte von Liebe und Freude.

Es war an den Stadtwall, und schneeweiss  
glänzten die Stadtwallgebäude.

Der Seufzer dacht’ an ein Maidelein  
und blieb erglühend stehen.

Da schmolz die Eisbahn unter ihm ein -  
und er sank, und war nimmer gesehen.

A sigh went a-skating on ice in the night,  
of love and of joy he was dreaming.

It was near the town wall, and snow white  
the town wall’s mansions were gleaming.

The sigh, he thought of a maiden fair  
and a-glowing he stopped on the scene.

That melted the ice below him there —  
and he sank, and was nevermore seen.



Example 17. Overman 'Der Tanz' bb1-10

**Andantino burlesco**  
*p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

Ein Vier - vier-tel-schwein und ei - ne Auf-takt - eu - le tra-fen sich im

[slow arpeggio]

6 *mf* 7 *f* **quasi rit.** 8 *f* 9 **Tempo** 10 *p* *f* *p*

Schat - ten ei - ner Säü - le die im Geis-ten ih - res Schöp-fers stand. Und zum

[slow arpeggio] *poco f*

Example 18. Overman 'Der Tanz', bb 28-35

28 *p* 29 *f* *p* 30 *cresc.* 31

Doch des Schöp-fers Hirn war nicht von Ei - sen, und die

[slow arpeggio] *f sub* *p cresc.*

32 *f* 33 34 35

Säü - le schwand, wie sie ge - kom - men war;

*f* *dim.*





**Example 19.** Overman 'Der Tanz' bb40–6

The diaphanous 'Der Seufzer' [The sigh] is composed of filigree wisps of scale in the high treble of the piano, flitting around the longer thread of the vocal melody, based on a peculiar scale of its own devising. Both piano and voice scales feature an augmented second, placing them outside classification in conventional modes or octatonic scales (Ex. 20). The sigh goes skating, dreaming of love, on lilting triplets in the voice. The singer suggests pitch centre of G, felt, rather than defined, by G being the lowest note of the scales, but by bar 10 we have a clearer idea. The piano scales drift downward, like falling leaves, or snowflakes. Bar 10 also sees a prominent C in the voice, giving the impression of C as the centre. When the piano scales begin their descent again, so does the voice begin its gradual ascent. Bars 14–16 intrude with weakly-related triads: F#/C#, C<sup>9</sup>, A<sup>b9</sup>, bound together by A#/B<sup>b</sup>. A couple of bars of piano scales attempt flight: they are now too low in the piano, too wet and heavy to be borne on the wind, and the ice melts under the sigh. Pedal notes descend E<sup>b</sup>–D–C, part of the piano scale, but now at the imagined bottom of the water. The voice, meanwhile, utters a long dramatic high A<sup>b</sup> as the last wisps of scale are sparsely repeated. When the wisps vanish, the sigh sinks to a low middle C: the last notes of the scale sound more like bubbles from the drowning sigh. The effect is of a gleefully comic grotesque moral tale, the means once again strikingly streamlined (Ex. 21).

**'Galgenberg'**

Blödem Volke unverständlich	Enigmatic for the masses
Treiben wir des Lebens Spiel.	playfully with life we fool.
Gerade das was unabwendlich	That which human wits surpasses
Fruchtet unserm Spott als Ziel.	draws our special ridicule.
Magst es Kinderrache nennen	Call it infantile vendetta
An des Daseins tiefen Ernst;	on life's deeply serious vein –
Wirst das Leben besser kennen	you will know existence better
Wenn du uns verstehen lernst.	once you understand our game.

This culminating song (Morgenstern 1964) is gallows humour indeed. This refusal to take things too seriously is ironically set 'maestoso' over richly resonant chords, built up with the sostenuto pedal over five beats. This faux solemnity is weakened a little by the time signature, 5/4 lopsidedly subverting 4/4, and Overman's sly 'con spirito' direction.

The piano's scale construction is that of 'Der Seufzer', transposed down a semitone onto C<sup>b</sup>. The voice borrows notes from within and without this scale, once again choosing to set out its melodic store in discrete intervals, referring back to the root each time. Underneath 'Treiben', the piano introduces a strongly dissonant C, reflecting the meaning 'striving'. At 'Spiel', 'play' or 'game', a clear plagal cadence in an equally clearly non-diatonic environment, deposits the piano in E<sup>b</sup> (Ex. 22). As the 'we' of the poem 'fools' with the essentials of life, C, E<sup>b</sup> and F tussle with each other in a resonant celebration of harmonic ambiguity. The simple rhythm of the vocal line and its syllabic setting lend an air of childlike directness and wonderment. As with the preceding poems, a childlike fascination and intensity is of the essence, necessitating the brevity of each song. Throughout the five songs, one is struck by the sureness of direction, pacing and shaping, in a thoroughly professional manner.



Example 20. Overman 'Der Seufzer', bb1–6

The musical score for 'Der Seufzer' is presented in a standard format with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part is characterized by intricate eighth-note patterns and triplets, creating a rich, glassy texture. The vocal line is simple and lyrical, with lyrics in German. The score is divided into measures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, with measure numbers indicated above the vocal line.

After the refining experience of Pijper’s tuition, Overman finds an irony, and control of dissonance, utilising traditional rhythmical figures and counterpoint as required. We detect intellectual clarity, succinctness and an ear for richly glassy textures for their own sake. Through Pijper these qualities reach back to Debussy, Stravinsky, Hindemith and others. And yet there is an abiding sense of Overman having achieved her own voice in song, allowing her to find a most apt response to Morgenstern’s blend of naïveté and metaphysics. Humour and seriousness live side by side in this important set.

## Overman’s Australian Songs

Newly married with a baby son, Overman and her husband had struggled in Rotterdam with the acute housing shortage ([Thorpe 1988: 12](#)). After the catastrophic German bombing of 1940, a decision was taken post-war to raze practically the whole of the city centre, barring four landmark buildings. The Conservatorium and Pijper’s home were among those previously damaged or destroyed. Pijper himself died in 1947. Food shortages had been serious immediately post-war. Against this background, the family emigrated to Australia to join Overman’s husband’s relatives in Pemberton, Western Australia, followed shortly afterwards by a move to Perth.

Thorpe reports a hard start to their life in their new country: menial employment, a hot summer and ‘a treeless, waterless housing block in Belmont’ ([Thorpe 1988: 14](#)). (Robert Hyner reports that Overman particularly suffered in the heat. ([Hyner, pers. comm. 2017](#))). ‘In order to shut out the extremely strange and hostile environment, Meta Overman spent many hours composing ...’: [m]y only salvation during that time ...’ as Overman described it ([Thorpe 1988: 14](#)).



Example 21. Overman 'Der Seutzer', bb14–28

### Two Lieder, 1952

Overman's first songs for voice and piano produced in Australia were the *Two Songs* to texts by Peter Krüger. It is interesting that, despite having successfully set English texts before and choosing poets who all had Anglophile leanings, Overman chose two Dutch lyrics. They have their intrinsic merits as poems and one might speculate that their use of her native language and their theme of hope and redemption appealed to the lonely composer. Thoughts of the future seem embodied in the choice of texts for other vocal works of that time: *Children's Animal Stories* for voice and harp (1952), and *Nursery Rhymes* for the same combination two years later.

Krüger's poems are 'Bethlehem' and 'Jeruzalem': clearly 'beginning' and 'end', not forgetting a troubled journey to Bethlehem and a life's journey to Jerusalem and apotheosis. Overman could scarcely have not appreciated the analogy to her own long journey with her young child and she must have hoped for a fulfillment of her own career in her adopted country.

Example 22. Overman 'Galgenberg', bb1–9

'Bethlehem'

Ik war nog niet in Bethlehem,  
 Ik hoorde niet de blijde stem;  
 Ik ben de avond ingegaan  
 En zag de ster niet blijven staan.  
 De blijde boodschap heb ik niet gehoord,  
 En toen ik kwam was heel de stad vermoord.  
 Ik weende: Kerstkind, kom je nog bij mij?  
 Toen was de grote dag al lang voorbij.

I was never in Bethlehem,  
 I never heard the evangelic voice;  
 I began the evening  
 Seeing the star not standing still.  
 I had never heard the Evangelical Word,  
 And then I heard that the whole town was slain.  
 I wept: Christ-child, will you come with me?  
 Then was the great day long past.

'Bethlehem' begins with the voice wearily ascending stepwise up an expressive scale that can be quickly identified as octatonic, this first iteration beginning on a semitone (x), and a second tortured climb up the variant beginning on a tone (y). In Perth then, fourteen thousand kilometers from Rotterdam, she draws significantly upon the example of her mentor with the first appearance in her songs of the Pijper scale (Ex. 23).

Trembling  $D\flat-C$  semiquavers, set over  $A\flat$  suggesting a  $D\flat M^7$  chord, underpin a dramatic chromatic ascent through parallel sevenths with flattened fifths to another  $D\flat M^7$ , perhaps a further working out of  $D\flat-C$  bitonality. Contrary motion of chords comprised of fourths and fifths fall back from an anguished climax, reaching the crucial line 'Christ-child, will you come with me?'

This profession of faith and dedication achieves fluctuating quietude but not stability, set as it is to the Pijper scale. The last variant leads up to a starry, temporary-feeling A major. It could be that the  $C-D\flat$  struggle is revealed as a striving for  $C\sharp$  and the haven of a major triad. The ambiguity of the octatonic scale and the bitonal implications of the two interlocking diminished seventh chords within it, are used to striking dramatic effect, rather than simply as exotic colour (Ex. 24).



Example 23. Overman 'Bethlehem', bb1-5

1 *p* *x* *p* *mf*  
 2 3 4 y 5  
 Ik war nog niet in Beth - le - hem, Ik hoor - de niet de blij - de stem; Ik

Example 24. Overman 'Bethlehem', bb10-18

10 *poco f* 11 *cresc. molto* 12 13 14 *ff*  
 De blij-de bood-schap heb ik niet ge hoord, En toen ik kwam was heel de stad ver-moord.  
 15 16 *mp* 17 18  
 Ik ween - de: Kerst-kind, kom je nog bij mij? Toen

There is an impeccable sense of direction and of prosody with no musical element wasted: everything is confidently understated, deftly controlled and at the service of the text. The vocal line cannot live independently of its harmonization. Rather it is another strand contributing to that harmony. Also impressive is the delicate precision of the control of range in the piano.



## ‘Jeruzalem’

Ik ben door vuur en bloed gegann,  
De wanhoop is rechtop gaan staan,  
En toen ik bijna was vergaan  
Ben ik naar Jeruzalem gegann.  
Mijn kleurig kleet heb ik afgelegd,  
Ik heb hem alles stil gezegd,  
En toen ik wachte op zijn recht  
Heeft hij zijn hand op mij gelegd.  
En toen hij mij weer achter liet,  
Toen wist ik ook het nieuwe lied,  
Toen wist ik dat de grote stem  
Alleen klinkt in Jeruzalem.  
Nu weet ik dat hij komen zal  
Tot in het allerdiepste dal.

I have been through fire and blood,  
Despair stands directly ahead,  
And then I almost perished  
I came near to Jerusalem.  
My colourful clothing I laid aside,  
I spoke to him quietly of everything,  
And then I waited at his right  
He laid his hand upon mine.  
And then he again passed me by,  
Then I knew this new song too,  
Then I knew that the great voice  
Is heard only in Jerusalem.  
Now I know that he shall come  
To this deepest valley.

‘Jeruzalem’ continues the consideration of  $D\flat/C$ , opening on a questioning  $D\flat m^7$  chord resolving onto  $C^9$ , a pairing repeated with variation three times. The two notes continue to be set beside or against each other through  $A\flat^9-B\flat m^7$ , a progression of  $Cm^9-D\flat^7-Dm^7$ , and  $E\flat m^{13}-Fm^7$ . By this time, in bar 11, Jerusalem has been reached ([Ex. 25](#)).

The protagonist sets aside their worldly goods and dedicates themselves to a silent patient Christ, over beautiful, rapt unfolding broken chords. Further heightening the gentle sublimity is a medieval-style chordal melody from bar 16. The laying on of Christ’s hand is accompanied by gravely deep parallel major chords, until a reharmonised variant of the opening music achieves C as a tonal centre, further exploring the  $D\flat$  pairing ([Ex. 26](#)).

Something special is required for the revelation, ‘Then I knew this new song too,/Then I knew that the great voice/Is heard only in Jerusalem’, and, with the original piano accompaniment raised up an octave into the heavens, the voice is given a gently ecstatic melody with a rare melisma on ‘Jeruzalem’. This is a device that so strictly syllabic a word setter as Gerald Finzi employed, reserving melismas for climactic or otherwise key moments without ever sacrificing a lyrical line: the governing influence is always the text. The climax subsides and, in something like the Mixolydian, F is settled on as the final resting place. So, in the first song  $D\flat$  was selected as victor over C, respelt as  $C\sharp$  in A major. This time, over a deep organ pedal, C is part of the final triadic goal, F major ([Ex. 27](#)).

The song has the air of a dignified sarabande without the gentle assertion of the second beat. In sleek understated lines it moves through states of fear and trepidation, through dedication to apotheosis and finally repose. In highly nuanced harmony with a carefully restricted palette, Overman displays emotional control and the capacity to sustain finely drawn tension. Craggy beginnings of the vocal phrases are balanced by meditative chant-like endings. Cadences, if the hinge points of the song’s architecture may be so described, never leak energy, such is the invention and ingenuity with the part-writing.

If there had been the opportunity for performances, Overman should surely have established herself as a most significant musician in Perth and in Australia more generally. Shortly after the composition of the *Twee liederen*, the family moved to Albany in the south of Western Australia. Its latitude and the influence of the Southern Ocean made for a more comfortable climate. Overman began playing the organ at the Scots Presbyterian Church. This prompted the writing of several choral works, including *The Image of the Cross* to a text by John Joseph Jones, himself a composer as well as teacher and poet, indeed a cousin of Dylan Thomas ([Thorpe 1988: 15](#)). The choral writing was particularly encouraged by the minister, Alexander Macliver, the grandfather of noted Australian soprano, Sara Macliver, herself a formidable performer of songs.

The years 1951–1955 saw the composition and troubled performance of Overman’s unconventional opera, *Psyche*. Her programme notes explain that ‘[a]lthough the principal characters still have their own musical patterns or leitmotifs, the roles are played by dancers,



Example 25. Overman 'Jeruzalem', bb1-11

2 3 4 5 6

Ik ben door vuur en bloed ge gann, De

7 8 9 10 11

wan - hoop is recht - op gaan staan, En toen ik by - na was ver - gaan Ben ik naar Je - ru - za - lem ge - gaan.

Example 26. Overman 'Jeruzalem', bb12-23

12 13 14 15 16 17

Myn kleu-rig kleed heb ik af - ge - legd, Ik heb hem al - les

18 19 20 21 22 23

stil ge - zegd, En toen ik wacht - le op zyn recht Heeft hy zyn hand op my - ge - legd.

Example 27. Overman 'Jeruzalem', bb24–41

24 25 26 27 28 29

En toen hÿ mÿ weer ach - ter liet, Toen wist ik ook het

30 31 32 33 34

nieu - we lied, Toen wist ik dat de gro - te stem Al-leen klinkt in Je - ru - za - lem. Nu weet ik

35 36 37 38 39 40 41

dat hÿ ko-men zal Tot in het al - ler - diep - ste dal.

a harpist and actors as well as singers.' Its musical features are outside the scope of this study but it is notable that, in search of original expression in opera, she was ready to sacrifice some lyrical opportunities in the quest for formal and timbral contrast. At any rate, the work and its financial and emotional consequences cost Overman her marriage, and she returned to Perth to live (Thorpe 1988: 26).

Despite these serious setbacks, Overman was not without her supporters. Thorpe quotes from an article by James Penberthy from *The West Australian* in 1956, which bears repeating here:

I believe that Perth can have quite soon an artistic life and activity which will be the envy of the Commonwealth. It embraces amongst its people an enormous national artistic talent and an audience with long hours of leisure and a pride in everything local — except home grown art. Who cares that in a small town in W.A. lives a New Australian who is also one of the World's finest woman composers? (Overman, unpublished scrapbook).

One imagines that Penberthy would not have had the opportunity to hear much, if any, of Overman's earlier music. The choral music written in Albany, the *Twee liederen* and *Psyche* seem to have impressed the perceptive Australian modernist, who was also a prolific songwriter. Coming from one of Australia's most vigorous and original (if inconsistent) musical voices of the 1950s to 1980s, Penberthy's vindication of Overman, despite her lack of commercial and even critical success, is significant to us as it must have been to her.





## Island Songs, 1956

The year 1956 saw the return of song to her catalogue, with the *Island Songs* to poems by John Joseph Jones whose work she had previously set in Albany. Overman heads the score with a charmingly Anglo-Dutch note that ‘These songs are based on the life on the Figi isles’. Just from handling the score it is evident that these are longer than all of her previous songs and, unlike the works written in Holland they are in the first person and on a more quotidian, less abstracted, plane than the Krýger songs. Jones himself lived briefly in Fiji, a place he held in great affection, according to Margaret Dylan Jones ([Jones 2017](#)), and this personal dimension is felt in the musical response.

### ‘Deep, Deep Blue Water’

Deep, deep blue water,  
Echoing the laughter  
Of the island children  
As they gaily play.  
Silent deep blue water,  
O the magic of your colour,  
When I find the silver moon  
Floating in your turquoise heart.  
Friendly deep blue water,  
O pearly coral reef,  
Where the fragile soft anemone  
Abounds in many hues.  
Deep, deep blue water,  
In my soul forever after  
I will carry still the  
Memory of your placid loveliness.

The first is ‘Deep, Deep Blue Water’, before which both performers are cautioned to employ ‘semplicità’. There is an appropriately rippling right-hand texture over the deepest possible depths of a standard piano, in euphonious octaves. Between these layers, the voice carries a simply shaped rising phrase, an outline familiar from previous songs. It is here presented in F Lydian, the sharpened fourth being saved for children’s laughter but, as soon as the phrase peaks, B is dropped in the piano in favour of B $\flat$ . Any thought of a possible F major is quickly forgotten as a beguiling mode of Overman’s own devising (half major, half minor) invokes the magic that Jones observes ([Ex. 28](#)).

The practice of gradually transforming modes in a slowly evolving kaleidoscope by altering one or two notes by a semitone continues. For praise of the blue water washing over a reef, the pianist’s left hand climbs into the treble clef and picks out the same delicate melody as the singer for the detail of an anemone. Overman here employs another non-standard mode (tone-semitone-tone-semitone-tone-tone on E), the piano sending up a little spray with prominent B naturals against it ([Ex. 29](#)).

The rippling figuration high in the piano has largely been made up of pairs and trios of fourths, and, as we leave the reef to dive deeper again, the descent is made by parallel arrangements of stacked fourths, coloured individually by different intervals in the left hand. Carrigan notes Overman’s propensity for visual imagery in her piano music ([Carrigan 2015: 10–17](#)), and it is surely not fanciful to hear something equivalent to the hues of coloured coral on the reef. The chords fall most attractively, sometimes moving by thirds, often with augmented fourths under the perfect fourths of the right hand ([Ex. 30](#)). The last line of the poem reveals that all this description has been, in fact, in memory. The clarity of the mode fades, the absolute concordance of the melody with most or all of the piano part is lost, and a short descending phrase through no coherent mode is left hanging on the fifth degree of F as the piano falls most of two octaves, again favouring skips of a third. The teasing ambiguity of B $\flat$  set before B $\sharp$ , A $\flat$  before A $\sharp$  and a written-out rallentando of increasing note lengths in the last bars are among the details to savour ([Ex. 31](#)). The dynamic profile of the voice works toward the surprise revelation of being in memory: forte – meno forte – mezzo forte (tenerezza) – piano – sotto voce. A simple device but subtly applied. The piano is left to make a final crescendo of conviction back to forte.



Example 28. Overman 'Deep, deep blue water', bb1-25

*f ma con semplicità*

2 3 4 5 6 7

Deep, deep blue wa - ter, E - cho - ing the

*f ma con semplicità*

portato

8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

laugh - ter of the is - land chil - dren As they gai - ly play.

*espr.*

16 17 *meno f* 18 19 20

Si - lent deep blue wa - ter, O the ma - - - gic of your

*sempre legato*

21 22 23 24 25

co - lour, When I find the sil - ver moon Floa - ting in your tur - quise heart.

*f*



**Example 29.** Overman 'Deep, deep blue water', bb27–32

*mf con tenerezza*

27 28 29

Friend - ly deep blue wa - ter, O pear - ly co - ral

30 31 32

reef, — Where the fra - gile soft a - ne - no - me A - bounds in ma - ny hues.

**Example 30.** Overman 'Deep, deep blue water', bb 33–6

33 34 35 36

*p*

Deep deep —

*dim. poco a poco*

*p*



**Example 31.** Overman 'Deep, deep blue water', bb40–51

40 sotto voce 41 42 43 44

In my soul for - e - ver af - ter I will car - ry still the mem - 'ry of your pla - cid

45 46 47 48 49 50 51

love - li - ness.

*sempre p*

*p*

*cresc. poco a poco*

*f*

**'Farewell'**

Farewell, my son, for I must on a journey go.  
 Watch over my household and bow only to thy King and God.  
 You have grown as strong and supple as a young palm,  
 And are well able to withstand the fury of life.  
 Seek only the truth with your clear eyes,  
 And when you've found it defend it with your life as I've done.  
 Now drink with me from the cava bowl,  
 For I must away, I must away.  
 Remember this island is your home,  
 And from its good earth have you been nourished.  
 Nurture the good that is in man and destroy all that which is evil.  
 For truly Degei has given you strength and wisdom to accomplish what you will.  
 Now drink with me from the cava bowl,  
 For I must away, I must away.

'Farewell' is an altogether more formal utterance, an invocation to a son to carry on the duties of head of the household before the speaker goes on an unnamed journey, presumably that to death. The music is markedly less French in tone than the water-figurations of 'Deep, Deep Blue Water', now owing more to the spareness and clarity of Stravinsky. The ringing rhetoric is matched by stacked fifths and fourths, and a note of foreboding in a frequent, prominent C–C# clash.

Five distinct figures comprise the basic musical constituents: (i) the chords of stacked fourths and fifths, (ii) a little dotted unit with one or two demisemiquavers, (iii) a syncopated descending group (Ex. 32), (iv) a descending chain of triplets (Ex. 34) and (v) flinty grace notes (Ex. 35).



Example 32. Overman 'Farewell', bb1-19

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

*ff* *più ff* *ff* *f* *ff*

Fare-well, my son, for I must on a jour-ney go. Watch

C is the apparent tonal centre for the opening, with a Mixolydian scale, but an alternative centre of gravity is offered by the insistent high C# in the right hand. In bar 9, E is immediately presented as the centre of a variant of the dotted figure, seeming quite distant from A because of the approach via C# and the subsequent introduction of A $\flat$  and B $\flat$ . With a hard-edged limited pitch set, F appears to become central in bar 15, an impression reinforced by the voice's sustained C above it, but a final iteration of the syncopated figure returns to E, explaining the F as an extended appoggiatura.

A whole-tone scale unison between voice and both hands of the piano accompanies the instruction to 'bow only to thy King and God', a device we heard in 'Der Seufzer' suggesting the unknowability of the Creator. One might speculate that this kinship is not accidental, the linking of the tonally goalless whole-tone scale being either intuitive or conscious.

This is swiftly contradicted by a bold B $\flat$ -E tritone. To the words, 'You have grown as strong and supple as a young palm', the piano responds by sending up a robust series of stacked fourth chords, moving steadily stepwise through a mode that the voice defines as G Mixolydian. From a climax there is a sinuous unison descent through contracting and expanding thirds, fourths and fifths, on a loosely Pijperesque scale to deeper regions of the piano in F/Dm open fifths and fourths where the speaker calls on the son to exercise wise judgement (Ex. 33).

Melodic strands overlap the moment of cadence and another current is set in motion, with C# prominent over A in the bass. A ritual libation in bar 44 is set to the first appearance of the falling triplet figure, on a whole-tone scale, reinforcing the sense that it represents the unworldly to Overman. As the father figure repeats 'I must away', the stacked fourth and fifth chords fall through a chain of fourths at their base: F-C-G-D-A-E. The stacked fourths, the partial octatonic scale and the obscured cadence are all Pijper-derived traits (Ex. 34).

Chromatic invention supports the text in subtle detail. For example, the E-B open fifth that occupies both staves of the piano from bar 51 is softened and enriched to E $\flat$ -B $\flat$  and G $\flat$ -D $\flat$ , E $\flat$ m7, in bar 59, as tacit acknowledgement of one's birthright is shifted to an instruction to actively do something with it, in this case to 'nurture good and destroy evil'. Appropriately, the harmony responds with something representing more of a struggle than the previous undulations, and the stacked fifths rise through C-E $\flat$ -F# with the voice declaring 'strength and wisdom' (Ex. 35).



Example 33. Overman 'Farewell', bb25–41

25 *f* 3 26 27 *cresc.* 28 29 30 *ff* 31 32

You have grown as strong and sup-ple as a young palm, And are well a-ble to with-stand the fu - ry of life.

33 34 35 36 *poco f* 37 3

Seek on - ly the truth with your clear eyes,

38 39 40 41

And when you've found it de - fend it with your life as I've done.

The climax is given plenty of space, and perhaps the father is nearing the end of his strength too: the ringing dotted figure lapses and the syncopated descent takes over with E $\flat$  hinting at the darker side of Cm. In fact, the C–C#–D#–E–F#–G is another partial Pijper scale (x) allowing the sudden dramatic reassertion of C#, from a bass pedal plus the right hand rising through bare octaves to strong anvil strikes three octaves thick, fortissimo accented (Ex. 36).

A last libation in bar 75, to falling triplets on a whole-tone scale highlights a feature that went unnoticed previously: the father is left centered on F for 'I must away', at odds with the piano's stacked fifths with a prominent E appoggiatura (bar 78). With the singer low in their range, fortississimo and marcato, the impression is of tearing himself away from the 'home', C, in the piano. A final mighty, clashing C# suggests the demand to rise, to take up responsibility, to set aside comfort. The ceremonial formality is evident, but Overman never loses the humanity of the scene: the syllabic setting is proud, the message urgent but not abstracted, and the texture is always transparent, reinforcing the sense of the speaker thinking and declaiming clearly.



**Example 34. Overman 'Farewell', bb42–50**

42 43 44 45

*f intenso*

Now drink with me from the ca - va bowl, For

46 47 48 49 50

I must a - way, I must a - way.

*dim.*

**'Lullaby'**

Rest, my little son,  
 Rest in slumber that's blest,  
 Lay thy tiny head down,  
 With the night as thy gown.  
 I must go far away,  
 And with close of the day  
 I will dream dear of thee.  
 Oh the stars are thine eyes:  
 Oh the birds sing thy cries,  
 Oh the moon beams thy smile  
 As I linger awhile.  
 And when far I have flown,  
 May the love that I've sown  
 Stay with thee through the night.

'Lullaby' returns, harmonically and texturally, to Overman's French-derived writing. Again, the harmony is the driver of structure and gesture: in D Dorian the piano outlines undulating figures of various lengths. The time signature is 7/8, already weakening a sense of periodicity, and then the piano's phrases are variously 7, 6, 5, 4, 3 and finally 2 quavers long. The voice calmly intones the text in irregular phrase lengths and without recurring duration patterns. Order is maintained by the fall of the principal word stresses on the first beats of the bars (Ex. 37). The piano figures are set either a fourth or augmented fourth apart between hands. There is a gently guiding feeling of D minor of course, even as tiny modifications are introduced: an A $\flat$  in bar 6 resolving to G, with B $\flat$  in bar 7 and a return to D in bar 8. A bigger departure begins in bar 10 with B $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , A $\flat$  and D $\flat$ , as the piano moves through parallel fourths before reaching D Dorian again. A final written-out ritardando of increasing note durations is a device Overman has previously employed effectively: it is particularly well judged here (Ex. 38).

Example 35. Overman 'Farewell', bb 51–70

2 *poco f* 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 Re-mem-ber this is-land is your home, And from its good earth have you been nou-rished.

5  
*poco f* *mf* *poco cresc.*

10 *poco f* 11 *cresc.* 12 13 14  
 Nur-ture the good that is in man and des-roy all that which is e-vil. For tru-ly De-

15 16 17 18 19 20  
 gei has gi-ven you strength and wis-dom to ac-com-plish what you will.

*mf* *cresc.* *poco f* *cresc.*

Rhythmically, the vocal line begins in conventional lullaby territory, lilting crotchets and quavers, the 7/8 acting as a loosened 6/8. As the parent figure grows more rhapsodic and reflective, so the range of durations and variety of groupings grows. There is a security and lightness of touch throughout so that, despite the analysis offered above the key remains more sensed than defined to the listener and the overlapping phrases and variable lengths keep a sublime buoyancy through the song.

The year 1957 saw the beginning of a happy and fulfilling period for Meta Overman. With her husband-to-be, flautist and pianist Robert Hyner, and her son, now twelve, she moved to Melbourne. Here, crucially, she was a central part of a vibrant musical community (Thorpe 1988: 48–65), something that, despite Penberthy's enthusiasm, she never felt in Perth. (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017). Any composer needs the oxygen of performances (and of repeat performances), the discussion with performers and fellow composers, and this she found in generous measure. Margaret Sutherland and Dorian Le Gallienne were among the most important of her circle, and both among the very best Australian songwriters, not to mention their other achievements in various genres. Thorpe further describes how Hyner's role as curator of the Grainger Museum (and Overman's own very close involvement), were just as revivifying. This led to a meeting with Keith Humble, recently returned from Europe and full of fresh invention and techniques, including in electronic music (Thorpe 1988: 39–40).





**Example 36.** Overman ‘Farewell’, bb71–84

71 72 73 74 75 76 *ff*  
 Now drink with me from the  
 ca - va bowl, For I must a - way, I must a-way.  
 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84  
*fff* *sf*

**‘Morning prayer’, 1960**

God of our hearts, I am thankful for the returning consciousness  
 And the privilege of serving one more day in the fulfilment of Thy decrees.  
 God of our hearts, I am thankful for the continued evolution  
 Of the personality of my soul upon this plane of understanding.  
 God of our hearts, keep me constantly attuned with thy mind  
 That I may be more readily inspired.

There were no more songs until 1960, when ‘Morning prayer’, her last work for voice and piano, was written. The poet is unnamed, though I have assumed that the text is by Overman herself, her English now finely tuned and idiomatic. Having seen other examples of her writing I can say that the style is consistent with them. Overman was by no means a conventional Christian, having rejected her schooling in faith during childhood. Nevertheless, she had a profound sense of spirituality and a thirst for philosophy and discussion of life and meaning (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017).

Her command of chromatic enhancements in series of unrelated triads is by now impressively secure. The piano left hand opens with a chain of descending parallel fifths, the right hand describing augmented fifths, in registers that lend a lofty, meditative atmosphere. The time signature is 5/8, allowing the prosody to be nicely free, with plenty of variety of durations and space around the notes. The effect of this, over the constant quaver movement in the piano and the slowly changing harmonic cloud, is of light and a delicate whiff of incense. The piano continues to navigate fifths and augmented fifths in irregular steps under tight intuitive control (Ex. 39).

A step up in the intensity of the setting is produced by a ‘poco più animato’ marking and a melody markedly closer to speech rhythm, at the same time containing the single longest melisma in Overman’s song output, on ‘thankful’. Briefly in unison with the voice, the piano unwinds its own octave unison melody in A Dorian, widening to three octaves. As the metaphysical thought continues its leisurely way, the



Example 37. Overman 'Lullaby', bb1–15

Tranquillo ♩ = 116

1 2 3 4 5 6

*p dolce*

Rest, my lit-tle son, rest in slum-ber that's blest, Lay thy ti - ny head down,

7 8 9 10

*p*

With the night as thy gown. I must go far a - way, And with close of the day I will

11 12 13 14 15

dream dear of thee, I will dream dear of thee.

[con ped.]

harmonic palette widens, the A centre of the plainchant now minor, now major, and for a moment harmony based upon the whole-tone scale, used in 'Der Seufzer' and 'Farewell' with its hint of the infinite, colours the 'personality of the soul'. Overman may be implying that the soul is properly not entirely one's own but is shared with her God (Ex. 40).

## Conclusion

Jeanell Carrigan describes how Overman's 'piano music and her compositions generally, are characterised by a strong sense of visual imagery' (Carrigan 2015: 10–17). This is true of the songs as well, though with an important qualification. The abstracted wordless genre of piano music has a long tradition of characteristic short pieces with poetic or descriptive titles, many with pictorial qualities. In her songs, she largely eschews obvious word painting and aims for what the poem does not say but, rather, implies.

In pursuit of this aim, she tackles a range of poetry, none written by poets acknowledged as belonging to the first rank, but most of it of high quality with a preference for shorter verses that rely upon suggestion rather than description, even when a narrative seems to be present. Overman allows the words to speak for themselves, aiming, actually, for the music of the words, hence the largely syllabic settings, with only carefully rationed short melismas on key words. Most of her songs are written on what are essentially French principles, where the subjective suggestive atmosphere is conjured, and the listener can contemplate and enjoy the eddying currents within this sphere, achieved by harmonic and textural means.

Example 38. Overman 'Lullaby', bb28–35

25 far I have flown, 26 May the love 27 that I've sown Stay with thee through the night, 28 Stay with  
*p dolce*

29 thee through the night. 30 31 32 33 34 35  
*perdendosi pp*

The songs are not, as one might imagine, without defining rhythmical figures, particularly the songs with German and English texts. They are lyrical in their concentration on the music of the text itself without being melody-driven: the vocal line is frequently one more strand in the web of lines comprising the harmony. The piano parts are deft and colourful, not technically challenging except in the detailed pursuit of the right tone and touch. The voice, for its part, is rarely taken to anything approaching its extremes and neither performer is required to deploy virtuosity for display for its own innate thrill. Overman's is a sensitive, spiritual and gently lyrical voice, something her husband, Robert Hyner, was at pains to point out (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017). It is certainly distinctly more immediately approachable than much of Pijper's music, wearing its intellectual trappings lightly. In this, in the captivating, delicate harmonic textures and in its spirituality, it is closer to the music of Henk Badings, another distinguished Pijper student and a significant songwriter.

For Australian readers, it should be clearly stated that Overman came to identify strongly as an Australian composer, particularly during the twelve fertile happy years in Melbourne (1957–1969) (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017). Hyner was appointed curator of the Grainger Museum, next to the Department of Music of Melbourne University, from 1966–1969. (Thorpe 1988: 53) Overman and Hyner became very close to Margaret Sutherland, a very fine Australian song composer, and lived in her house when Sutherland was ill. Sutherland admired Overman's work and, having left a painful marriage herself, sympathised deeply with Overman's pain over her failed marriage to Frank Russcher (Appleby 2012: 18). She encouraged Overman's composition, giving recommendations and making introductions to key people leading to commissions, performances and broadcasts.

Dorian Le Gallienne often brought Overman to concerts which he was reviewing (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017) and the two struck up a lively written correspondence (Overman, unpublished scrapbooks). Overman and Hyner lived in Le Gallienne's Eltham house during the latter's year in Europe in 1960. We have heard how James Penberthy had been liberal with his praise and Percy and Ella Grainger also regarded Overman's music very highly (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017). Keith Humble proved to be a particularly galvanising influence. He brought scores, recordings and news of techniques from Europe, and he inspired Overman on a new direction in style and notation, including graphic scores and prepared tape (Thorpe 1988: 59). This is the kind of environment a composer needs: opportunity, challenge, support, and one that was often hard to find in the relatively small and dispersed population of Australia. Overman had been widely and frequently performed in the Netherlands, until the mid-1950s and the Australian Broadcasting Commission finally paid proper attention during the 1960s,



Example 39. Overman 'Morning prayer', bb1–16

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

God of our hearts, I am thank - ful

*p delicato* *mp* *cresc. poco a poco*

9 10 11 12

for the re - tur - ning con - scious-ness And the pri - vi - lege of ser - ving one more

*mf*

13 14 15 16 17

day in the ful - fil - ment of Thy de - crees.

*mp* *p*

attesting to the quality of her output (Thorpe 1988: 49). Sadly for song lovers, only one song ('Morning Prayer') was written during the Melbourne years though Overman wrote prolifically, experimenting with unusual combinations of instruments and with techniques new to her (Thorpe 1988: 58–9).

It is worth mentioning that Carrigan reports frequent difficulty in deciphering the hand-written notation in the piano music (Carrigan 2015: 17–18). All of the song manuscripts are fortunately beautifully neat, suggesting that perhaps they were copied for performance, or at least the expectation of performance. It may even be that as Overman aged and spent less time practising, she preferred to play her songs rather than the more challenging piano solos. At any rate, her personal presence presides over the mature songs: thoughtful, wise, sometimes witty, sometimes tender and often intense.

She took no composition students that we know of (Hyner, pers. comm. 2017), and so there is no evidence of her having passed her influence on. Whatever the good opinions of the abovementioned composers, there is no suggestion that they imitated particular techniques in Overman's music though her warm humanity and spirituality and her perceptive critical faculties cemented deep friendships. In the present era, with so much music of different eras and origins available to us, this should not be seen as a failing or evidence of the lack of any qualities, as it might have been a century or more ago, where chains of influence were part of a belief in inexorable progress and improvement. It is time for the best of Meta Overman's music to take its place in performance.



Example 40. Overman 'Morning prayer', bb18-36

18 *f* 19 20 21  
God of our hearts, I am thank - ful\_ for the con - ti-nued e - vo-lu-tion of the per-so - na - li - ty of my

22 23 24 25 26 27 28  
soul u-pon this plane of un-der - stan - ding. God of our hearts, —

29 30 31 32  
Keep me con-stant - ly at - tuned, at - tuned with Thy mind That I may

33 34 35 36  
be more rea - di - ly in - spired.

*espr. e cresc.*  
*dim. poco a poco*  
*poco f*  
*p sub.*  
*cresc. molto*  
*f*  
*p subito*  
*cresc. molto*  
*f*  
*Red.*



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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I aim to introduce the piano-accompanied songs of Dutch-Australian composer Meta Overman to scholars and performers. A brief biographical survey sketches her musical training in Rotterdam, especially under important composer-teacher Willem Pijper, and then a short survey of major Dutch song composers of the preceding two generations sets her songwriting in context. I will argue that the music of Willem Pijper and Alphonse Diepenbrock influenced her compositional technique and I point out affinities with other song composers, notably Matthijs Vermeulen, Henri Zagwijn and Henriëtte Bosmans. All of her songs are examined critically, with straightforward harmonic analysis. It is helpful to divide her song output (twenty-three in total) into two loose groups: those written before 1932 as she searched for her individual voice and those after she emigrated to Australia in 1947 and achieved her mature powers. Her best work is in settings of short suggestive lyrics where she captures the music of the words in a sensitive lyricism with colourful piano parts tied closely to the text.

**Keywords.** Willem Pijper; Alphonse Diepenbrock; Guido Gezelle; Christian Morgenstern; John Joseph Jones; Perth, Western Australia; Melbourne; Rotterdam

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Wickham is one of Australia's pre-eminent accompanists and has broadcast many recitals for ABC Classic FM, BBC Radio 3 and UK Classic FM. He has taught at the Australian Opera Studio and for twelve years at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. He has edited the vocal works of John Antill, Phyllis Batchelor, Phyllis Campbell, Meta Overman, James Penberthy, and Rudolf Werther for Wirripang.

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