



PETER JAMES LEARN

WHITMAN SONGS

“That Which Fills Its Place”

Three Songs for Soprano  
and String Quartet

Texts drawn from  
Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass”  
and F.G. Lorca’s *Oda a Walt Whitman*



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# WHITMAN SONGS

## I - MIRACLES

## II - ODE TO WALT WHITMAN

## III - A CLEAR MIDNIGHT

### I. MIRACLES

(Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*)

WHAT shall I give? and which are my miracles?

Realism is mine—my miracles—Take freely,  
Take without end—I offer them to you wherever your  
feet can carry you, or your eyes reach.

Why! who makes much of a miracle?  
As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles,  
(.....)  
One and all, are to me miracles,  
The whole referring—yet each distinct and in its  
place.

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,  
Every inch of space is a miracle,  
Every square yard of the surface of the  
Earth is spread with the same  
(.....)  
To me the sea is a continuous miracle;  
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the  
waves—the ships, with men in them,  
What stranger miracles are there?

### III. A CLEAR MIDNIGHT

(Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*)

THIS is thy hour O Soul,  
thy free flight  
into the wordless,  
Away from books,  
away from art,  
the day erased,  
the lesson done,  
Thee fully forth emerging,  
silent, gazing,  
pondering the themes thou lovest best,  
Night, sleep, death, and the stars.

### II. ODE TO WALT WHITMAN

(Federico Garcia Lorca, *Ode to Walt Whitman*)

BY the East River and the Bronx  
boys were singing, exposing their waists,  
(.....)  
Ninety thousand miners taking silver from the rocks  
and children drawing stairs and perspectives.

But none of them could sleep,  
none of them wanted to be the river,  
none of them loved the huge leaves  
or the shoreline's blue tongue.  
(.....)  
Not for a moment, Walt Whitman, lovely old man,  
have I failed to see your beard full of butterflies,  
nor your corduroy shoulders frayed by the moon,  
nor your thighs pure as Apollo's,  
nor your voice like a column of ash,  
old man, beautiful as the mist,  
you moaned like a bird  
with its sex pierced by a needle.  
(.....)

No quarter given! Death  
spills from your eyes  
and gathers gray flowers at the mire's edge.  
No quarter given! Attention!  
Let the confused, the pure,  
the classical, the celebrated, the supplicants  
close the doors of the bacchanal to you.  
(.....)  
Sleep on, nothing remains.  
Dancing walls fill the prairies  
and America drowns itself in machinery and lament.  
I want the powerful air from the deepest night  
to blow away flowers and inscriptions from  
the arch where you sleep...

*First two songs use excerpts of the poetry. Second song's text is translated into English from Spanish. All tempi are flexible and at the soloist's discretion. (Full set: Ca. 17')*

For Rebekah Smeltzer  
**WHITMAN SONGS**  
THAT WHICH FILLS ITS PLACE

I - MIRACLES

PETER JAMES LEARN (b. 1982)  
BMI

*Hazy* (♩ = c. 60)

trem. leg., arco ad lib.

Violin 1 *p* *mp*

Violin 2 *p* *mp*

Viola *p* *mp*

Cello *p* *mp* *poco*

8 **A** *mp* *mf*

What shall I give?

*mf* *mp* *mf*

*mf* *mp*

*mf* *mp*

*poco* *pp*

15 *f* *mf* *f* *mp*

And which are my mir-a-cles? re-al-is-m is

*even gl.* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *fp* *pp*

*mp* *mf*

I - MIRACLES

21 *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

mine, my mir - a - cles, take free - ly, take

trem. leg., arco ad lib.

27 *f* *mf*

free - ly, take with - out end, I of - fer them

**B**

32 *poco* *più f* *mf*

to you where - ev - er, where - ev - er, your feet

*più f* *mf*

I - MIRACLES

37 *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

— can car-ry you, — your feet can car - ry you, or your eyes reach.

37 rit. trem. — sul tasto *mp*

rit. trem. — sul tasto *mp*

rit. trem. — sul tasto *mp*

sul tasto *mp*

*Espress., meno mosso*

43 **C** *dolce* *mf* *f* **A tempo giusto**

Why, — who makes much of a — mir - a - cle? —

43 ord. *mf* *f* poco più *f*

ord. trem. leg., arco ad lib. *mf* poco più *f*

ord. trem. leg., arco ad lib. *mf* poco più *f*

ord. trem. leg., arco ad lib. *mf* poco più *f*

*mf* poco più *f*

49 poco rit. *mp* *mf* *poco* *mf* *poco*

As to — me, — I know of — no - thing,

49 *mp* *mf* *mp*

(trem. decel.) *mp* *mf* *mp*

(trem. decel.) *mp* *mf* *mp*

(trem. decel.) *mp* *mf* *mp*

*mp* *mf* *mp*

I - MIRACLES

56 *poco* *poco*

I know of no-thing but mir - a cles,

*mf* *poco* *poco* *poco* *poco*

62 **D**

One and all are to me mir - a - cles,

*poco* *mp* *f* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf*

68

the whole, the whole, re - fer - ring yet

*mp* *f* *mf*

I - MIRACLES

74 *poco* *f*

— each dis - tinct, and in its place.

81 **E** *rit. maestoso* , *a tempo* *semplice mp*

To me

trem. leg., arco ad lib.

*p sub.* *pp* *p*

trem. leg., arco ad lib.

*p sub.* *trem. leg., arco ad lib.*

*p sub.* *trem. leg., arco ad lib.*

*p sub.* *trem. leg., arco ad lib.*

*mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *pp*

88 *f* *mf* *p* *mp* *mf*

ev' - ry hour of the light and dark is a mir - a - cle,

I - MIRACLES

94 *f*  
 ev'ry inch of space is a mir-a - cle,

94 *mf* *f* *mf*  
*mf* *f* *mf*  
*mf* *f* *mf*  
*mf* *f* *mf*

100 *mf*  
 ev' ry square yard of the sur - face of the Earth is spread with the

100 *cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*  
*cresc.*

105 *ff*  
 same!

105 *ff* *mf* *mp*  
*ff* *mf*  
*ff* *mf*  
*ff* *mf*

I - MIRACLES

**F** *mp* *mf* *f*

110 To me, the sea is a con - tin - u - ous mir - a - cle;

110 *mp* *mf* *mp*

*mf* *f* **G** *mp*

114 a mir - a - cle, the fish - es

114 *mf* *fp* *pp* *mf* *mf* *mp* *mf*

119 *mf*

that swim, the rocks, the mot - ion

119 *mp* *mf* *mp* *mp* *mf* *mf*

I - MIRACLES

123 *f* 3

of the waves, \_\_\_\_\_ the ships with men in them, \_\_\_\_\_

123 *mf* *mp* *mf* *mf* *mf*

trem. leg., arco ad lib.

*Espress., meno mosso*

*poco rit.*

128 *mp* *plaintive* *mf* *p*

What strang - er \_\_\_\_\_ mir - a - cles are there?

128 *mp* *mp* *mp* *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

# II - ODE TO WALT WHITMAN

*Boding and rhythmic* (♩ = c. 110)

Soprano

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

7 *dancing* *mf* *f*

By the East riv-er and the Bronx boys were sing-ing, sing-ing, ex-pos-ing

11 *mf* *secco* **A**

their waists, nine-ty thous-and min-ers tak-ing sil-ver from the rocks,

16

And chil-dren draw-ing stairs and\_ per-spec-tives, but none of\_ them could sleep,

*pizz.*  
*mf* *f* *mf* *f*  
*arco*

21

*expansive*

none of them want-ed to be\_ the riv - er. none of them loved

*mf* *f* *mf* *f*  
*mf* *f* *mf* *f*

26

\_ the huge leaves, or the shore-line's blue tongue. Not for a mo -

*f* *mf*  
*mf* *f* *mf* *f*  
*pizz.*  
*mf* *mf*

II - ODE TO WALT WHITMAN

31 *dolce* 3

ment, Walt Whit - man, love-ly old man, have I failed to see your

The first system of music covers measures 31 to 34. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "ment, Walt Whit - man, love-ly old man, have I failed to see your". A triplet of eighth notes is marked *dolce* above the notes "love-ly". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with triplets and accents.

35 3 3 3 3

beard full of but-ter-flies — nor your cor-du-roy shoul-ders frayed by the

arco

The second system of music covers measures 35 to 39. The vocal line continues with "beard full of but-ter-flies — nor your cor-du-roy shoul-ders frayed by the". There are four triplet markings above the vocal line. The piano accompaniment includes an *arco* section in the cello/bass line starting at measure 37.

40

moon, nor your thighs pure as A-pol - lo's nor your voice like

pizz. *p* *mf*

The third system of music covers measures 40 to 43. The vocal line continues with "moon, nor your thighs pure as A-pol - lo's nor your voice like". The piano accompaniment features a pizzicato section in the cello/bass line starting at measure 42, with dynamic markings *p* and *mf*.

C

45

a col-umn of ash, old man, Beau-ti-ful

*f* *mf* *mf* *arco* *mf*

D

50

as the mist, you moaned like a bird with its sex pierced by a need-le

*f* *arco*

55

No quar-ter giv-en! Death spills from your eyes

*mf* *f* *pizz.* *pizz.*

*declamando, emphatic*

61 *mf*

and gath-ers — gray flow-ers at the mire's edge. — No quar - ter giv -

65 *f* *mf*

en! At-ten-tion! Let the con - fused, the pure, the Clas-si - cal,

70 *f* *mf* *f*

the ce-le-brat-ed the sup-pli-cants — close the doors of the bac-cha

75 *mf* *f* **E**

- nal to you.

81 *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *f* *f*

ringing *f*

Sleep on,

87 *mf* *pale* *mp*

No-thing re-mains.

93 *mf* *declamando*

Dan - cing walls fill the prair - ies And A - mer - i - ca

98

drowns it - self \_\_\_\_\_ in ma - chin - er - y and la - ment.

103

*p* *f* *mf*

109 G *wistful*

I want the pow - er - ful air from the deep - est night

115 *f* *mf*

to blow a - way flow - ers and in - scrip - tions from the arch where

121

you sleep.

III - A CLEAR MIDNIGHT

*Shimmering, distant* (♩ = c. 60)

Soprano *plaintive mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

This is thy hour, this is thy hour O soul,

Violin 1 *p* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

Violin 2 *p* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

Viola *p* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

Cello *p* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

8 *mf* *più f*

thy free flight in to the word-less,

8 *mf* *più f* *mf*

*mp* *mf* *mp* *più f* *mf*

*mp* *mf* *mp* *più f* *mf*

*mf* *più f* *mf*

15 **A** *semplice* *mp* *mf*

a-way, a - way from books, a-way from

15 *f poco* *mf* *mp* *mf*

*f poco* *mf* *mp* *mf*

*f poco* *mf* *mp*

*f poco* *mf* *mp*

III - A CLEAR MIDNIGHT

*riten. a tempo* *mp* *pale* *p* *mp* *poco rit. a tempo* *p* *mf*

art, the day e - rased the les - son done, Thee, thee,

*mp* *p* *emerging mp* *mf* *f*

thee, Thee ful - ly forth e - merg - ing, e-merg - ing,

**B** *light p* *flowing mp* *mf*

si - lent gaz - ing, gaz - ing,

\* Or arco, sul pont., at the discretion of ensemble.

III - A CLEAR MIDNIGHT  
**poco rit.** **a tempo**

43 *mp* *mf* *f*

pond - er - ing, pond - er - ing the themes thou lov - est best,

50 **C** *f* *mf* *f*

thou lov - est, lov - est best.

**rit. morendo al fine**

56 *mp* *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *p* *mp*

*pale* *plaintive*

Night sleep, death, and the stars.

*pale, senza vib.*