

FREDERICK LOEWE SYMPOSIUM ON AMERICAN MUSIC
 THE MUSIC OF LIBBY LARSEN

LARGE ENSEMBLE CONCERT

Thursday, October 29, 2015 - 8 p.m.
 MEMORIAL CHAPEL

A Lover's Journey (2000)

Libby Larsen

I. In the Still Garden

(b. 1950)

II. St. Valentine's Day texts by James Joyce, William Shakespeare

III. Will, you, nill you and Karl Joseph Simrock

IV. Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?

Chapel Singers

Ariel Estébez, soprano

Jessica Bondy, alto

Andrew Metzger, tenor

Justin Brunette, bass

Nicholle Andrews, conductor

Refuge (1988)

text by Sara Teasdale

Bel Canto

Joseph Modica, conductor

Deep Summer Music (1982)

University Orchestra

Co Nguyen, conductor

Grand Rondo (1988)

Symphonic Band

David Scott, conductor

Strut (2003)

Wind Ensemble

Eddie Smith, conductor

A Lover's Journey (2000)

Four Valentines: A Lover's Journey is a set of four pieces which chronicle the extraordinarily commonplace yet supremely elegant story of love and valentining. They are settings of three texts by William Shakespeare and one text by James Joyce, published by William Shakespeare and company in 1915. When the concert date for the premiere of our new piece was set for February 14, I began to search for appropriate texts and remembered Ophelia's song from *Hamlet* "Good morrow! 'Tis St. Valentine's Day." In reading about the texts' origins I came upon a curious custom practiced in some parts of Great Britain and Italy, whereby before sunrise on St. Valentine's Day, unmarried women stand by their window, sometimes for hours, watching for a man to pass by. It's said that the first man they see (or more wisely someone who looks like him) will marry them within a year.

I decided to play with the theme in *Four Valentines: A Lover's Journey*. I created four pieces beginning with the poem "Simples" by James Joyce. Set in a moonlit garden, the lover is bedazzled by a young woman, his "bella bionda." The lover repeats these words to himself over and over again, silently summoning her. The second, quiet piece "Good morrow! 'Tis Saint Valentine's Day" takes place at sunrise. In it the lovers meet and undo each other. The third piece is a brief, insistent rhythmic outcry, setting words from the *Taming of the Shrew* "Will you, nill you, I will marry you." And finally, "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" completes *Four Valentines: A Lover's Journey*.

This piece is my Valentine to the King's Singers.

I. In The Still Garden

"Simples"

James Joyce (1882-1941)

*O bella bionda,
 Sei come l'onda!*

Of cool sweet dew and radiance mild
 The moon a web of silence weaves
 In the Still garden where a child
 Gathers simple salad leaves.

A moondew stars her hanging hair,
And moonlight touches her young brow;
And, gathering in, she sings an air:
“Fair as the wave is, fair art thou.”

Be mine, I pray, a waxen ear
To Shield me from her childish croon,
And mine a shielded heart to her
Who gathers simples of the moon.

II. St. Valentine's Day

Karl Joseph Simrock
after William Shakespeare from *Hamlet*

Good morning, it's Valentine's Day.
So early before sunshine.
I, young maid at the window,
Will be your Valentine.

The young man put trousers on,
Opened the chamber door,
Let in the maid who as a maid
Departed nevermore.

By St. Nicholas and Charity,
A shameless breed!
A young man does it when he can,
for truth, that is not right.
She said: Before you trifled with me,
You promised me to wed
I'd not by sunlight break my word
If you had not come in.

III. Will, you, nill you

William Shakespeare
The Taming of the Shrew

Will you, nill you, I will marry

IV. Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?

William Shakespeare
Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed,
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou lovest
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee

Refuge (1988)

Text by Sara Teasdale

From my spirit's gray defeat,
From my pulse's flagging beat,
From my hopes that turned to sand
Sifting through my close-clenched hand,
From my own fault's slavery,
If I can sing, I still am free.

For with my singing I can make
A refuge for my spirit's sake,
A house of shining words, to be
My fragile immortality.

Deep Summer Music (1982)

Panorama and horizon are part of the natural culture of the plain states. On the plains, one cannot help but be effected by the sweep of the horizon and depth of color as the eye adjusts from the nearest to the farthest view. The glory of this phenomenon is particularly evident at harvest time, in the deep summer, when acres of ripened wheat, sunflowers, corn, rye, and oats blaze with color. In the deep summer, winds create wave after wave of harvest ripeness which, when beheld by the human eye, creates a kind of emotional peace and awe: a feeling of abundance combined with the knowledge that his abundance is only as bountiful as nature will allow.

When Tim Mahr invited me to compose a work for the St. Olaf Band, a work to celebrate 100 years of the Department of Music at St. Olaf College, I was immediately honored and intrigued with the possibilities that music offers a composer to “honor” music making and the tremendous talent and vigor of St. Olaf’s professional and student musicians over the past century. For some reason, the phrase “strut your stuff” exploded into my mind and I recognized that this new work, *Strut*, had to spring from that inspiration.

‘Strut.’ What a word! Writers such as Dickens, Shakespeare, and Nobokov employ the word ‘strut’ to capture the essence of their subjects. Traced back to its Old High German roots its meaning is “to stand out, project”. Traced to its old Norwegian roots, its meaning is “obstinate resistance.” Traced to its American English roots, its meaning is “to display one’s ability with a certain attitude.” The Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines the word ‘strut’ as “to walk with a lofty, proud gait;” while the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* states, “IDIOM: strut (one’s) stuff. Slang: To behave or perform in an ostentatious manner; show off.”

‘Strut’ is a noun: a dance, a brace, a support; a verb with many synonyms including swell, bulge, thrust forth, stick out, contend, strive, quarrel, and bluster as well as exult, swagger and “to stand erect at one’s full height.” One might say that precision is the full height at which a world class concert band stands. I took this to heart and built the music of *Strut* around the idea of the ability of the band to play precisely within an unerring beat while rarely hearing it articulated. The conductor holds the beat and the ensemble must feel it and its subdivisions exactly in order to realize the precision and flow of the music.

All of these meanings — nouns, verb, and attitudes — are at the heart of this new celebratory work for the great and renown St. Olaf Band. All that remains is for the band to do what it does so well — strut its stuff.

Libby Larsen, composer in residence

Libby Larsen (b. 24 December 1950, Wilmington, Delaware) is one of America’s most performed living composers. She has created a catalogue of over 500 works spanning virtually every genre from intimate vocal and chamber music to massive orchestral works and over twelve operas. Grammy Award winning and widely recorded, including over fifty CDs of her work, she is constantly sought after for commissions and premieres by major artists, ensembles, and orchestras around the world, and has established a permanent place for her works in the concert repertory.

As a vigorous, articulate advocate for the music and musicians of our time, in 1973 Larsen co-founded the Minnesota Composers Forum, now the American Composer’s Forum. A former holder of the Papamarkou Chair at John W. Kluge Center of the Library of Congress, Larsen has also held residencies with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Colorado Symphony. Her career has been recognized with several awards including MIT’s McDermott award, the Peabody Award, and the American Academy’s Arts and Letters Award.