



Beauty Intolerable  
On Loving  
Transcending  
Chariessa  
Nocturne

# BEAUTY INTOLERABLE

Songs of Sheila Silver

TROY1854-55

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BEAUTY INTOLERABLE: SONGS OF SHEILA SILVER

CD 1

<b>Beauty Intolerable</b>	[67:35]
<i>A Songbook based on the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay</i>	
1 First Fig (I)	[1:05]
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano   Risa Renae Harman, soprano Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Christopher Cooley, piano	
2 I, being born a woman	[2:01]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
3 Recuerdo	[4:15]
Risa Renae Harman, soprano   Timothy Long, piano	
4 Hyacinth	[4:17]
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano   Ryan McCullough, piano	
5 Only until this cigarette is ended	[4:16]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
6 The Penitent	[3:46]
Risa Renae Harman, soprano   Timothy Long, piano	
7 She is Overheard Singing	[4:17]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
8 Thursday	[2:04]
Risa Renae Harman, soprano   Timothy Long, piano	
9 Tristan	[8:58]
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano   Ryan McCullough, piano	
10 An Ancient Gesture	[5:01]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
11 Aubade	[9:53]
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano   Ryan McCullough, piano	

12 A Visit to the Asylum	[2:46]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
13 Mindful of you	[4:57]
Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Kayo Iwama, piano	
14 What lips my lips have kissed	[4:47]
Dawn Upshaw, soprano   Gilbert Kalish, piano	
15 Love, though for this	[4:13]
Risa Renae Harman, soprano   Christopher Cooley, piano	
16 First Fig (II)	[1:00]
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano   Risa Renae Harman, soprano Deanne Meek, mezzo-soprano   Christopher Cooley, piano	

Total Time = 67:35

CD 2

<b>On Loving</b>	[13:40]
<i>Three Songs for Diane Kalish, in memoriam</i>	
Texts by William Shakespeare   Edna St. Vincent Millay   Kahlil Gibran	
1 O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!	[3:48]
2 Mindful of you	[5:13]
3 Love is a Magic Ray	[4:39]
Dawn Upshaw, soprano   Gilbert Kalish, piano	
<b>Transcending</b>	[11:07]
<i>Three Songs for Michael Dash, in memoriam</i>	
Texts by W.B. Yeats   H.D. Thoreau   Paul Laurence Dunbar	
4 The Cat and the Moon	[4:30]
5 To be calm, to be serene	[4:09]

6 We Wear the Mask [2:28]  
Sidney Outlaw, baritone | Warren Jones, piano

7 **Nocturne** for piano solo [11:50]  
*Based on Raga Jog*  
Gilbert Kalish, piano

**Chariessa** [20:49]  
*A Cycle of Six Songs on Fragments from Sappho*  
Texts by Sappho (trans. Mary Barnard)

8 Leave Crete and come to us [6:20]

9 Lament for a Maidenhead [1:49]

10 The full moon is shining [2:54]

11 Gold is God's child [2:20]

12 The moon and then the Pleiades go down [5:22]

13 As a whirlwind swoops on an oak [2:05]  
Lucy Fitz Gibbon, soprano | Ryan McCullough, piano

**Four Songs from the Beauty Intolerable Songbook** [15:29]  
(arr. for contralto)  
Texts by Edna St. Vincent Millay

14 I, being born a woman [2:04]

15 She is Overheard Singing [4:18]

16 An Ancient Gesture [5:12]

17 Love, though for this [3:55]  
Stephanie Blythe, contralto | Kayo Iwama, piano

Total Time = 72:54

## THE COMPOSER

Sheila Silver has written in a wide range of mediums, from solo instrumental to large orchestral works, from opera to feature film scores. “*Only a few composers in any generation enliven the art form with their musical language and herald new directions in music. Sheila Silver is such a visionary.*” (Wetterauer Zeitung, Germany)

Silver's honors include: *Guggenheim Fellowship*; two *Opera America Toulmin awards*; *Sackler Prize in Opera*; *Radcliffe Institute Fellowship*; *Rome Prize*; *Prix de Paris*; *American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Composer Award* and numerous grants and commissions. Her opera based on Khaled Hosseini's international best-selling novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, was commissioned and is to be premiered by the Seattle Opera. She is Professor *Emeritas* of Music at Stony Brook University. Her teachers included Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero, Erhard Karkoschka, and Gyorgy Ligeti. She was born and raised in Seattle, Washington and began studying piano at the age of five. Sheila and her husband, filmmaker John Feldman, make their home in the mid-Hudson Valley, New York. They have one son, Victor. For more information: [www.sheilasilver.com](http://www.sheilasilver.com)

## THE MUSIC

### **Beauty Intolerable**

*A Songbook based on the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay*  
Edna St. Vincent Millay was a powerful and romantic figure, an idol in her day (1892-1950). The title of this Songbook, *Beauty Intolerable*, is the title of a poem written *about* Edna St. Vincent Millay by her lover, the poet George Dillon. Edna earned a substantial living from the sale of her poetry and toured the country from coast to coast giving readings to sold-out audiences. She even filled the Hollywood Bowl with people eager to hear and catch a glimpse of the legendary poet. She was a feminist, a beauty who inspired love, an intellectual, a devoted friend, wife and lover, an avid naturalist and gardener, and even an owner of race horses. This is a woman who, in spite of long bouts of ill-health, lived life intensely and for the most part joyously.

My fascination with Millay began in 2011 when I read the sonnet *What lips my lips have kissed*. The more I learned about her, the more I admired her. The first poem of Millay's that I set was the sonnet *Mindful of you* in the winter of 2012 as part of what was to become *On Loving, Three Songs for Diane Kalish, in memoriam*. Then in the Spring of 2012, I decided to compose some songs for a tribute concert at Stony Brook University celebrating my friend and colleague legendary mezzo soprano Elaine Bonazzi. Since Elaine had an enormous *joie de vivre* and sense of humor, I selected three poems which were playful and irreverent: *Recuerdo*, *The Penitent*, and *Thursday*. I asked Risa Renae Harman, who had impressed me when she sang the lead in my opera *The Wooden Sword*, to sing the songs. She was accompanied by pianist, vocal coach and conductor Timothy Long. At this concert I heard mezzo soprano Deanne Meek and later we decided that I should compose some Millay songs for her, and thus the idea of a *Songbook* for women's voices – both soprano and mezzo – was born. Throughout the composing of *Beauty Intolerable* I never felt ready to set *What lips my lips have kissed*, that first poem that had initiated my journey. When I finally did, there were 14 songs and I knew I was done. I added two short rounds, both based on one of Millay's most famous poems, *First Fig*, as processions for the singers to get on and off stage – and for the audience to hear, for just a moment, the three vocalists sing together.

While I was composing the *Songbook* and researching Millay, I had many conversations about her life and work with Peter Bergman, then director of the Millay Society. He gave me private tours of Edna's house and grounds in the Hudson Valley, New York, just 10 minutes from my home. I've seen her extravagant and petite gowns, her private photographs, her bedroom, the private cabin in the woods where she diligently wrote at a tiny desk for four hours a day, the hand dug swimming pool where everyone swam *au naturel* and even her library where she stayed up late into the night reading. I felt like I knew her well.

Her poetic voice inspired me to delve into popular American musical idioms. Seen through the prism of my "classical" voice, the listener may perceive elements of jazz, folk, and even rap. A departure musically for me was the setting of the exotic poem, *Aubade*.

It was composed just as I started studying Hindustani music in preparation for composing my opera *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and is based on *Raga Shree* (D, E-flat, F-sharp, G-sharp, A, B-flat, C-sharp, D).

Pianists Christopher Cooley and Kelley Horsted and singers Deanne Meek, Risa Renae Harman and Lauren Flanagan participated in the premiere in June 2013 in Hudson, New York and at Symphony Space in New York City with Tyne Daly and Tandy Cronin reciting the poetry. Director Dona Vaughn provided staging. *Beauty Intolerable* was created with the support of The American Opera Project and the Edna St. Vincent Millay Society.

### **On Loving**

*Three Songs for Diane Kalish, in memoriam*

Written in memory of Diane Kalish, wife of my long-time collaborator, colleague, and friend pianist Gilbert Kalish, this set of songs unfolded over several years. Soon after Diane's death in 2011, I wrote *O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright*, from Romeo and Juliet – Diane loved Shakespeare. It was drafted quickly, over a weekend, as I thought about Diane and the love that she and Gil shared. A few months later, I decided to compose another song to go with the Shakespeare and selected as a text Millay's sonnet *Mindful of you*. This was the first Millay poem that I ever set and this song is included in both *Beauty Intolerable* and *On Loving*. Composed for the illustrious soprano Dawn Upshaw, Gilbert Kalish's long-time collaborator, I adjusted a few notes to make it appropriate for mezzo soprano when I included it in the Millay *Songbook*. *Mindful of you* reflects on the absence of a loved one as a year passes. In the Fall of 2015 Dawn asked me to compose a third song to round out the group. Thus came *Love is a Magic Ray* by the mystical poet Kahlil Gibran, celebrating universal love. Gil, Dawn and I decided to name the cycle *On Loving* and the whole set was premiered at the Resonant Bodies Festival at New York's Merkin Hall in September 2015.

## Transcending

*Three Songs for Michael Dash, in memoriam*

These songs were written in memory of Michael Dash, African American baritone and countertenor. Michael's career began as the boy soprano on the classic recording of George Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*. We became friends when he performed and recorded my *Canto, A Setting of Ezra Pound's Canto XXXIX* for baritone and chamber ensemble in the 1980's. He had an extraordinary range and facility. An early victim of AIDS, he died in 1995 at 36 as his career was in full bloom. I composed *Transcending* hoping Michael would be able to sing it, but that was not to be. I chose texts by three different poets. Yeats' *The Cat and the Moon* spoke to me of the mystery of life, the unknown and also the whimsical. Thoreau's *To be calm, to be serene* is a meditation on human emotion and its reflection in nature. The third, *We Wear the Mask* by Paul Laurence Dunbar, is a painful look at being Black in America in 1895 and remains just as relevant today. When I first heard Sidney Outlaw sing, I knew I had found the artist to record these songs. For this recording project, each singer chose their pianist and Sidney requested Warren Jones, with whom I was thrilled to work for the first time.

## Nocturne for piano solo

*Inspired by Raga Jog*

*Nocturne* was commissioned for Gilbert Kalish's Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center recital in April 2015. I met Gil when I was a student composer at Tanglewood in 1972 and we became colleagues when I joined the faculty at Stony Brook in 1979. Some of my most significant chamber works, *Sonata for Cello and Piano* (1988), *Six Preludes for Piano on poems of Baudelaire* (1990), *Twilight's Last Gleaming* for two pianos and percussion (2007), and *On Loving* (2015), were written for and premiered by Gil. *Nocturne* was composed while I was in the middle of composing *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and deeply immersed in the study of Hindustani music. I had used *Raga Jog* in the wedding scene of the opera and it lingered in my musical imagination. To our Western ears we would say it has a scale of C, E-flat, E-natural, F, G, and B-flat, and might

even sound bluesy. In the *Nocturne*, *Raga Jog* is used as a starting point, but is not adhered to strictly.

## Chariessa

*A Cycle of Six Songs on Fragments from Sappho*

*Chariessa* was composed in 1977-78 when I was the recipient of a Radcliffe Institute Fellowship and is the earliest composition in my catalogue. "Chariessa" means beautiful woman in ancient Greek. Composed for soprano Karen Komar and me as pianist, we premiered it at the Radcliffe Institute and at Wheaton College where Mary Barnard, poet and Professor of Classics at Wheaton, and whose translation of Sappho I had used, was present.

What is left of Sappho's poems are primarily fragments, so I combined them to craft my first song cycle. I remember looking for texts in a Harvard Square book store, pulling the Sappho off the shelf and opening at random to "*The moon and then the Pleiades go down, The night is now half-gone; youth goes; I am in bed alone*" and saying to myself, "this is it." When I finally set that fragment in the 5<sup>th</sup> song, I thought of it as a piano solo with voice accompaniment. When I first heard Lucy Fitz Gibbon and Ryan MacEvoy McCullough rehearse it, I realized that the text deals with the same theme as *What lips my lips have kissed* from *Beauty Intolerable*, written 35 years later.

*Chariessa* won an International Society of Contemporary Music award in 1980 and was orchestrated and performed by the RAI orchestra of Rome (1981) as part of my Rome Prize (1978-79). The songs are extremely difficult but I knew that Lucy would handle them magnificently. I first heard Lucy sing as a Fellow at Tanglewood in the summer of 2014 and we cast her in the leading role of *Laila*, which she sang in all three workshops of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Her voice and stage personality influenced my composing of this role. Lucy and her collaborator and husband, pianist and composer Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, have performed much of my music and understand it deeply. Hence they figure prominently in this recording project, both in *Chariessa* and *Beauty Intolerable*.

## **Four Songs from the Beauty Intolerable Songbook**

*Arranged for contralto Stephanie Blythe*

I arranged these four songs for acclaimed mezzo soprano turned contralto Stephanie Blythe. At first I thought it was just a function of transposition – in the tradition of creating “high voice” “low voice” versions of an art song. But I was in for a surprise. I found myself reframing, sometimes even re-composing, for Stephanie’s unique contralto voice and in the end I decided to feature them as a separate group on this recording. I hope they will contribute to the contralto repertoire and offer a fresh perspective on the original settings. I was delighted that Stephanie requested pianist Kayo Iwama as her accompanist, whose elegant playing I had known for years.

## THE TEXTS

### **Beauty Intolerable**

*A Songbook based on the poetry of  
Edna St. Vincent Millay*

#### **1. First Fig (Round I)**

My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!

#### **2. Sonnet**

I, being born a woman and distressed  
By all the needs and notions of my kind,  
Am urged by your propinquity to find  
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest  
To bear your body’s weight upon my breast:  
So subtly is the fume of life designed,

To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,  
And leave me once again undone, possessed.  
Think not for this, however, the poor treason  
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,  
I shall remember you with love, or season  
My scorn with pity, —let me make it plain:  
I find this frenzy insufficient reason  
For conversation when we meet again.

#### **3. Recuerdo**

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—  
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,  
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;  
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;  
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,  
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;  
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,  
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,  
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;  
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,  
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

#### 4. Hyacinth

I am in love with him to whom a hyacinth  
is dearer  
Than I shall ever be dear.  
On nights when the field-mice are abroad  
he cannot sleep:  
He hears their narrow teeth at the bulbs of  
his hyacinths.  
But the gnawing at my heart he does not  
hear.

#### 5. Sonnet

Only until this cigarette is ended,  
A little moment at the end of all,  
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,  
And in the firelight to a lance extended,  
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,  
The broken shadow dances on the wall,  
I will permit my memory to recall  
The vision of you, by all my dreams  
attended.  
And then adieu,—farewell!—the dream is  
done.  
Yours is a face of which I can forget  
The colour and the features, every one,  
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet;  
But in your day this moment is the sun  
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

#### 6. The Penitent

I had a little Sorrow,  
Born of a little Sin,  
I found a room all damp with gloom  
And shut us all within;  
And, "Little Sorrow, weep," said I,  
"And, Little Sin, pray God to die,  
And I upon the floor will lie  
And think how bad I've been!"

Alas for pious planning—  
It mattered not a whit!  
As far as gloom went in that room,  
The lamp might have been lit!  
My Little Sorrow would not weep,  
My Little Sin would go to sleep—  
To save my soul I could not keep  
My graceless mind on it!

So up I got in anger,  
And took a book I had,  
And put a ribbon on my hair  
To please a passing lad,  
And, "One thing there's no getting by—  
I've been a wicked girl," said I;  
"But if I can't be sorry, why,  
I might as well be glad!"

#### 7. She is Overheard Singing

Oh, Prue she has a patient man,  
And Joan a gentle lover,  
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—  
But my true love's a rover!

Mig, her man's as good as cheese  
And honest as a briar,  
Sue tells her love what he's thinking of,—  
But my dear lad's a liar!

Oh, Sue and Prue and Agatha  
Are thick with Mig and Joan!  
They bite their threads and shake their  
heads  
And gnaw my name like a bone;

And Prue says, "Mine's a patient man,  
As never snaps me up,"  
And Agatha's, "Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,  
Could live content in a cup,"

Sue's man's mind is like good jell—  
All one colour, and clear—  
And Mig's no call to think at all  
What's to come next year,

While Joan makes boast of a gentle lad,  
That's troubled with that and this;—

But they all would give the life they live  
For a look from the man I kiss!

Cold he slants his eyes about,  
And few enough's his choice,—  
Though he'd slip me clean for a nun, or a  
queen,  
Or a beggar with knots in her  
voice,—

And Agatha will turn awake  
While her good man sleeps sound,  
And Mig and Sue and Joan and Prue  
Will hear the clock strike round,

For Prue she has a patient man,  
As asks not when or why,  
And Mig and Sue have naught to do  
But peep who's passing by,

Joan is paired with a putterer  
That bastes and tastes and salts,  
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—  
But my true love is false!

#### 8. Thursday

And if I loved you Wednesday,  
Well, what is that to you?

I do not love you Thursday—  
So much is true.

And why you come complaining  
Is more than I can see.

I loved you Wednesday,—yes— but what  
Is that to me?

### 9. **Tristan**

I  
Put it down! I say; put it down,— here,  
give it to me, I know what is in it,  
you Irish believer in fairies! Here,  
let me smash it  
Once and for all,  
Against the corner of the wall!  
Do we need philtres?

Look at me! Look at me! Then come here.  
This fearful thing is pure  
That is between us. I want to be sure that  
nothing drowns it.  
Look at me!  
This torture and this rapture will endure.

II  
I still can see  
How you hastily and abstractedly flung  
down

To the floor,  
Having raked it, arm after arm,  
Over your head,  
Your lustrous gown;  
And how, before  
Its silken susurration had subsided,  
We were as close together as it is possible  
for two people to be.

It was your maid, I think,  
Who picked it up in the morning, while  
we lay  
Still abed, exhausted by inexhaustible love;  
I saw her, I saw her through half-closed  
eyes, kneel above it,  
And smooth it, with a concerned hand,  
and a face full of thoughtfulness.  
Not that the dress  
Was fragile,  
Or had suffered harm,  
But that you had planned  
To walk in it, when you walked ashore:  
And our ship was getting minute by  
minute, more and more  
Close to Tintagel.

### 10. **An Ancient Gesture**

I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the  
corner of my apron:

Penelope did this too.  
And more than once: you can't keep  
weaving all day  
And undoing it all through the night;  
Your arms get tired, and the back of your  
neck gets tight;  
And along towards morning, when you  
think it will never be light,  
And your husband has been gone, and you  
don't know where, for years,  
Suddenly you burst into tears;  
There is simply nothing else to do.

And I thought, as I wiped my eyes on the  
corner of my apron:  
This is an ancient gesture, authentic,  
antique,  
In the very best tradition, classic, Greek;  
Ulysses did this too.  
But only as a gesture,—a gesture which  
implied  
To the assembled throng that he was much  
too moved to speak.  
He learned it from Penelope . . .  
Penelope, who really cried.

### 11. **Aubade**

Cool and beautiful as the blossom of the  
wild carrot

With its crimson central eye,  
Round and beautiful as the globe of the  
onion blossom  
Were her pale breasts whereon I laid me  
down to die.

From the wound of my enemy that thrust  
me through in the dark wood  
I arose; with sweat on my lip and the wild  
woodgrasses in my spur  
I arose and stood.  
But never did I arise from loving her.

### 12. **A Visit to the Asylum**

Once from a big, big building,  
When I was small, small,  
The queer folk in the windows  
Would smile at me and call.

And in the hard wee gardens  
Such pleasant men would hoe:  
“Sir, may we touch the little girl's hair!”—  
It was so red, you know.

They cut me coloured asters  
With shears so sharp and neat,  
They brought me grapes and plums and  
pears  
And pretty cakes to eat.

And out of all the windows,  
No matter where we went,  
The merriest eyes would follow me  
And make me compliment.

There were a thousand windows,  
All latticed up and down.  
And up to all the windows,  
When we went back to town,

The queer folk put their faces,  
As gentle as could be;  
“Come again, little girl!” they called, and I  
Called back, “You come see me!”

### 13. Sonnet

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,  
And all the flowers that in the springtime  
grow;  
And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow  
Rising of the round moon; all throats that  
sing  
The summer through, and each departing  
wing,  
And all nests that the bared branches  
show;  
And all winds that in any weather blow,  
And all the storms that the four seasons  
bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet  
Up paths that only mist and morning knew;  
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat  
Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—  
But you were something more than young  
and sweet  
And fair,— and the long year remembers  
you.

### 14. Sonnet

What lips my lips have kissed, and where,  
and why,  
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain  
Under my head till morning; but the rain  
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh  
Upon the glass and listen for reply,  
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain  
For unremembered lads that not again  
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.  
Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,  
Nor knows what birds have vanished one  
by one,  
Yet knows its boughs more silent than  
before:  
I cannot say what loves have come and  
gone,  
I only know that summer sang in me  
A little while, that in me sings no more.

### 15. Sonnet

Love, though for this you riddle me with  
darts,  
And drag me at your chariot till I die,—  
Oh, heavy prince! Oh, panderer of  
hearts!—  
Yet hear me tell how in their throats they lie  
Who shout you mighty: thick about my  
hair,  
Day in, day out, your ominous arrows purr,  
Who still am free, unto no querulous care  
A fool, and in no temple worshiper!  
I, that have bared me to your quiver's fire,  
Lifted my face into its puny rain,

**Credit:** Edna St. Vincent Millay, “An Ancient Gesture,” Tristan,” and “Aubade” from *Collected Poems*. Copyright 1934, 1954, © 1962, 1982 by Norma Millay Ellis. Used with the permission of The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Holly Peppe, Literary Executor, The Edna St. Vincent Millay Society, Millay.org. All rights reserved.

### On Loving

*Three Songs for Diane Kalish,  
in memoriam*

#### 1. O, she doth teach the torches

*William Shakespeare*, *Romeo and Juliet*  
O, she doth teach the torches to burn  
bright!  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of  
night

Do wreath you Impotent to Evoke Desire  
As you are Powerless to Elicit Pain!  
(Now will the god, for blasphemy so brave,  
Punish me, surely, with the shaft I crave!)

#### 16. *First Fig (Round II)*

My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with  
crows,  
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.

The measure done, I'll watch her place of  
stand,  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude  
hand.

Did my heart love till now? forswear it,  
sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

## 2. Sonnet

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,  
And all the flowers that in the springtime  
grow,  
And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow  
Rising of the round moon, all throats that  
sing  
The summer through, and each departing  
wing,  
And all nests that the bared branches  
show,  
And all winds that in any weather blow,  
And all the storms that the four seasons  
bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet,  
Up paths that only mist and morning  
knew,  
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat  
Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—  
But you were something more than young  
and sweet  
And fair — and the long year remembers  
you.

## 3. Love is a Magic Ray

*Khalil Gibran*

Love is a magic ray  
emitted from the burning core  
of the soul  
and illuminating  
the surrounding earth.

It enables us  
to perceive life  
as a beautiful dream  
between one awakening  
and another.

## Transcending

*Three Songs for Michael Dash,  
in memoriam*

### 1. The Cat and the Moon

*W. B. Yeats*

The cat went here and there  
And the moon spun round like a top,  
And the nearest kin of the moon,  
The creeping cat, looked up.  
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,  
For, wander and wail as he would,  
The pure cold light in the sky  
Troubled his animal blood.  
Minnaloushe runs in the grass

Lifting his delicate feet.  
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you  
dance?  
When two close kindred meet,  
What better than call a dance?  
Maybe the moon may learn,  
Tired of that courtly fashion,  
A new dance turn.  
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
From moonlit place to place,  
The sacred moon overhead  
Has taken a new phase.  
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils  
Will pass from change to change,  
And that from round to crescent,  
From crescent to round they range?  
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
Alone, important and wise,  
And lifts to the changing moon  
His changing eyes.

### 2. To be calm, to be serene.

*H.D. Thoreau*

There is the calmness of the lake when  
there is not a breath of wind; there is the  
calmness of a stagnant ditch. So is it with  
us. Sometimes we are clarified and  
calmed healthily, as we never were before  
in our lives, not by an opiate, but by

some unconscious obedience to the all-just  
laws, so that we become like a still  
lake of purest crystal and without an effort  
our depths are revealed to ourselves.  
All the world goes by and is reflected in  
our deeps.

### 3. We Wear the Mask

*Paul Laurence Dunbar*

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes —  
This debt we pay to human guile:  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

**Chariessa**

*A Cycle of Six Songs on Fragments  
from Sappho*

*Translated by Mary Barnard*

I

Leave Crete and come to us  
waiting where the grove is  
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense  
smokes on the altar, cold  
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young  
rose thicket shades the ground  
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows  
where horses have grown sleek  
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!  
Fill our gold cups with love  
Stirred into clear nectar

II

(Lament for a maidenhead)  
Like a quince-apple

ripening on a top  
branch in a tree top

not once noticed by  
harvesters or if  
not unnoticed, not reached

Like a hyacinth in the mountains, trampled  
by shepherds until  
only a purple stain  
remains on the ground

III\*

The full moon is shining:  
girls take their places  
as though around an altar

And their feet move

Rhythmically, as tender  
feet of Cretan girls  
danced once around an

altar of love, crushing  
a circle in the soft  
smooth flowering grass

Come here to us  
gentle Gaiety,

Revelry, Radiance

and you, Muses  
with lovely hair

IV

Gold is God's child;  
neither worms nor  
moths eat gold; it  
is much stronger  
than a man's heart

V

The moon and then  
the Pleiades  
go down

The night is now  
half-gone; youth  
goes; I am

\* More than one fragment is combined in the song

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in bed alone

VI\*

As a whirlwind  
swoops on an oak  
Love shakes my heart

If you will come

I shall put out  
new pillows for  
you to rest upon

Irresistible  
and bittersweet

that loosener  
of limbs, Love

reptile-like  
strikes me down

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—Sheila Silver

## CREDITS

Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistant: Jeanne Velonis

Most of *Beauty Intolerable*, *On Loving*, *Nocturne*, and *Four Songs from the Beauty Intolerable Songbook* recorded September 20-23, 2019 in the Sosnoff Theater, Fisher Center for the Arts, Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York.

Piano technician: Mark Moriarty

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Piano technicians: Ismael Cunha and Alex Markovich

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