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PRAIRIE LAND, PRAIRIE HEART, AND PRAIRIE SPIRIT: AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE GUIDE OF GWYNETH WALKER'S *PRAIRIE SONGS*

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PRAIRIE LAND, PRAIRIE HEART, AND PRAIRIE SPIRIT:
AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE GUIDE
OF GWYNETH WALKER'S *PRAIRIE SONGS*

By
Kiya Fife

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Jamie Reimer Seaman

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2021

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AN INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE GUIDE
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Kiya Fife, D. M. A.

University of Nebraska, 2021

Advisor: Jamie Reimer Seaman

Largely known for her choral compositions, American composer Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) has composed hundreds of songs for solo voice. Walker's songs demonstrate her unique compositional style which blends many characteristics of American music, including strong rhythms, open sonorities, and influences of rock, jazz, blues, and American folk music. With each work, Walker's goal is not only to communicate to the audience, but for the music and poetry to deliver a specific musical imagery. Walker believes that the message of a song is not solely the poetry, but that the central images of the poem are the message. Walker believes that it is only when these images are combined with music that you have words. The result of this unique compositional style is over ninety songs for solo voice that are accessible to many performers.

This document is organized into four chapters: chapter one includes an introduction to the study, review of literature, and a brief biography of Gwyneth Walker, Carl Sandburg, and Willa Cather. The second chapter includes a formal overview and discussion of the individual *Prairie Songs*. Chapter three is a discussion of Walker's compositional style, the compositional process of *Prairie*

Songs, and Walker's relevancy as a twenty-first-century American woman composer. The fourth chapter is a summary of findings and conclusions. Finally, the document includes five appendices that contains a list of the poems from *Prairie Songs*, a list of musical figures, transcripts of interviews, emails between the composer and author, a catalogue of Walker's published and recorded songs, and a bibliography.

PREFACE

During my first semester of doctoral studies, I was given a small set of Gwyneth Walker's art songs. After looking at the scores, I was immediately impressed with her beautiful melodies and exquisite accompaniments. Upon further research, I found that Walker (b. 1947) has composed many works for solo singers. She has a deep love for performers and the connections that are made with live musical performance.

Walker graciously agreed to compose a new song cycle for me. We decided the song cycle would be titled *Prairie Songs* and would include poems by Nebraska author and University of Nebraska alumna Willa Cather and Pulitzer Prize winning poet, Carl Sandburg. As both Walker and I have spent time on dairy farms, we loved the idea of music reminiscent of open land, grass, and starry quiet nights. The themes of the cycle include prairie land, prairie spirit, and prairie heart. The cycle was completed on December 29, 2019, and was premiered on April 3, 2021, in Kimball Hall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Thank you to my teacher and advisor, Dr. Jamie Reimer, who assisted me with contacting Walker, commissioning the work, and planning all of the corresponding events associated with this project. This project was funded through the generous support of the Graduate Student Scholarly and Creative Activity Grant of the Hixon-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts and the Glenn Korff School of Music.

This document is the result of my relationship with the composer and in-depth study of *Prairie Songs*, which will be significant to any student, teacher, or

performer of Walker's songs. Throughout this document, I will not only provide a detailed musical discussion of *Prairie Songs* but will also include performance aspects derived from studying and performing the songs. I will conclude with a discussion about why Walker's solo songs deserve a permanent place in today's American art song repertoire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor and vocal teacher, Dr. Jamie Reimer Seaman for all of her help throughout my doctoral coursework and with this project. Thank you to my committee members: Dr. William Shomos, Dr. Karen Becker, and Dr. Julia Schleck each of whom has supported me throughout my studies as well as in the composition of this document. I am especially grateful for my accompanist, Michael Cotton for all of his support and help in the many performances throughout my doctorate degree as well as this project. Your wisdom, encouragement, and esteem example of musicianship are treasures that I will cherish throughout the rest of my career.

A special thank you to all of my friends and colleagues who have helped encourage me and been supportive throughout numerous performances and accomplishments. Thank you to my grandparents, Brad and Sally Fife, for always cheering me on and pushing me to do my best. I would like to express my deepest thanks to my parents Brock and Jennifer, my siblings, Kaleb, Korbin, and KateLynn, and my niece Emberlynn for their unwavering and continued support throughout my academic career. I would not be where I am today without each of you. I will be forever grateful for your encouragement and assistance in any capacity I have needed. Without all of your support, I would not have been able to finish this degree. I love all of you deeply.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Gwyneth Walker for her creativity, immense talent, and time devoted to this project. I have truly enjoyed our relationship and the insight that you have provided not only for music but for living a happy life as well. I am honored to have commissioned *Prairie Songs*.

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CHAPTER ONE

Brief Biographies and Poetic Background Information

Gwyneth Walker

World-renowned contemporary composer Gwyneth Walker was born on March 22, 1947 in New York City. Shortly after Walker was born, her family moved to New Canaan, Connecticut, where she lived throughout her childhood. Walker's upbringing in Connecticut and her parent's individual personalities and hobbies both played a role in shaping her musical career. Although neither of her parents received any formal musical training, both of them shared a deep love for music. Walker ruminates the memories of her mother singing, noting that she had an exceptional musical ear. Gwyneth states that, although her mother never studied music, she could harmonize any song by ear.¹ In fact, it is from her that Walker attributes her musicality. Known as a scientist and inventor, her father taught her the importance of integrity and the creativity of putting things together. Together, her parents' love of music, combined with each of their own special interests, greatly influenced Gwyneth and her compositional style.

Although Walker took a music theory class in high school, she was not formally trained until she attended college. In fact, most of Walker's musical abilities were self-taught. Walker vividly remembers her first introduction to

¹ Ben and Dawn Willis, "Gwyneth Walker interview in her own words, with views of her beloved Vermont a video interview (2007-08)," *Website of Gwyneth Walker – Composer*, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/vidintro.html>, accessed December 17, 2019.

music as a child.² Her older sister was playing Beethoven's *Für Elise* on the piano that happened to be in the room directly below Gwyneth's room. Gwyneth remembers, "The music was full of life and energy. I heard it leaping out at me. There was something physical about it."³ At the age of two, Walker began to experiment on the piano and by the age of four, she began playing piano by ear. Walker recalls:

I was supposed to be falling asleep and I heard, directly under me, this sound! And it was so exciting that the next morning, when my sisters were in school, I climbed up on the piano and started making sounds. Every day, I got better at emulating what she had been playing, and then I started making up my own things.⁴

Her parents took notice of her interest in the piano and decided to schedule lessons for her. From her first lesson, Walker struggled with the idea of technique, especially scales, and the formality of practicing. She goes on to say, "It was completely boring to me. I didn't see why it was important that your thumb go under this way and that."⁵ The following week, she returned to her lesson having not practiced her scales or technique and presented her teacher with a piece she had composed. Walker told her teacher that the title of the piece that she was assigned to learn did not match the piece in the book that was titled "swing" but that the piece she had composed, in fact, did. Gwyneth recalls, "My teacher was shocked and horrified,"⁶ but she returned for the next two lessons in

² Ben and Dawn Willis, "Gwyneth Walker interview in her own words, with views of her beloved Vermont a video interview (2007-08)," <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/vidintro.html>, accessed December 18, 2019.

³ Ibid

⁴ "Composer Gwyneth Walker Lives Her Dream," *Ohana Newsletter, Spring 2007 Website of Gwyneth Walker—Composer*, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/pdf/a-aloha.pdf>

⁵ Ben and Dawn Willis, "Gwyneth Walker interview in her own words," accessed December 18, 2019.

⁶ Ibid

the same manner as she had in the second lesson; she continued to not practice her scales or the piece that she was assigned but, rather, composed a new song that was more interesting to her and presented it to her teacher for the following lessons. After only four lessons, her teacher told her parents that she should quit lessons and be left alone to compose her own songs. This led Walker to compose small compositions for herself and for some of her friends.

Throughout her childhood, Walker continued to compose, but she also experimented with playing various musical instruments, including singing in choir, the clarinet, ukulele, guitar, and even the bugle. Much of her musical exposure was to folk and rock music; and she remembers listening to musicians like the Beatles, Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell, and James Taylor.⁷ The popular stylistic choices of these genres and musicians greatly influenced her own compositional taste.

While music was always a big component of Walker's life, she did not always consider it a viable career choice. When Walker first began her undergraduate degree at Brown University, she considered a major in physics, but, eventually, found her way back to music. Walker received her Bachelor of Arts (1968) from Brown University and both her Master of Music (1970) and Doctor of Musical Arts (1976) in composition from the Hartt School of Music in West Hartford, Connecticut. After receiving her doctorate, Walker taught at Oberlin College Conservatory from 1977-80 and at the Hartford Conservatory for one year from 1981-82. Although Walker enjoyed teaching, she found little time for composing, leading to her eventual retirement from teaching to focus entirely

⁷ Ibid

on composing. Walker states, “many people told me I would be ‘selfish’ to dedicate myself solely to composing,” she goes on to say, “but I had been hearing an inner voice telling me that it was the thing to do, and that it was meant for me to do it.”⁸ Walker wanted the seclusion of country-living and settled on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont, where she lived and composed for nearly thirty years. She currently divides her time between her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut, and Randolph, Vermont. She states that she will never retire simply because she is leading the life she has always wanted and doing exactly what she has always liked to do.⁹

One of most influential aspects of Walker’s life and musical career is her faith. Being a Quaker is a very important aspect of her life and personality, and she maintains a great deal of pride in her ancestors and the Quaker religion in general. One of the most important elements of her religion is the explicit equality of men and women. There was never a question by her parents whether Walker was fit to be a composer as a woman. She comments:

I owe so much to my Quaker faith. It helped me realize that composing is what God wants me to do.” She later responded saying, “music is a gift from God...if one pursues this craft, develops one’s skills.... this is a form of worship.”¹⁰

Her Quaker faith has significantly influenced her compositional style as she aims to compose music that is “accessible and easily understood by anyone who hears it.”¹¹ This kind of ease and accessibility is a fundamental characteristic found

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Chris Costanzo, “Walker Celebrates Lifetime of Composition,” *The Randolph Herald* October 11, 2007, www.gwynethwalker.com/a-lifet.html, accessed May 25, 2020.

¹¹ Costanzo, “Walker Celebrates Lifetime of Composition,” accessed May 25, 2020.

throughout Walker's compositions. Specific characteristics that define ease and accessibility will be further discussed later in this paper.

Due to her deep love for active collaboration with musicians, Walker's catalogue includes more than 350 commissions from all over the United States, allowing her to closely work with instrumentalists, choral ensembles, soloists, and institutions to rehearse and perform her music. Her output includes works in almost every genre including choral music, music for solo voice, chamber music, string orchestra music, organ music, piano music, staged music, orchestra and band music, and narrator and instruments music. One of Walker's special interests is dramatic works, combining readings, acting, and movement. These characteristics of "drama" are prominent throughout *Prairie Songs* and will be later discussed and analyzed. Currently, Walker's catalogue contains over 90 works for solo voice, making it one of her largest genres. This could be due to the fact that she believes, "when you write for the human voice, you are writing for something that is universal and everlasting."¹²

One value that Walker deeply resonates with is integrity. She prides herself in an "honest day's work", typically consisting of three to four hours each day being devoted to composing and five to six hours of administrative work related to her compositions.¹³ When asked about the vigorous work of a composer Walker states:

Writing music is a craft. It is a skill, developed over years of training and practice. The composer is a craftsman. There is pride

¹² Gene Brooks, "An Interview with Gwyneth Walker," *Choral Journal* (February 1999), *Website of Gwyneth Walker – Composer*, www.gwynethwalker.com/walkinsf5.html, accessed 7 June 2020.

¹³ Gwyneth Walker, "Thoughts on Music: Reflections on a Musical Career," February 26-28, 2004, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/e-though.html>, accessed June 6, 2020.

to be taken in a 'job well done,' in 'an honest day's work.' Shortcuts to the compositional process are generally not effective!¹⁴

This statement is a clear summary of Walker's view on composing as well as her work ethic.

Walker strives to produce "well-crafted works strengthened by a greater depth of thought,"¹⁵ and her compositional style has been compared to that of Aaron Copland. At the beginning of her career, she was adamant that her musical style was unique to herself; however, over time she has acknowledged some similarities. Within her music, she not only strives for music that everyone can listen to, but also music that is associated with the American experience.¹⁶ Walker attributes this "American experience" to her childhood musical exposure to rock and folk music, as well as other popular music styles. Walker possesses a deep passion for composing music that everyone can listen to and enjoy. This sense of ease and enjoyment can be seen throughout her songs even within the accompaniments. Walker states, "I often write piano accompaniments that express the essence of the music a lot. They are very colorful and quite playable—you don't have to put your thumb under. You can just play them!"¹⁷ As seen from her first piano lesson, technique and the formality of music is not as important to Walker as is creating something that the audience can understand and enjoy. Due to her love of collaboration with musicians, Walker accepts commissions from people with a variety of musical experience, ability, and

¹⁴ Gwyneth Walker, "Thoughts on Music: Reflections on a Musical Career," <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/e-thought.html>, accessed May 21, 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ben and Dawn Willis, "Gwyneth Walker interview in her own words, with views of her beloved Vermont a video interview (2007-08)," accessed June 28, 2020.

talent. One of the most admirable characteristics found in Walker's music is inclusivity; her music is more than just notes on a page, it is a portrait of inclusion and empowerment. Walker states:

I am the most stubborn Quaker you will ever meet! I have been given a mandate from my faith to compose music. And there is nothing that will stop me! For I believe that music is a gift from God. And by the grace of God, and the good will of musicians such as those gathered in this room, my music, and other worthy American music, will be brought to life. For this endeavor is not about me. It is about all of us together.¹⁸

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878 in Galesburg, Illinois. His family emigrated to the United States from Northern Sweden changing their surname from Johnson to Sandburg. Sandburg's family was very poor; at the age of thirteen, Carl left school and began working to help support his family. At the age of seventeen he served in the military for eight months during the Spanish-American War. During his service, Sandburg met a student from Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois who convinced Sandburg to enroll after his service in the war. He attended Lombard College in 1898 and gained immense support from Professor Philip Green. Green not only encouraged Sandburg with his writings but also paid for his first publication of poetry, *Reckless Ecstasy*, in 1904.¹⁹ Although he attended university for four years, he did not receive his diploma until later in life.

¹⁸ Gwyneth Walker, "Thoughts on American Music," accessed May 27, 2020.

¹⁹ Danny Heitman, "A Workingman's Poet," *Humanities Magazine* March/April 2013, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2013/marchapril/feature/workingmans-poet>, accessed January 25, 2020.

After leaving university, Sandburg moved to Milwaukee and became an advertising and newspaper writer. During this time, he met and married Lillian Steichen. The young couple soon moved to Chicago where he worked as an editorial writer for the Chicago *Daily News*. The magazine *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, founded by Harriet Monroe, published Sandburg's poems, and Monroe encouraged him to continue writing in the free-verse, Whitman-like style of his college years.²⁰ During this period, Sandburg was recognized as a member of the "Chicago Literary Renaissance" and established himself as a writer with *Chicago Poems* (1916) and *Cornhuskers* (1918).

Throughout the 1920s, Sandburg embarked on some of his most impressive works, including his biography of President Abraham Lincoln.²¹ Sandburg held great admiration for President Lincoln, collecting material for his impressive six-volume biography of the former president for nearly thirty years. During the 1920s, Sandburg also produced two collections of American folklore (*The American Songbag* and *The New American Songbag*), as well as several children's books.

Sandburg's repertoire of children's books includes *Rootabaga Stories* (1922) and *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1929), which contain a series of whimsical, sometimes melancholy, stories that he wrote for his daughters. The *Rootabaga Series* were also a part of Sandburg's desire for "American fairy tales" to match the childhoods of American children.²² The common European fairy tales often included royalty, castles, and knights, all of which did not depict the

²⁰ Danny Heitman, "A Workingman's Poet," accessed January 25, 2020.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

circumstances of American children. Instead, Sandburg filled these stories with skyscrapers, trains, corn fairies, and the “Five Marvelous Pretzels.”²³ In addition, he produced an anthology, the *American Songbag* (1927), in which he accompanied himself on guitar, performing at lectures, poetry recitals, and in recordings. It is believed that Sandburg was the first American urban folk singer. Musicologist, Judith Tick, states:

As a populist poet, Sandburg bestowed a powerful dignity on what the '20s called the “American scene” in a book he called a “ragbag of stripes and streaks of color from nearly all ends of the earth...rich with the diversity of the United States.” Reviewed widely in journals ranging from the *New Masses* to *Modern Music*, the *American Songbag* influenced a number of musicians. Pete Seeger, who calls it a “landmark”, saw it “almost as soon as it came out.” The composer Elie Siegmeister took it to Paris with him in 1927, and he and his wife “were always singing these songs. That was home. That was where we belonged.”²⁴

In 1945, Sandburg moved to Connemara, a 246-acre rural estate in Flat Rock, North Carolina. It was here that he produced slightly over a third of his published works, living with his wife, daughters, and two grandchildren.²⁵ For the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s birth, Congress met in joint session to hear actor Fredric March give a dramatic reading of the Gettysburg Address, which was followed by an address by Sandburg.²⁶

Throughout Sandburg’s career he earned three Pulitzer Prizes: two for his poetry (i. e. *Cornhuskers* in 1919 and *Complete Poems* in 1951) and one for his

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

biography of Abraham Lincoln (i.e., *The War Years* in 1940). Historian David McCullough, writes:

Whether it is poetry or some other form of expression, the poetic writing of Carl Sandburg is an eloquent testimony to a unique life that flared across America in its most formative years. His shining contributions to our lives, so vividly set forth, will live, in my opinion, when other less original ones have passed.²⁷

Some of his most famous collected works are *Chicago Poems* (1916), *Cornhuskers* (1918), and *Smoke and Steel* (1920).²⁸ From these popular works, Walker chose the poem “Prairie” from Sandburg’s *Cornhuskers* for *Prairie Songs*. *Cornhuskers* is a collection of 103 classic, rural American poems. The collection is divided into several sections, including “Cornhuskers,” “Persons Half Known,” “Leather Leggings,” “Haunts,” and “Shenandoah.” Each of the sections varies in mood or theme, as well as length. The “Cornhuskers” section revolves around life on the great plains of the United States.

Similar to Walker, Sandburg embraced the folk-like rendition of the “American lifestyle” and embraced this theme throughout his works. Danny Heitman from *Humanities* magazine comments, “he enjoyed, ‘unrivaled appeal as a poet in his day, perhaps because the breadth of his experiences connected him with so many strands of American life.’”²⁹ Due to Sandburg’s vast life experiences he was able to capture not only the life of the working American but also the growth of the United States through mechanization and civilization which occurred throughout his lifetime. For example, he wrote about characters

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

and subjects that people could relate to. Ted Kooser (a former U.S. poet laureate) credits Sandburg as an important voice for the Midwest region which was largely invisible in American literature. He comments, “the fact that he wrote about the prairie was very important to those of us who live out here... You know, we don’t have a lot of writers writing about this landscape.”³⁰

Sandburg died in his home in North Carolina on July 22, 1967. His ashes were interred under “Remembrance Rock,”—a granite boulder located behind his birth house in Galesburg. In 2018, Sandburg was inducted to the American Poets’ Corner at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. After his death President Lyndon B. Johnson stated, “Carl Sandburg was more than a voice of America, more than the poet of its strength and genius. He was America.”³¹

Willa Cather (1873-1947)

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873, in Back Creek, Virginia. In 1883, Cather’s family moved to Catherton, Nebraska and one year later relocated to Red Cloud, Nebraska. Although Cather, only nine years old, struggled with life on the prairie, Red Cloud later became famous because of her works. Upon arrival, she was quite shocked with her new surroundings and was unsure about her new home. Eventually, Cather established a deep love for her new home, which became the thematic center of her writings. In fact, seven of her novels center on her experiences in Nebraska.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

In 1890, Cather moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, to attend the University of Nebraska and, like Walker, was planning to study something different—science and medicine. Soon afterwards, she wrote an essay for her professor, Thomas Carlyle, which he submitted for publication to the Lincoln newspaper. The encouragement from her professor led to her switching her area of study and engrossing herself in becoming a writer. During her studies, Cather became the managing editor of the school newspaper, the author of short stories, a theater critic, and the columnist for the *Nebraska State Journal*, as well as the Lincoln *Courier*. She also developed an intense admiration for music and drama. Due to her sharp eye and harsh reviews, she earned the reputation of a “meat-ax critic.”³² Cather’s personality was always very strong and uniquely her own. In fact, classmates described her as one of the most colorful personalities on campus: intelligent, outspoken, talented, and even man-like in her opinions and dress.³³

Cather graduated from the university in June of 1895. She accepted a job in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as the managing editor for the *Home Monthly* magazine. While in Pittsburgh, Cather continued to write theater reviews for the Pittsburgh *Leader* and the *Nebraska State Journal*. During this time, she met Isabelle McClung, a fellow theater lover, who quickly became one of Cather’s closest friends and one of her biggest encouragers. It was, in fact, McClung who encouraged Cather to write and take a break from journalism. Cather quit her job in Pittsburgh to teach high school English from 1901 to 1906. Her teaching

³² Amy Ahearn, “Willa Cather: A Longer Biographical Sketch,” *Willa Cather Archive* updated 2021, <https://cather.unl.edu/life/longbio#rn15m>, accessed May 19, 2020.

³³ Amy Ahearn, “Willa Cather: A Longer Biographical Sketch,” accessed June 2, 2020.

position allowed her ample time to write, and she went on to publish *April Twilights* (1903), a book of poetry, and *The Troll Garden* (1905), a collection of short stories.³⁴

Her stories from *The Troll Garden* gained popular reviews and caught the attention of S. S. McClure, an editor of the most famous muckraking journal. McClure admired Cather's work so much that he published "Paul's Case" and "The Sculptor's Funeral" in *McClure's Magazine*. A year later, McClure offered Cather the position of managing editor for *McClure Magazine*. Cather accepted the position and immediately fell back into heavily editing journalism. Although Cather's work as an editor gained her national popularity, her job once again took up most of her time, leaving little time to write. During this time, Cather was still able to produce a year-long series, *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science*, as well as *The Autobiography of S. S. McClure*. Through her demanding work she developed her own writing style and continued to publish short stories and poems. Similar to her experience in Pittsburgh, one of Cather's mentors, her friend and fellow author Sarah Orne Jewett, once again convinced Cather to quit her job and pursue her writing career. Eventually, Cather left her managing position and started her new career as a full-time writer.

Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, was published in 1912; however, she dismissed the work as she felt that it was closely imitative of authors Edith Wharton and Henry James. In 1913, Cather published her second book, *O Pioneers!*, which depicts the brave Swedish immigrant farmers and their journey

³⁴ Ibid

to cultivate the prairies of Nebraska. Cather was known for judging most woman writers with disdain, since she found them overly sentimental. One exception was Sarah Orne Jewett; Jewett was both a friend and mentor. She advised Cather to first use female narrators in her fiction even though Cather preferred male ones, and to write about her “own country.”³⁵ As a result of the friendship, *O Pioneers!* was largely dedicated to Jewett. The reviews of this book were quite positive and she was recognized as a new voice in American letters.³⁶

Cather continued writing in her autobiographical style which resulted in one of her most famous novels, *My Ántonia*, (1918). Like *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, was written about her “own country.” In fact, within *O Pioneers!*, Cather writes, “There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.”³⁷ Due to her unique and passionate writing style, Cather’s stories quickly engaged her audiences. From 1923 to 1940, she continued to publish short stories and novels, including *One of Ours*, *The Professor’s House*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) was the last novel published by Cather before her death.

Although Cather is widely recognized for her novels, her career began with her poetry. Some of her most popular poems were reprinted many times in anthologies and national magazines.³⁸ Her first book of poetry was entitled *April Twilights* and was published in 1903. Later, Cather revised the collection and expanded it changing the name to *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923). The poems “Going Home” and “Prairie Dawn” from *Prairie Songs* are from Cather’s

³⁵

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

April Twilights and Other Poems. The final Cather poem that Walker selected is “Prairie Spring” from the forward to Cather’s book *O Pioneers!*. These poems were selected for their exquisite depiction of the prairie. Amy Ahearn, a writer for the Willa Cather Archive website at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, stated, “Cather evoked not only the Nebraska plains but also the history and topography of the southwest.”³⁹

Cather’s writings led her to a long and successful career. She became both nationally and internationally respected. Her novel, *One of Ours*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923. Throughout her career, Cather continued her education and received honorary degrees from Yale, Princeton, and UC Berkeley in addition to the degree that she received from the University of Nebraska. She was also awarded the Howells Medal and the *Prix Femina Américain*. Willa Cather died on April 24, 1947 in her home in Manhattan, leaving behind the legacy of a successful 45-year writing career.

Because of Cather’s innate ability to create stories to which people could relate, her works continue to be popular today. When asked about writing her relatable stories, Cather stated:

It takes a great deal of experience to become natural. People grow in honesty as they grow in anything else. A painter or writer must learn to distinguish what is his own from what he admires. I never abandoned trying to make a compromise between the kind of matter that my experience had given me and the manner of writing which I admired, until I began my second novel, ‘O Pioneers!’ And from the first chapter, I decided not to ‘write’ at all—simply to give myself up to the pleasure of recapturing in memory people and places I had believed forgotten.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

Similar to Sandburg, Cather's works are deeply rooted in the American experience, she uses the theme of American prairie-life throughout her various writings. Drawing upon her own life experiences in America (especially the plains of Nebraska), Cather was able to capture the American lifestyle and essence of life in the prairie lands.

CHAPTER TWO

Formal Overview and Discussion of *Prairie Songs*

Prairie Songs

As stated in the preface of this document, this song cycle is the result of a commission by the author. The song cycle was completed on December 29, 2019, in New Canaan, Connecticut. *Prairie Songs* is meant to be performed as one continuous work with no pauses between numbers. Walker utilizes the musical and poetic structure together with the underlying themes of the land, spirit, and heart of the prairie to evoke the feelings and emotions of the poetry throughout the music; the result is one unified song cycle that requires the performance of all songs for full appreciation. At the beginning of the cycle, Walker gives a brief introduction to the work:

The texts for *Prairie Songs* are taken from the writing of Willa Cather and Carl Sandburg. Three Cather poems (“Going Home,” “Prairie Dawn,” and “Prairie Spring”) are framed by sections of the Sandburg extended poem, “Prairie.” Together, these lyrics provide rich and abundant portraits of the prairie land, prairie spirit and prairie heart.⁴¹

Prairie Songs is comprised of seven songs: 1. *Prairie*, 2. *Going Home*, 3. *Prairie*, 4. *Prairie Dawn*, 5. *Prairie*, 6. *Prairie Spring*, and 7. *Prairie*-reprise. Though mostly sung, the cycle also includes spoken text and instructions from the composer to move to different places on stage, to clap, and to perform indicated gestures. *Prairie Songs* is approximately

⁴¹ Gwyneth Walker, *Prairie Songs* (New Caanan, CT, 2020), <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/prairiesongs.html>

fourteen minutes and thirty seconds long. Throughout the cycle Walker utilizes the title “Prairie” for songs one, three, five, and seven. The poetry used in these songs are from Sandburg’s extended poem “Prairie.” Walker uses Sandburg’s poetry throughout these pieces to unify the remaining songs (2. Going Home, 4. Prairie Dawn, and 6. Prairie Spring) that utilize Cather’s poetry. By utilizing sections from the same poem, Walker creates a sense of unity throughout the cycle as she alternates between Sandburg and Cather’s work, always returning to the original prairie found in Sandburg’s poem. Throughout the cycle, Walker uses unique sound elements and musical themes and motives to bring Cather and Sandburg’s poetry to life, creating picturesque images in the listener’s mind reminiscent of life on the prairie. Walker reiterates:

Certain poetic images suggested by the Cather and Sandburg poetry run through the songs. The listener might hear, and then envision, the expanse of open land, prairie grass blowing in the wind, a train crossing the prairie at night, stars, the mist rising, youth flaming like the wild roses. The astute listener might even hear strains of “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the background while at a country picnic. These are the images of mid-America, of the prairie. *The prairie sings to me...*⁴²

To further unify the cycle, each song is through-composed, and Walker uses repeated poetic lines, musical material such as themes and motives, and gestures.

The central images of the poetry are one of the foundational aspects of the cycle. Walker states:

⁴² Gwyneth Walker, *Prairie Songs* (New Caanan, CT, 2020), 1.

When I set poetry to music, I focus on the central images in the poem. To me, poetry is not words. It is the images that the words create. And thus, with the musical setting, it is important that the images in the poetry translate into musical imagery.⁴³

As Walker states, the most important aspect of the poetry is the imagery created within the mind of the listener and the journey that can commence from within the music. For example, Walker uses the piano at the beginning of many songs to musically paint a setting before the entrance of the singer. This is very similar to how a writer would create a scene and setting before the plot of the story begins. Walker utilizes this musical imagery as a metaphorical paint brush, painting the imagery of the poems with musical elements and themes.

1. "Prairie"

"Prairie", the first song in the cycle, is approximately two minutes long with the range of B3 to E5. The tessitura of this song is rather high for a contralto sitting from A4 to D5. This and all subsequent "Prairie" numbers are excerpted from Carl Sandburg's "Prairie", found in his collection from *Cornhuskers*. The original poem is nine pages in length; Walker, however, chose to set the following five strophes:

Prairie

I WAS born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover,
the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a knowledge...

⁴³ Gwyneth Walker, "Words and Music," <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/e-words.html>

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians,
here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and cow
pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky
moon of fire or a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy
in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the
pistons hiss and the wheels curse.

On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and the
soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

The poem is in first person and recounts the poet's experience of the prairie. At
the beginning of the cycle, Walker states:

The Sandburg texts which connect the Cather poems are all
excerpted from the poem, "Prairie." This writing is personal (first
person), narrative expressive poetry, which contrasts and balances
with the Cather style of descriptive imagery. Sandburg writes, "I
was born on the prairie. The prairie sings to me. O prairie mother, I
am your daughter. I rest easy in the prairie arms." These words are
exquisitely beautiful. They engender the music that opens and
closes the *Prairie Songs*.⁴⁴

It is clear from Walker's statement that this poem is essential to the overall
structure and unity of the work. She not only uses it to connect Sandburg and
Cather's poetry but also to open and close the cycle.

The song begins in E minor and the tempo is marked "flowing", a
moderate tempo (♩ = 108). At the beginning of the piece, the singer is instructed
to "move hand cross stage as the piano plays two slow *glissandi*." The *glissandi*
are meant to represent the broad expanse of the prairie (see Figure 1). As she

⁴⁴ Gwyneth Walker, *Prairie Songs*, 1.

stated in the introduction to the work, it is important to Walker that the audience feel and hear the expanse of the open land of the plains. The motion from the singer provides a visual representation for the *glissando* movement in the piano part.

Figure 1. "Prairie *glissandi*" m. 1

commissioned by Kiya Fife

Prairie Songs

for Contralto and Piano

Carl Sandburg Gwyneth Walker

1. Prairie

Singer moves hand across stage as piano plays.

slow glissando
(to represent the broad
expanse of the prairie)

Piano *p*

with pedal

After the *glissandi*, Walker introduces alternating sixteenth-note and quintuplet patterns in the right hand of the piano part (see Figure 2), alluding to a “trance-like” or mesmerized state as the poet reflects on the landscape of the prairie.

Figure 2: "Trance-like motive" mm. 2-13

2 Moderate tempo ♩ = 108
flowing

4

6 *p*
I was born on the prai - rie and the

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

2

8 *sustained*

milk of its wheat, the red of its clo - ver, and the

Rec. Rec.

10

eyes of the wom - en, gave me a

LH

Rec. Rec.

12 *poco rit.*

song and a know - ledge.

poco rit.

LH

Rec. Rec.

The pedaled rolling chord in the left hand of the piano part also aid in this mesmerizing feeling. In m. 6, Walker indicates that the voice part should enter on a *piano* dynamic as the poet reflects on their time on the prairie. From mm. 6-13, the vocal line is quasi-recitative, comprised of only three different pitches (E4, D4, and B3), with twenty-five repetitions of the 5th scale degree (B3), while the accompaniment part continues with the “trance-like” pattern. When asked about the range of this song, Walker commented:

You’ll notice that when she’s singing about the prairie arms and the prairie heart that she’s in the low range she’s on a B(3). You would hardly sing the word *heart* on a high range unless it was to break your heart, but she’s in love with the prairie. So, I used the depths of the voice when talking about the land and the emotions of the prairie; this works well with the rich, lowest range of the voice.⁴⁵

Walker’s use of the repeated fifth and the “trance-like” motive in the piano part is used to further demonstrate that the poet is in a state of remembrance. Even though this melody is rather simple, it exemplifies Walker’s ability to musically inflect the text and the poet’s mood and feelings. One of the most difficult aspects of this section to sing is the many repeated pitches and extended phrases. In order to perform this accurately, the performer must identify the text stress and emphasize these syllables or words, thus allowing the phrases to still incorporate some form of shape and direction.

In m. 14, there is a change in tempo indicated “slightly faster” ($\text{♩}=120$), as well as an overall energy change. The “trance-like” motive stops and the poem shifts from describing specific elements from the prairie to what lies around it. In

⁴⁵ Ibid

addition, there is a crescendo marking, as well as an indication to “gain in energy.” In m. 14, Walker shifts the texture in both the piano and vocal lines. The piano part switches from the sixteenth-note pattern to an eighth-note chordal gesture. Although different from the first section, this piano pattern still evokes the poet’s sense of reflection to their life on the prairie but is less “trance-like.” The vocal line is no longer recitative-like but is more melodic. Walker also incorporates several meter changes beginning in m. 19: 5/4 followed by 6/4 and then returning to 4/4 in m. 22. These meter changes further Walker’s indication to “gain in energy” throughout this section and also signal the transition between starkly different settings, such as the Rocky Mountains and cow pastures. In m. 21 there is another change in the piano part as Walker employs an arpeggiated triplet pattern in C major (see Figure 3). This change paints the image of a lazy wind blowing through the grass in the cow pastures, the stalks in the corn fields, and the plants in the cotton fields, each one swaying back and forth under its effects.

Figure 3: "Meter and key change" mm. 14-21

3

14 **Slightly faster** ♩ = 120
cresc. (gaining energy)

Here be-tween the sheds of the Rock - y Moun-tains and the Ap-pa-la - chians,

Slightly faster ♩ = 120

cresc.

with pedal
mf

17 here now a morn - ing star fix - es a fire sign o - ver the

mf

20 tim - ber claims and the cow pas - tures, the

f

Leg.

In m. 34 the tempo returns to the original tempo once again, resembling the “trance-like” energy from the beginning of the song. Along with the return of the original tempo, the song also returns to E minor (see Figure 4). This is reflective of the “trance-like” motive from the beginning of the song with the four, sixteenth note pattern in the right hand of the piano. This “trance-like” motive

remains until the poet “rests in the prairie”, reflecting on the opening material while still maintaining a through-composed form.

Figure 4: “Return to home-key” mm. 31- 35

31 *poco rit.*
riv - er moon of wa - ter.

34 *Slower* ♩ = 108, original tempo
Slower ♩ = 108, original tempo
f

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 1. *Prairie*

The “trance-like” motive stops in m. 41 as the singer sings, “I rest easy in the prairie arms on the prairie heart.” Within this line, the melodic line descends to B3 (the lowest pitch in the song). This melodic motion is an example of text painting, as the melodic line descends just as one would lie down to rest (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: “Text painting in Prairie” mm. 40-45

40

know in the night — I rest eas - y in the prai - rie

mf

43

arms, on the prai - rie heart.

(Ped.)

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | *I. Prairie*

Toward the end of the song, Walker instructs the singer to “hum” from mm. 47-49. The humming is another example of Walker musically mirroring the poet’s reflection of her time on the prairie. Right before the last statement of the vocal part, the piano drops out as the singer restates, “on the prairie heart.” This phrase is again recitative-like, bringing all of the focus to the singer and text. The song ends with an octave broken E-minor chord in the right hand (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: "End of Prairie" mm. 50-53

50 *rit. to end*
(*p*)
on the prai - rie heart.

rit. to end
(*LV*)
(*p*)
2:00

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | I. *Prairie*

Performance Considerations

As previously stated, one of the most difficult aspects of this song to sing is the many uses of repeated pitches. The repetitions can easily be sung out of tune and lack musical depth, losing the intended text emphasis. In addition, there are multiple instances of rather long musical phrases. For example, in mm. 17-21 the poetic line reads, "Here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and the cow pastures." Poetically there are no commas, leaving the singer to determine the most logical and musical place to breathe. After studying the poem and singing through this phrase, it makes the most sense to first breathe after the word "sign" and then not again until after the word "pastures." Another rather long phrase is "Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise and a sky moon or fire or a river moon of water." Throughout this phrase, there is, yet again, no punctuation to create a brief pause for a breath. The best place to take a breath is after the words "much" and "fire." In mm. 17-

25, the melodic line is filled with alternating ascending and descending intervals of a third; if this section lacks a sense of legato and text stress, the vocal line can become quite choppy and rigid. Therefore, it is imperative for the singer to incorporate appropriate text stress and to not allow the highest pitch in each phrase to stick out.

Another performance aspect to consider is the *glissandi* gesture. At the beginning of the cycle, Walker is trying to demonstrate the open, flat expanse of the prairie; as such, the first glissandi gesture should begin with the singer's palm up and open and their whole arm should move from the left side of their body to the right in a grand, sweeping motion. For the second glissandi gesture, the singer should use both arms with palm's open, beginning in the center of their body and moving outward. It is also important that the "humming" section at the end of this song is placed in the front part of the mouth so that the "hum" is audible.

Transition to # 2

Following "Prairie", Walker writes a 45 second transition into the second song. The entire transition is not sung as the singer is instructed to recite the poetry. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 88$ and the meter is 2/2; the singer is instructed to "tap hands lightly, suggesting the motion of a passing train." The transition begins with a rhythmic figure first introduced by the singer (see Figure 7). The singer repeats this rhythmic figure twice and then it is taken over by the pianist. This rhythmic pattern continues until the singer is done reciting all of the poetry. Walker has roughly estimated that the repetition will occur seven to eight times.

The text for this transition is again from Sandburg's "Prairie":

Prairie

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the pistons hiss and the wheels curse.

On the prairie the overland fits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

In m. 5, the singer is instructed to walk to center stage as the pianist is instructed to tap piano lid/ledge moving from upper right end to lower felt end, "as a train passing by." Walker has indicated specific dynamic markings for the tapping. These dynamics help to emphasize the downbeat of each of the repeated rhythmic patterns. These rhythmic patterns emulate the sounds made by a train as it rumbles down the tracks. Walker also uses dynamic markings to reinforce this imagery. The dynamics begins *piano* and then, as the train comes closer, is marked *mezzo forte* (see Figure 7). As the train leaves, the dynamics return to *piano*. At the end of the transition, Walker indicates that the performers continue directly into the second song.

Performance Considerations

In order to accurately perform this transition, both of the performers need to make sure the clapped rhythms are both accurate and audible to the audience, despite being marked *piano* and *pianissimo*. Due to the repeated pattern tapped by the pianist, it is important that the singer speaks the lines with a moderate tempo, as it is easy to want to rush because of the fast tempo of the tapping. It is

also important that the singer not begin the first song (1. Prairie) center stage, as the singer is instructed to walk to center stage in the transition.

Figure 7: "Transition to #2" mm. 1-10

7

Transition to #2

♩ = 88

Singer taps hands lightly,
suggesting the motion of a passing train

p pp p pp

♩ = 88

5 Singer walks to center stage

mf p mf p

Singer reads:

9 In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the pistons hiss
and the wheels curse.
On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil between them
muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

Pianist continues tapping pattern as singer reads (approximately 7-8 repetitions).

mf p

continue directly to next song

2. "Going Home"

The second song, "Going Home," provides great contrast to the first song. This is largely due to the tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 88$ "with the energy of a train in motion." Walker often employs this kind of change between the first and second songs in her song cycles. This compositional technique will be further discussed in the third chapter of this document. "Going Home" is approximately three minutes long with a range of G3 to G5 and the tessitura of D4 to C5. The poem is by Willa Cather from *April Twilight and Other Poems* (1923). There are two lines of poetry that Cather incorporated from the Bible. The following line, "The crooked straight and the rough places plain," comes from Isaiah 40:4. The line, "every valley shall be exalted," is also found in the tenor's aria "Ev'ry Valley" from George Frederic Handel's *Messiah*. Cather specialist James Woodress indicated that Cather knew Handel's *Messiah* quite well, leaving no doubt that she knew the reference.⁴⁶

It is important to note that the Burlington Railroad played a large role in Willa's life. The railroad brought her west to Red Cloud, Nebraska, and it was the Burlington Depot that acted as a springboard to the larger world. It was also at the Depot that the performers from the Red Cloud Opera House arrived and young Cather often lingered to see who was arriving or departing by train. The poem was even used as advertising for the railroad and was eventually published in the service directory for the "Aristocrat," a train that ran between Chicago and Denver (May 1932).

⁴⁶ James, Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 43.

Going Home

(Burlington Route)

How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;
 Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.
 The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;
 The sharp curves and windings left behind,
 The roadway wide open,
 (The crooked straight
 And the rough places plain.)
 They run smoothly, they run softly too.
 There is not noise enough to trouble the lightest sleeper.
 Nor jolting to wake the weary-hearted.
 I open my window and let the air blow in,
 The air of morning,
 That smells of grass and earth—
 Earth, the grain-giver.
 How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;
 Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.
 The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;
 They run like running water,
 Like Youth, running away...
 They spin bright along the bright rails,
 Singing and humming,
 Singing and humming.
 They run remembering.
 They run rejoicing,
 As if they, too, were going home.

Walker parallels the imagery of the poem throughout the composition, using unique themes and motives to further the poem's effect (analyzed below).

Walker comments on Cather's poem, stating:

Of the Cather poems, the first, "Going Home," speaks of a train crossing the prairie. *How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri...like Youth, running away...they run rejoicing...singing and humming.* This is a song of nostalgia. *Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.* Energetic train rhythms fill the piano accompaniment.⁴⁷

At the start of the song, Walker once again incorporates several musical motives to instill the energetic train rhythms, sounds, and images from the poem.

⁴⁷ Gwyneth Walker, *Prairie Songs*, 1.

For example, in mm. 1-6, Walker uses an ascending and descending quarter note pattern in the left hand of the piano as well as half note to descending eighth note pattern in the right hand of the piano to depict the train in motion motive (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: “Train in motion motive” mm. 1-8

8

2. Going Home

Willa Cather

Same tempo $\text{♩} = 88$
with the energy of a train in motion

f

slight pedal

5

The musical score for measures 1-8 of 'Going Home' is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) shows the piano accompaniment. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a half note G4, followed by a descending eighth note pattern: A4, G4, F4, E4. The left hand (bass clef) plays an ascending quarter note pattern: G3, A3, B3, C4. The score includes a dynamic marking of *f* and the instruction 'slight pedal'. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the accompaniment with similar rhythmic patterns, including some chords in the right hand.

When the voice enters in m. 11, Walker instructs the singer to sing “warmly, as recounting a fond memory” as the pianist is instructed to provide “a quiet murmur of the train, as a background while the passenger sleeps.” This murmur acts as the “train background” motive. The motive consists of a two eighth note pattern in the left hand and a four note eighth note pattern in the right hand (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: “Train background motive” mm. 9–16

9 *mf* warmly,
as recounting a fond memory

How smooth - ly the

piano provides a quiet murmur of the train,
as a background while the passenger sleeps.

pp

13

trains run be - yond the Mis-sou - ri; E - ven in my

(*leg.*) *leg.* *leg.*

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 2. Going Home

In m. 19, the voice part descends to G3—the lowest note in the song cycle on the words, “The wheels turn as if they were glad to go”. This line begins on G3 and slowly ascends to G4, creating an octave circle, symbolizing the circular spinning of a wheel (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: "Wheel turning text painting" mm. 17– 24

9

17

sleep I know when I have crossed the riv - er. The wheels_ turn as

21

if they were glad to go; The sharp curves and

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 17-20, and the second system covers measures 21-24. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The score includes fermati in measures 18, 20, 22, and 24.

Walker uses fermati in m. 38 in both the vocal and piano parts to create a bit of dramatic space before the next section. In m. 39, the tempo returns to 88 with four measures of the original six-measure "train in motion" motive from the beginning (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: "Return of train in motion motive" mm. 36-44

The musical score for Figure 11 consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 36 to 40. The vocal line begins at measure 36 with the lyrics "they run soft - ly, too." The tempo is marked "Slowly" and then changes to "a tempo (♩ = 88)". The piano accompaniment starts at measure 37 with a piano (*p*) dynamic and becomes fortissimo (*f*) by measure 39. A "slight pedal" instruction is placed under the piano part. The second system covers measures 41 to 44. The vocal line begins at measure 41 with the lyrics "There is not noise e - nough to". The tempo remains "a tempo" and the dynamic is marked *mf*. The piano accompaniment continues with a *mf* dynamic.

In m. 50, there is a marking in the vocal line to be "ecstatic" as the singer sings "I open my window and let the air blow in." In m. 53, there is a quintuplet eighth note pattern in the right hand of the piano followed by an arpeggiated triplet note pattern (see Figure 12). Walker's alternating figures are reflective of the wind from the line "I open my window and let the air blow in." The piano part drops out in m. 62 for four measures as the singer sings, "earth, the grain giver, the grain giver, the grain giver." Here Walker employs repetition to direct the attention to the text, focusing on the importance of grain to prairie life.

Figure 12: "Quintuplet and triplet note pattern" mm. 50–56

11

50 *ecstatic*

heart - ed. I o - pen my win - dow and let the

54

air blow in, The air of

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 50-53) features a vocal line in G minor with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quintuplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked with '5'. The second system (measures 54-56) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with similar rhythmic patterns. The piano part includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a quintuplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked with '5'. The score is marked with 'Ad.' (Ad libitum) at the end of both systems.

In m. 66, the key returns to G minor as Walker instructs that the original tempo ($\text{♩} = 88$) should return. In addition, the “train in motion” motive also returns, as well as the opening melodic line and the “train background” motive in m. 72. In m. 82, however, Walker slightly changes the melodic line. The vocal line begins the same until m. 83; instead of the line “the wheels turn as if they were glad to go” beginning on an G3, this line now begins on D4. Similar to the first song, the ending returns to the original key, tempo, “train in motion” motive, and “train background” motive, as well as the melodic line from the beginning of the song with slight alterations; this creates unity from the beginning of the piece to the

end, as well as between this piece and the next by repeating previous musical elements. Similar to the first song, in mm. 73-83 Walker incorporates twenty-four uses of the pitch D4, once again reiterating the fifth scale degree, emphasizing the text, and ensuring the melody is not distracting.

Figure 13: “Climax of Going Home” mm. 104-108

15

104

joi - - - cing, As if they, two, were go - ing home. _____

mf *p*

105 106 107 108

In m. 94, the vocal line ascends to a G5 (the highest note in the song cycle), leading to the climax of the song, providing emphasis to the text “singing and humming.” The music portrays the exciting feeling of returning home, to the degree that even the wheels of the train are “singing and humming” with joy. In m. 103-4, the vocal line ascends from a G4 to D5, once again exhibiting a fifth interval reflective of the text “rejoicing”. The piano part in m. 104 also helps to reiterate the “rejoicing” felt from the text with four accented ascending half-note chords (see Figure 13). In m. 106, the piano part, once again, drops out as the singer sings, “As if they, too, were going home.” As the voice part ends, the piano part again plays the “train in motion” motive, again referencing that even

the wheels of the train are excited to return home. Walker indicates a *ritardando* in m. 117, as the “train departs in the distance” (see Figure 14) audibly painting the picture of the train departing.

Figure 14: “Train departing into the distance” mm. 109-120

109 *a tempo* (♩ = 88)

a tempo (♩ = 88)

p

cresc.

slight pedal

113

f

117 *rit. to end*
train departs in the distance

dim.

pp

mf

Performance Considerations

Despite this song being the longest of the cycle, there are only a few unique performance aspects to consider when performing it. One of the first aspects to consider is the length of the fermati in the song. The fermati are used to create a brief pause between text. Although Walker doesn't indicate a specific length for these pauses, a few seconds should be adequate time for both performers and audience members to understand the text. Similar to the first song, the melodic line is filled with instances of repeated pitches. Therefore, it is once again important to sing with specific text stress so that each phrase conveys the intended musical imagery. For example, in mm. 11-22, there are twenty-five repetitions of the pitch D4. Due to the static nature of both the vocal and piano parts, it is crucial for the singer to emphasize each word that falls on a D4 such as "know" and "river" to provide contrast within the repeated sections. Walker also incorporates several examples of alternating intervals of a third, once again making it easy to mistakenly stress syllables or words that are not necessarily important.

3. "Prairie"

This song is an example of Walker's preference for "dramatization" as the singer yet again recites lines of poetry to music rather than singing them. The song is marked "singer speaks lines of poetry with piano chords in the background (speaking and chords should be approximately coordinated)." The song is approximately thirty-five seconds long and is in G minor. The tempo is

marked a moderate tempo (♩ = 112). The poem is another excerpt from Sandburg's "Prairie."

Prairie

I am here when the cities are gone.
I am here before the cities come.
I nourished the lonely men on horses.
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.
I am dust of men.

Just like the transition at the end of the first song into the second, this song is meant to connect directly to the next song (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: "3. Prairie" mm. 1-12

16

3. Prairie

Carl Sandburg

Singer speaks lines of poetry with piano chords in the background.
(Speaking and chords should be approximately coordinated.)

I am here when the cities are gone. I am here before the cities come.

Moderate tempo ♩ = 112
 [background chords and rhythm]

p

much $\text{r}e\text{o}$ *simile*

5

I nourished the lonely men on horses. I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.

9

I am the dust of men.

rit.

$\text{r}e\text{o}$

connect to next song

One of the most difficult aspects of this song is coordinating the text with the music. There is temptation to speak the lines too quickly. This is largely due to the fact that the poetic lines are quite short, and Walker sets these lines to two full measures of music with the brisk tempo of $\text{♩} = 112$, leading the singer to speak too quickly. In order to ensure a steady speaking pace, the singer should begin reciting the text after the first chord of each phrase. Due to the repetition of both the chords and rhythm in the piano part, the contrast is again found within the spoken text. For example, in the first two lines, the words that should be emphasized are: "I", "when", "cities", "gone", "I", "before", "cities", and "come". Text stress throughout the piece is based on piano rhythm and continues throughout the remainder of the song.

4. "Prairie Dawn"

"Prairie Dawn" has a range from C4 to E5 with the tessitura from E4 to C5. The tempo is marked "with slight motion" ($\text{♩} = 88$) and begins in A major. This song is approximately one minute and fifty seconds long and the poem is from Cather's *April Twilight and Other Poems*.

Prairie Dawn

A crimson fire that vanquishes the stars;
 A pungent odor from the dusty sage;
 A sudden stirring of the huddled herds;
 A breaking of the distant table-lands
 Through purple mists ascending, and the flare
 Of water ditches silver in the light;
 A swift, bright lance hurled low across the world;
 A sudden sickness for the hills of home.

Walker gives a brief introduction to the song:

A second Cather poem is the brief "Prairie Dawn." *A crimson fire that vanquishes the stars; a swift, bright lance hurled low across the world.* Here the piano patterns are fluid like the stars, or the purple mists ascending. The voice is gentle and quiet, expressing the magical beauty of a prairie dawn.⁴⁸

The piano part is marked "gently, as stars (*mentioned in poem*)."⁴⁸ There is a four sixteenth note pattern in the right hand of the piano part which is reflective of shimmering stars (see Figure 16).

⁴⁸ Ibid

Figure 16: "Star motive" mm. 1-6

17

4. Prairie Dawn

Willa Cather

1 With slight motion ♩ = 88

With slight motion ♩ = 88
gently, as stars (mentioned in poem)

p

loco

4 *p* expressing the magical beauty of a prairie dawn

A crim-son fire that van-quish-es the stars; A

loco

In m. 13, the vocal line literally ascends on the word “ascending,” providing an example of text painting. In mm. 17-20, the star motive briefly stops and the piano part drops for two measures as the singer sings, “A swift bright lance hurled low across the world; a sudden sickness for the hills...” (see Figure 17). Walker also indicates that the words “swift bright lance hurled” are accented as she places *tenuto* markings above them. This combination of the *tenuto* markings and the pausing of the piano and star motive, brings the attention to the text, which uses the metaphor of a lance to convey the pain felt from missing home (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: "Text painting and tenuto markings" mm. 13-18

13 *cresc. poco a poco*
 pur-ple mists as-cend-ing and the flare of wa-ter dit-ches sil-ver in the

16 *(cresc.)* *f* *poco rit.*
 light; A swift bright lance hurled low a-cross the world;

(cresc.) *f* *poco rit.* *p*

Rec. Rec. Rec.

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 4. *Prairie Dawn*

In m. 21, on the word "home," the star motive (see Figure 18) returns as does the original tempo marking. The humming in mm. 22-24 conveys the sense of security and longing for home, reminiscent of a mother humming to her child.

Figure 18: "Humming section in Prairie Dawn" mm. 19-27

19

19 *Slower* *p* *a tempo* (♩ = 88)

A sud-den sick-ness for the hills of home, _____

Slower *a tempo* (♩ = 88)

(*p*)

(*leg.*) _____

22

_____ Hmm _____ home. _____

25

(*leg.*) _____

Performance Considerations

There is another example of an extended poetic phrase within this song. The line reads, “A breaking of the distant table-lands through purple mists ascending and the flare of water ditches silver in the light.” With no punctuation and no real pause in the music, the logical place to breathe is after the word “lands”. Another performance aspect to consider when performing this song is maintaining a legato melodic line against the rhythm of the “star” motive in the piano part. This is due to the differing roles of the singer and pianist; the singer is describing the prairie sunrise while the piano is painting the shimmering stars of nightfall. Therefore, the singer must sing with as much legato as possible and not imitate the rhythm felt in the piano part.

Transition/Interlude

Once again there is a transition/interlude beginning in m. 30 (see Figure 19). At the end of the song, in m. 29, Walker uses an enharmonic modulation with a $D\#6$ that leads directly into a $E\flat6$ as the key shifts to $E\flat$ major. Walker does not alter the tempo but indicates the pianist play “relaxed and reflective.” The transition begins in $6/4$ and switches to $4/4$ in m. 33. In m. 32, Walker briefly shifts into A-flat major; the piano, however, quickly shifts to C major, ending the transition on a rolling chord resembling a G dominant seventh chord, emphasizing the fifth scale degree, typical of Walker’s compositional style. Walker uses the transition to shift from the shimmering of stars at dawn into the prairie day of the following song. At the end of this transition/interlude, there is direction for this section to be immediately connected to the next song.

Figure 19: "Transition/Interlude" mm. 30-37

20

Transition/Interlude

28 *rit.* Same tempo ♩ = 88

31 *rit.* Same tempo ♩ = 88
relaxed and reflective

(*Rec.*)

31

(*Rec.*)

34 *rit.*

rit. *grava* *p*

(*Rec.*)

connect to next song

1:50

5. "Prairie"

The fifth song in the cycle is also entitled "Prairie." The range of this song is from C4 to G5 with a tessitura of G4 to C5. Just under three minutes in length, this poem is once again an excerpt from Sandburg's "Prairie."

Prairie

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.
 They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driving steers to the railroad cattle pens.
 They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing bridges.
 They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.
 They are mine.

The many subjects and poetic images in this poem have musical counterparts in several themes and motives. "Prairie" is marked *flowing* with a note to the accompanist to play "as prairie grass blowing in the wind" (see Figure 20). The first two measures of the piano part consist of an ascending and descending triplet note pattern, allusive of the grass blowing in the wind. Right after these measures, Walker introduces a theme for the "timeless expanse of the prairie" consisting of a quarter-note, eighth-note, and sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand of the piano part (see Figure 20). This theme is further enhanced with a *simile* marking (to play in a "similar way") allowing for music connectivity between the two themes. Walker alternates both the "blowing grass" motive and "timeless expanse of the prairie" motive until m. 16. with the voice part entering in m. 11.

Figure 20: "Prairie grass motive" mm. 1-9

21

5. Prairie

Carl Sandburg

Flowing ♩ = 108
as prairie grass blowing in the wind

[a theme for the timeless
 expanse of the prairie]
mf espr.

p *mf espr.* *(p)* *simile*

4

7

In m. 20 there is a change in the piano part to background *tremolos* as the melodic line becomes recitative-like. The *tremolos* are meant to bring “hints of excitement” as the poet describes the farmboys, cattle, and crew of the railroad. The *tremolos* conclude in m. 24 as Walker incorporates the rolling chord gesture from the first song as the crowds of people appear (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: "Tremolos in 5. Prairie" mm. 19-27

19

mine, the thresh - ing crews eat - ing beef - steak, the farm - boys driv - ing

gentle background tremoli, with hints of excitement

(mf) *p*

23

steers to the rail-road cat - tle pens. — They are mine, the crowds of peo - ple at a

(mf)

Reo. Reo.

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 5. Prairie

In m. 28, there is a five sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand that is meant to be played "as a blur of the 'crowds of people'" (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: "Crowds of people blur" mm. 28-31

23

28

Fourth of Ju - ly bas - ket pic - nic,
as a blur of the "crowds of people"

pp barely audible

(*Rec.*)

This pattern continues until the end of m. 31 where Walker includes a quote from "The Star-Spangled Banner" in the right hand of the piano part (see Figure 23).

The key changes to C major in m. 29 and Walker reiterates the fifth with twenty repetitions of G4 in the melodic part to, once again, bring the focus to the text.

Figure 23: "Quote of the Star-Spangled Banner" mm. 30-35

30
listen - ing to a law - yer read the Dec - la - ra - tion of In - de - pen - dence, -
[quote from "The Star-Spangled Banner"]
mf

32
Watch - ing the pin - wheels and Ro - man
pp

34
can - dles at night, - the
mf
pp

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 5. Prairie

The five sixteenth-note pattern returns briefly for two measures as the vocalist sings "watching the pinwheels and candles at night." In m. 35, this pattern moves from the right hand to the left hand, along with another repetition of the notes C5, E5, G5, and C6 from the earlier "Star-Spangled Banner" quote in the right hand of the piano (see Figure 23). In mm. 36-7, the piano part contains two rolling chords as all of the focus is brought to text and vocal line. Thus, the

following measures have a sense of recitative as the singer sings “...young men and women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing bridges” (see Figure 24). In m. 38, there is a meter change to 6/8, allowing for a staccato rhythm on the words “...and kissing bridges”. This measure is marked “slowly, piano, and playfully” as young adults would be when playfully kissing. Directly after this line, Walker includes three measures of staccato, white-note clusters to indicate the “kissing” (see Figure 24). This is one of her finest examples of text painting throughout the cycle as the text painting is not only in the vocal line but in the piano part as well.

Figure 24: “Kissing white-note clusters” mm. 38-41

24

36

Slowly (*playfully*)
p

young men and wom-en two by two hunt-ing the by - paths _ and kiss-ing brid-ges. _

Slowly (*playfully*)

mf

39 Quickly (*playfully*)

random white-note clusters, “kisses”

p

rit.

p tenderly

a tempo
(♩ = 108)

They are

rit.

a tempo
(♩ = 108)

Detailed description of Figure 24: The figure shows a musical score for two systems. The first system (measures 36-41) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts in 4/4 time, then changes to 6/8 time at measure 38, and returns to 4/4 at measure 41. The piano part consists of chords and clusters of white notes. The second system (measures 39-41) shows the vocal line with rests in measures 39 and 40, and the piano part with staccato white-note clusters in measures 39 and 40. Tempo markings include 'Slowly (playfully)', 'Quickly (playfully)', and 'a tempo' with a tempo of 108. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte).

It is interesting that at the end of the clusters in the piano part, in m. 41, Walker includes a *ritardando*. However, when the voice reenters at the end of the measure, there is an *a tempo* marking to return to the original tempo. This is largely due to the change in the text as Walker returns to the poetic idea of “they are mine.”

On the text “good morning” the vocal line consists of a G4, E5, and C5. Directly after the singer sings this passage, it is exactly repeated in the right hand of the piano part (see Figure 25). This is an example of text painting imitative of a conversation, as it repeats the “good morning” phrase back, as if greeting another person. As the singer repeats the words “good morning” in m. 49, the piano part becomes quite sparse and eventually drops out as there is another recitative-like section on the text “good morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.” This prepares for the shift back to 4/4 as the poet goes from talking about farm life to becoming part of the prairie.

Figure 25: "Good morning answer in the piano" mm. 45-49

25

45

fence in the frost of late October saying good

47

morn - ing, good morn - ing, good

[piano answers voice]

mf

From mm. 63-4, Walker repeats the pitch G4 on the repeated word "waiting". There are also *tenuto* markings on each of the repeated "waiting" to reiterate that the prairie is everlasting and will always be there. Over the four repeated "waiting" statements, there is a *decrescendo* to *piano* as the piano part plays three more ascending rolling chord clusters (see Figure 26). After the chord clusters, the voice part, unaccompanied, sings the final "they are mine." Like at the end of many songs in this cycle, this choice brings the attention to the text and vocal line, and creates a more intimate moment, emphasizing the deep connection to the prairie the poet retains. The piano part returns in m. 69 as Walker returns to the "prairie" theme which ends the song (see Figure 26), reinforcing the idea that the prairie is everlasting.

Figure 26: "Prairie theme" mm. 64-71

64 *p* *tenderly*
 wait - ing, wait - ing, wait - ing. ___ They are

68 *rit. to end*
 mine. [*prairie* theme] *(p)*

*Lower pitches if preferred.

2:50

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 5. Prairie

Performance Considerations

Throughout this song, there are several performance aspects to consider. Due to the vast number of different subjects and poetic ideas in this song, there are many examples of text painting. These phrases require the singer to sing with specific intention and text delivery. For example, the line “the young men and women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing bridges” must begin in a legato manner so that the specific rhythms and staccato markings set by Walker allow for the listener to hear the young couple “kissing”.

6. "Prairie Spring"

The last of the Cather poems, "Prairie Spring" comes from the prologue to her novel, *O Pioneers!* (1913). According to James Woodress, this poem is considered to be a sister poem to "Prairie Dawn."⁴⁹ The range of this song is A3 to F5 with a tessitura of E4 to D5. The song is approximately two minutes long and is in 4/4 meter; it is one of the only songs in which Walker doesn't employ any meter changes.

Prairie Spring

Evening and the flat land,
 Rich and somber and always silent;
 The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
 Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
 The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
 The toiling horses, the tired men;
 The long empty roads,
 Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
 The eternal, unresponsive sky.
 Against all this, Youth,
 Flaming like the wild roses,
 Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
 Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
 Youth with its unsupportable sweetness,
 Its fierce necessity,
 Its sharp desire,
 Singing and singing,
 Out of the lips of silence,
 Out of the earthly dusk.

At the beginning of the work, Walker gives a brief introduction to the song. She comments:

⁴⁹ James, Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, 40.

“Prairie Spring” is a poem of contrasts, opening with a description of the somber land, *heavy and black, full of strength and harshness...* and then suddenly changing to *Against all of this, Youth, flaming like the wild roses*. Musically the contrast is heard in the change from the dark tonality of F Minor into a bright D Major. *Singing and singing, out of the lips of silence, out of the earthy dusk.*⁵⁰

The tempo of the song is marked ♩ = 100 and hovers around a tonal center of A. On the first page, the piano part is filled with *tremolos* in the left hand and rolling chords in the right hand (see Figure 27). Walker uses these *tremolos* to create a “murmuring, quiet background” as well as static pitch in the vocal part to focus all attention on contrast within the text; Cather makes contrasting references throughout the text of light and dark, twilight and dusk, wheat and weeds, etcetera. Due to role of these *tremolos*, there is no real indication of a key until later in the song. When the voice part enters in m. 5, there is a direction of “free rhythm recited on pitch, with depth of tone.” Although Walker has incorporated recited text on pitch before, this is by far the largest section. This serves to strongly reiterate the idea of the prairie being everlasting as referenced in the text.

⁵⁰ Ibid

Figure 27: "Prairie Spring *tremolos*" mm. 1-4

6. Prairie Spring

Carl Sandburg

Moderate tempo ♩ = 100

Moderate tempo ♩ = 100

*murmuring,
a quiet background*

p

with much pedal

At the end of m. 12, the recited text on pitch stops as the singer shifts from singing recited text on the indicated note to singing. In m. 13, the melodic line begins on an E4 and slowly ascends a perfect fourth to an A4. This ascending melodic line occurs on the text "The growing wheat, the growing weeds" (see Figure 28). This is yet another example of text painting as the melodic lines rise just as the plants would when they are growing. The first real indication of tonality occurs in m. 17 where Walker incorporates an arpeggiated E-flat major chord; however, the *tremolos* return in m. 21 as well as a tonicization of A-flat major. Walker is once again emphasizing the fourth scale degree.

Figure 28: "Ascending vocal line" mm. 13-18

28

13 *(p)* *cresc.*

The grow - ing wheat, the grow - ing weeds, — the toil - ing hors - es, the

16 *(cresc.)* *mf*

tired — men; the long emp - ty roads,

The static passiveness of “the eternal, unresponsive sky” is evoked by the singer’s nine repeated C5s, while a *ritenuto* on the final three syllables help dissolve a sense of time, thereby intensifying the poetic “eternal” (see Figure 28). One of the greatest contrasts in tonality occurs in m. 26 where Walker utilizes a F minor chord which then directly shifts to D major in m. 27 (see Figure 29). Musically, this is one of the best representations of the dark and bright contrasts discussed in the poem.

Figure 29: “*Tenuto* markings in *Prairie Spring*” mm. 25-27

29

25 *mf* *rit.* **Slightly faster** ♩ = 108
the e - ter - nal, un - re - spon - sive sky.

mf *rit.* **Slightly faster** ♩ = 108
delicately, sparkling

p *rit.*

In m. 27, there is a shift in tempo to ♩ = 108 and it is marked “slightly faster, delicately, sparkling.” When the voice enters in m. 28, Walker indicates in the score to sing “with joy and excitement” on the text “against all of this youth.” This marking helps to further convey the text and mood as children are often excited and joyful. At m. 35, the melodic line consists of repeated eighth notes on the pitches D5 and B4. The repeated pitches and eighth-note rhythmic pattern are sung on the text “flashing like a star out of the twilight” (see Figure 30). This pattern is another example of text painting as the repeated pitches and rhythm evoke the flashing of a star from the text. In m. 37, there is another example of text recited on the pitch A4 with a tremolo in the right hand of the piano part as Walker draws the attention to the text, again referencing the raw joy and excitement that is prevalent in young children (see Figure 30). The original tempo returns in m. 38 as the piano part consists of an arpeggiated triplet pattern ascending to the climax of the song as the vocalist sings “singing and singing.”

Figure 30: "Alternating thirds" mm. 34-37

30

34
plowed fields, ___ flash-ing like a star out of the twi - light, ___

3
3
3

Rec. *Rec.*

37 *recited on pitch*
Youth with its unsupportable sweeteners, its fierce necessity, its sharp desire,

p

(*Rec.*)

In m. 47, there is a marking of a "slow arpeggio" when singing the word "dusk" (see Figure 31). Although there is no indication to connect to the next song, as indicated in several of the earlier songs, it is very obvious that Walker wants the songs to connect as the octave triplet note pattern at the end of this song continues in the introduction of the next song. Walker does include a *caesura* marking in m. 49 which acts as a brief pause at the end of the song right before the reprise and the end of the cycle.

Figure 31: "Ending of Prairie Spring" mm. 44-49

44

Out of the lips of si - lence, — out of the earth - ly

mf

(*And.*)

47

p dusk. —

molto rit.

slow arpeggio

p

molto rit.

8^{va}-----,

(*And.*)

2:00

Walker | *Prairie Songs* | 6. Prairie Spring

Performance Considerations

This song contains the largest sections of text recited on pitch. Therefore, establishing a “free” rhythm within these sections is vital for the coordination of the vocal line and the piano part. Walker has given the singer adequate time to recite these lines. One of the lines that is the most tempting to rush is “Youth with its unsupportable sweeteners, its fierce necessity, its sharp desire.” This is due to the length of the line and the fact that Walker set it over one measure. In

order not to rush and for clarity of text, the singer must take a brief pause after the words “sweeteners”, “necessity”, and “desire”. This ensures a “free” rhythm of text that is clear and understood.

7. “Prairie-reprise”

The final song of the cycle is exactly what it is entitled—a reprise. The range of this song is similar to the first song being from B3 to E5 with a tessitura of D4 to B4. This song is approximately one minute and forty-five seconds long and is a section of Walker’s excerpt from Sandburg’s “Prairie.” As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this poem is essential to the overall structure and unity of the work.

Prairie

O prairie mother, I am your daughter.
I have loved the prairie as a woman with a heart shot full of pain over
love.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky
moon of fire or a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy
in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

As the reprise begins, the piano part begins with one measure of an octave B5 to B4 eighth note pattern. Following this measure, the *tremolo* pattern returns in the right hand of the piano part which is reflective of the *tremolos* from the previous song “Prairie Dawn” (see Figure 32). The voice enters in m. 7, establishing the

return to the original E minor key of the first song. The text at the opening of this song shifts from reflective, as the speaker remembers the prairie lands, to the poet referring to the prairie as “her mother.” In the original poem, the speaker is referenced as a boy; however, Walker changes the line to “I am your daughter” as the cycle was composed for a woman.

Figure 32: “Opening of reprise” mm. 1-8

32

7. Prairie – reprise

Carl Sandburg

very gently (8va RH only)

5 *p tenderly*
O prai - rie moth - er,

ped. ped. ped. ped.

The text goes on to say that she “has loved the prairie as a woman with a heart shot full of pain over love.” This melodic phrase descends to a B3 (the same pitch

referenced twenty-five times in the first song of the cycle). This pitch is also part of the B major chord in m. 14 as Walker restates mm. 26-33. There are slight changes to the melodic line, and it is the interval of a fourth lower (see Figure 33). The impression is almost an exact restatement from the first song. Although the melody is essentially a restatement of mm. 26-33 of the first song, the piano part is completely different. Instead of incorporating the four sixteenth-note pattern from the first song, Walker incorporates the arpeggiated triplet pattern seen frequently throughout the work (see Figure 33). This pattern was used as text painting multiple times throughout the work, creating imagery such as the prairie grass blowing in the wind and flowing water. Walker uses this pattern here to unify the prairie themes as well as the entire song cycle.

Figure 33: "First restatement of phrase from 1. Prairie" mm. 13-21

33

13 *cresc., with increased intensity*
 heart shot full of pain o - ver love. Here I know I will

16 *(cresc.) mf*
 thirst for _____ noth - ing so much as one more sun-rise or a

19
 sky moon of fire or a riv - er moon of wa - ter. _____

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (measures 13-15) features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment with triplets and a glissandi effect. The second system (measures 16-18) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment with triplets and a *mf* dynamic. The third system (measures 19-21) concludes the phrase with a final vocal line and piano accompaniment, including a glissandi effect.

In m. 24, Walker restates an exact repetition of the vocal line from the first song in mm. 36-49 (see Figure 34). In m. 38, the piano part has a rolling chord as the singer sings the final "O prairie mother, I am your daughter." During this line the piano part drops out bringing the final focus to the voice part and text (see Figure 35). In m. 42, the *glissandi* return from the opening of the first song (see Figure 35). There is also another instruction to the singer to move hand

across the stage to the *glissandi* to end the final visual and aural representation of the open expanse prairie lands.

Figure 34: "Second restatement of phrase from 1. Prairie" mm. 25-35

34
25

sings to me in the fore - noon

27 *mf*
and I know in the night I rest
(RH quieter, less intrusive)

30
eas - y in the prai - rie arms, on the prai - rie heart.

fade out *p*

33 *p* *(p)*
Hmm

Figure 35: "Closing *glissandi*" mm. 38-45

38 **Slower** (*p*) *tenderly*

O prai - rie moth - er, I am your daugh - ter.

Slower

42 **rit. to end** Singer moves hand across stage (as in first song)

rit. to end
"prairie glissando"
(as in first song)

p

(Reo.)

Performance Considerations

The performance aspects of this reprise are very similar to the aspects discussed earlier in this document. The restatement of several musical phrases and themes from earlier songs requires the singer to deliver them with a new energy and intention. For example, the restatement of the line "Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise and a sky moon of fire or a river moon of water" should shift from yearning to be with the prairie to a

statement of peace with the prairie. In addition, the repeated gesture to move hand across the stage at the close of the cycle should be different from the choices made at the beginning of the cycle. As the poet has rejoined the prairie, one might choose to represent “the broad expanse of the prairie” gesture with both hands on both *glissandi* rather than one like at the beginning of the cycle. Thus, establishing a true distinction of intention for the close of the cycle.

Conclusion

Walker’s distinctive compositional style and integration of unique musical elements throughout *Prairie Songs*, creates thematic unity throughout the entire work, making it a distinct, contemporary American song cycle. Her utilization of text painting, themes and motives, and text emphasis along with her intense focus on the central imagery found within the poetry, allowed Walker to evoke vivid musical images of life on the prairie. Maintaining a central focus on the theme of the prairie allowed Walker to create unity throughout the work, taking both performers and listeners on a musical journey to the prairie. The result of the combination of these compositional techniques is an exquisite musical depiction of the spirit, heart, and land of the prairie.

CHAPTER THREE

Walker's Compositional Style and Compositional Process of *Prairie Songs*

Music is a powerful language which can express emotions and form. It is this combination of the two which is of interest to me.

-Gwyneth Walker⁵¹

As mentioned in the first chapter, Walker's compositional style has been compared to that of Aaron Copland; however, Walker states that her style contains a greater sense of humor. When asked about her compositional style, she commented:

If people ask me to describe my style I say, I think I sound like Aaron Copland with a sense of humor. And then people say, oh okay, you know because it is fairly tonal and sometimes melodic, but he wasn't nearly as funny as I am. So that's the difference.⁵²

Despite Walker's songs being largely written for high voice, many of her songs are vocally accessible for all performers. Each of Walker's songs are composed with detailed attention to the setting of the text, dramatic elements, harmony, melody, and overall structure.

Although they continue to gain popularity, there are still many teachers and performers who are unaware of Gwyneth Walker and her compositions. Walker's songs offer varying levels of difficulty but, in general, are songs which all levels of singers can perform. This discussion of her compositional style is meant to serve as a starting point for the study of Walker's songs. Her unique

⁵¹ Gwyneth Walker to Corin and Students, January 29, 2004, personal email, www.gwynethwalker.com

⁵² Gwyneth Walker, interview by author, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NE, 9 September 2020.

compositional style, unwavering attention to detail, and commitment to song accessibility provide a strong argument that her songs deserve a permanent place in contemporary solo vocal repertoire.

Text Setting

Reflecting her preference for American poetry, all but her *La Ternura* are set to English texts or English translations. When asked about her choice in poetry, she stated, “When selecting poetry, I prefer American poetry. I’m an American person, and I have occasionally used other poetry... but eventually I thought, just let me go back to my America.”⁵³ Poetry selection is vitally important to Walker’s compositional process as the music is often composed to reflect and enhance the images and feelings invoked by the text. Therefore, the study and interpretation of the text is a key consideration when preparing and performing Walker’s solo songs.

Walker employs several different textural effects to help emphasize the words and to help the singer effectively deliver them. For example, throughout *Prairie Songs*, Walker includes several instances of spoken text. This not only brings the focus to the text, but also makes it easier for the audience to comprehend. At the beginning of many of her songs, she suggests that the singer read the poetry aloud before the performance. By doing this the audience members have an opportunity to hear the poetry and contemplate before the song is sung.

⁵³ Ibid

Like many composers, Walker often adapts the poetry, even omitting lines from the original poem. Walker adapts the original text not only to fit her musical depiction of the poem but also to make the poetry easier for the audience to understand. For example, in *Prairie Songs*, Walker only utilizes eight strophes from Sandburg's original twenty-two strophe poem. Walker selected strophes that paired well with the Cather poems, unifying the underlying prairie theme. She also often repeats several phrases from the poetry to further emphasize the text. Throughout *Prairie Songs*, Walker repeats the lines "Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire or a river moon of water" and "The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart" in the first and last songs from the cycle. This repetition strongly emphasizes the elements of day and night within the prairie life, focusing on the familiarity and comfort felt by the poet.

The incorporation of *quasi-recitative* sections is another tool Walker frequently utilizes throughout many of her art songs to further enhance the text. Throughout *Prairie Songs*, there are many examples where Walker sets the poetry in a recitative-like manner. The repetitive nature of this technique brings emphasis to specific areas of text, poetic ideas, moods, and themes throughout her works.

In addition, Walker's songs are often set syllabically with little use of ornamentation; this sets the focus on the text rather than the specific melodic notes or characteristics. Finally, Walker uses spoken text and recited text on a singular pitch to emphasize certain words and to enhance the overall mood and emotions from the song or work.

Melodic Characteristics

Due to Walker's early exposure to folk music, her melodic lines are generally relatively easy to sing and are very memorable. Her melodies contain very little chromaticism and often move stepwise or triadically. These specific characteristics can be seen throughout many of the melodies in *Prairie Songs*. For example, in "Prairie Dawn," during the line "...through purple mist ascending and the flair of water ditches silver in the light...", the melodic line contains both stepwise motion and alternating third intervals.

Although there are times when Walker employs an octave leap, they are few and far between and are often accompanied by a breath, offering ample time for the singer to appropriately approach the leap. Most of Walker's melodies feature a medium tessitura and the vocal range is generally not taxing. Therefore, when Walker utilizes the higher range of the voice, it is usually for dramatic effect or in the climax of the song. For example, in "Going Home" from *Prairie Songs*, Walker sets the word "singing" on the pitch G5 (the highest note in the cycle) as the start to the climax of this song.

Another melodic aspect that is often found throughout Walker's songs is the use of a repeated pitch. For example, in the second song, "Prairie" from *Prairie Songs*, Walker repeats the pitch B3 thirty-two times. This repetition is used to further emphasize the text and the overall poetic mood; repetition brings recurring attention to specific words and phrases, repeatedly enforcing the trance-like motive, reiterating the poet's state of reflection.

Harmonic Characteristics

Due to her study of traditional harmony, Walker composes with some standard harmonic elements but also explores experimental harmonies that emerged out of the 20th century. Some of these methods include quartal harmonies, tone clusters, and non-traditional key relationships and chord progressions. At times, her harmonies are difficult to analyze due to the lack of a key signature and her use of modal harmony. Although her harmonies are largely tonal, she frequently shifts tonality and rarely stays in one tonal center for very long. These shifts can be seen throughout almost every song in *Prairie Songs*, often employing a mediant tonal shift. For example, in "Prairie Spring," Walker employs a shift from D major directly into F minor. In general, her harmonic language is full of non-functional tonality, resulting in her own sophisticated and unique harmonic style.

Tempo and Rhythmic Characteristics

Throughout her songs, Walker employs frequent changes in tempo and meter, blurring the lines of formal sections. Although these are not defining characteristics of a through-composed song, they create a natural tendency for many of her songs to be through-composed, including every song in *Prairie Songs*. These frequent changes in tempo, once again, help enhance the mood or energy felt in the poem. Walker combines this with sections of recited text (which are indicated to be performed with free rhythm), drawing the focus to the text while also allowing the singer rhythmic flexibility in the delivery of the text.

Another frequent element found in many of Walker's songs is her use of duplets against triplets. Throughout *Prairie Songs*, Walker frequently uses these rhythmic values in opposition between the vocal and piano parts, requiring each part to be secure in their corresponding rhythmic value. Finally, Walker includes many eighth- and sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand of the piano part to convey energy and imagery from the text. These rhythmic patterns can be seen within many of her songs, including several of the songs in *Prairie Songs*. One demonstration of this is present in "Going Home," within the "energy of the train in motion" motive.

Accompaniment Characteristics

Almost every song in Walker's catalogue begins with a piano introduction that evokes images from the poetry. All but one of the *Prairie Songs* begins with an introduction where Walker both establishes the poetic image and introduces important themes and motives. She also uses the piano part for musical commentary. For example, in "Prairie (#5), random white-note clusters within the accompaniment musically mimic "little kisses", enhancing the text "...and kissing bridges..." The white-note clusters have an ascending and descending pattern that the pianist is meant to follow; however, the actual pitches are random and could be different each time, creating a musical depiction of "little kisses." There are also times where the piano part directly quotes the vocal line—a literal repetition to draw attention and focus.

Due to the importance of the text throughout all of her songs, Walker believes that the accompanist must have an equal understanding of the text. She states:

In general, when accompanying any songs by any composer, I believe it is crucially important for the accompanist to be fully aware of the texts. Although the accompanist does not "sing" the words, the pianist should know these words every bit as well as the singer and should always have them fully in mind throughout. Only then can the true emotional depths of a song be found. In this sense, the pianist is a crucial and important partner in this endeavor -- as they must provide accompaniment which is sensitive and thoughtful to the ENTIRE conception of the song, not just the raw notes on the page.⁵⁴

This strong, equal comprehension of the text among all performers is crucial to the correct interpretation and performance of Walker's songs.

Dramatic Characteristics

One of Walker's most interesting compositional characteristics is her use of dramatic elements. Many of her songs include non-traditional art song elements such as readings, stage direction, and movement or gesture. These are important tools for Walker as she uses them to enhance the natural drama present in her solo songs. There are many examples of Walker's dramatic elements in *Prairie Songs*. For example, in the first song, "Prairie", Walker directs the singer to move their hand across the stage as the piano plays two *glissandi*. This gesture is meant to represent the broad expanse of the prairie. This gives a visual representation of the prairie as well as an aural one.

Another element that has been previously discussed, but deserves mention in this section, is her use of recited text. The change from singing to speaking adds a dramatic shift, as is seen in the transition to the second song as

⁵⁴ Gwyneth Walker and Carson Cooman to Josh, September 12, 2005, personal email, www.gwynethwalker.com

well as in the third song, "Prairie," in *Prairie Songs*. Finally, Walker often gives specific instructions to the performers including specific performance movements and locations, as well as stage direction. For example, in the transition to the second song, Walker indicates that the singer should walk to center stage before reciting some of the text. All of these elements are used in a unique way to incorporate more theatrical and dramatic elements into the traditional art song genre.

Compositional Process of *Prairie Songs*

When asked about her knowledge of the poets selected for *Prairie Songs* prior to the composition of the cycle, Walker commented:

I actually did not know Willa Cather's poetry at all. I was hoping that she had written some poetry because I really couldn't deal with all of the volumes that she wrote. I didn't know that she had poems and I was lucky that I found some. But there weren't enough of them to make a song cycle, so I stumbled upon the Sandburg because I had been using some of his other poems...and there I saw his prairie poem that one, many multifaceted poem, that he had. And I said oh, I could chop that up and stick that between the Willa Cather and that would work. So, I sort of knew Carl Sandburg's works, but I didn't know any of Willa Cather's.⁵⁵

It is very interesting that Walker admits to having no prior knowledge of the poets as she was able to accurately depict each author's experience of the prairie while eloquently unifying their works to create a vivid musical depiction of the prairie lands.

⁵⁵ Gwyneth Walker, interview by the author, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NE, 19 September 2020.

Another interesting factor in the compositional process of the *Prairie Songs* is Walker's lack of visualization of the texts. She instead insists that she "feels" the poems, sensing the feelings of the poet. She comments:

Well, I think I feel them. For some reason, I am able to translate feelings into music better than some people. There are things that I don't do as well as some composers, but my strength seems to be that my feelings come out in the music. It's just a gift and so I go with it! But it's not that I see the prairie. Instead, I sense how Carl Sandburg or Willa Cather felt in a certain poem, and I tried to capture that, but I can't picture the prairie. I can just feel what that poet was saying.⁵⁶

Focusing on the feelings and emotions experienced by the poets, rather than the visual aspects of the prairie, allowed Walker to create a much more intimate connection between the music and the poems and, ultimately, a more cohesive composition.

Prior to the cycle, Walker admitted that she had visited Nebraska several different times but was so involved with her work that she did not really "see" it. After studying and performing *Prairie Songs*, this comment was quite surprising as Walker's unification of the texts and musical depictions of the prairie suggest that she had an intimate knowledge of Nebraska and its prairie lands. When asked about depicting the Nebraska prairie she stated:

When I write the music, I'm in that world. My mind is in that world. I've already told you that I was working on the *Prairie Songs* while sitting in the church. When I was working on the Sierra songs, I was in Vermont in someone's home with a piano and a little desk. It is perfect for me. I guess I was so wrapped up in composing that I had stayed in my little room for the whole day. And my friend, Nancy, whose house I was staying in, her sisters who were visiting didn't know anything about music or me and they thought that this was odd this person was upstairs and hadn't

⁵⁶ Ibid

left the room. They were still trying to get a handle on who I was, I guess, so I came downstairs at the end of the afternoon and they said “Gwyneth, we’ve been so worried about you. You have been cooped up upstairs are you alright?” and I said, “I’ve been on top of Yosemite. I’ve been on a glacier!” I mean I had been all over the place. It had never occurred to me that physically I was in this little room and that someone might think that I was confined. So, I have been across the prairie and I’ve been to the Fourth of July picnic and heard “The Star-Spangled Banner” even though I really haven’t. But I have. And that’s just how it works. I haven’t been to most of these places, physically, but I have in my imagination.⁵⁷

Walker’s creativity and use of imagination bring the composition to life, allowing the performers and audience members to “visit” Nebraska and life on the prairie from anywhere.

When asked of any differences in the compositional process of *Prairie Songs* in contrast to her other song cycles, Walker commented:

This is when I thought of my other song cycle *Songs from the High Sierra*. I realized how similar the process was to create these works—emphasis on the fact that these are song cycles. There are many songs involved. How do I structure them? That is the critical thing. You don’t just say, oh well there are six songs so here we go. We will start at number one and I’ll end up at number six. That doesn’t work. What works is that you plan the whole process. You pick the poems that you like and even if that means bringing back some of the first poem at the end. I believe that’s what I did here...So, I already had the beginning and the end. And then I had to figure out what I wanted to go in between. I knew that I wanted to have the Willa Cather poems with the Carl Sandburg interspersed. So, the whole thing is an overall plan.⁵⁸

From this statement, it is clear that Walker composed *Prairie Songs* in small sections, often times random and out of order. This reflects Walker’s incredible ability to create unification throughout the poetry, musical themes, and motives

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

of a cycle, each individual song coming together to form a complete work centered on one poetic idea—the prairie.

One of the final steps in Walker's compositional process of *Prairie Songs* was to actually put notes down on the page. She continues:

I realized that I planned your piece in about five different states of the United States. I even did one during a church event where I rehearsed with the choir and there was time before the service started and while everyone else was eating coffee cake or something or other and I was sitting there with this in my lap, once again, to finally get it to something that I want. This was very similar to what I did for *Songs for the High Sierra*. The planning was done in bits and pieces as I traveled so I could kind of mull it over and then get to the final. Then finally, the last thing that happens is you put notes on the page. But you don't worry if you can finish the piece because you probably have already written the end in the beginning. It's more just filling it in.⁵⁹

This method of composition, much like writing a paper, involves detailed planning, initially constructing only the “bones” of the work; then, later, developing and refining it to create one fluent composition. This creates an interesting dynamic for *Prairie Songs*, as it was ultimately planned and composed throughout five different states during Walker's travels.

In the original manuscript, Walker included several more dramatic elements that were omitted from the final score. When asked about this change, Walker stated:

I was going to have the singer sort of move between different places to sing, the Sandburg, the Cather, and then maybe to speak. The more that I planned it out logistically it started to make me dizzy! It seemed that there were too many places to go and too many things to do. I thought, maybe just inherently in the songs that there was plenty of drama and for your role in all of this that not only do you sing, but sometimes you read lines of poetry just

⁵⁹ Ibid

per se, sometimes you read sections of poetry where there's portions of piano accompaniment, sometimes you sing a rhythm on a pitch like a recitative and like three other things you do, and I thought that this is enough variety for what the singer does to get the words out. You are welcome to use the stage as you want. I was just trying to think now do I want two music stands? And then she reads in between? Well, I just couldn't make it work. Simply, it would be different if there was a definite A and B and an A and a B but this had readings and then crossing over and I just didn't do that. I figured between the straight singing and the recitatives it would be enough.⁶⁰

Although Walker omits some of her initial dramatic elements, it is clear from the above statement that she feels she left enough in the score to convey all of the dramatic elements and aspects of life on the prairie. However, she also reiterates the fact that this work is just that—one work. Therefore, it must be performed as one. If the songs were to be performed individually, the songs would not make poetic or musical sense and would lack a large portion of the drama that is apparent when performed as a whole. The end result, despite the omissions, is a unique musical portrayal of Sandburg, Cather, and Walker's interpretation of the prairie.

Although Walker has made numerous comments pertaining to the importance of both the performers and audience members possessing a strong understanding of the text, she further comments on the relevancy of this within *Prairie Songs*:

If you can't get in the spirit and if you don't know what the poem is about, or the song is about then you aren't going to be able to produce it. So, it's very important to just read the poem as a poem and not be insecure saying that I didn't study literature very much in college. It doesn't matter what you studied, it's a matter of what you sense the poem means to you. You need to realize that your audience has probably never heard the poem either, so they are not

⁶⁰ Ibid

going to be more scholarly than you. They just have to know what it is that you feel is coming out in this song.⁶¹

This statement holds true when performing *Prairie Songs*, as the singer is often taking on the role of describing her surroundings, portraying the emotions of the poet, and, at times, the prairie itself simultaneously. Thus, the performer must have an intimate knowledge of both poets' works to create an accurate portrayal of the poetic ideas through music.

⁶¹ Ibid

CHAPTER FOUR

Final Summary and Conclusions

It is a gift to create music. And, it is a gift beyond planning when the message of the music resonates within performers and audiences. It is their gift back to the composer.

-Gwyneth Walker⁶²

Gwyneth Walker's songs are not only a reflection of her childhood, her education, her Quaker faith and egalitarian beliefs, but also of her joy in composing music that everyone can listen to and enjoy. When asked if there was only one genre of music that she could continue to write for she commented:

People have always sung and always will sing. That is universal...I am a formalist. Anyone who knows my music would say, "the piece did not go on too long." People want a well-formed piece of music. They want poetry that is thoughtful, they want a setting that is sensitive, and they want the thing to end when it should end. Bravo!⁶³

Due to her attention to creating songs that are well-formed with thoughtful poetry, Walker's songs are accessible to many singers who possess varying levels of musicianship. One reason why Walker's songs are so accessible is because of her careful attention to detail in setting the text. As previously mentioned, Walker takes a great deal of time selecting and studying the poetry which she chooses to set. Like Walker, anyone who wishes to study or perform her songs should do the same thing. By doing this, the performers can truly understand not

⁶² Gwyneth Walker, "Thoughts on Music: Reflections on a Musical Career," <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/e-thought.html>

⁶³ Gwyneth Walker, "Words and Music," <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/e-words.html>

only Walker's musical intentions but the central themes and intentions of the poetry.

It is Walker's hope that these poetic images are not only heard throughout *Prairie Songs*, but also throughout her many other vocal works. Her unique compositional style of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic techniques, combined with her use of dramatic elements, results in over ninety songs that are truly enjoyable to perform and hear. Although her melodies are sometimes simple, they have a memorable effect, using simplicity as a tool to direct attention to the text. Walker's focus and enhancement of the text is found throughout each song in *Prairie Songs*. Walker incorporates various compositional techniques such as *quasi-recitativo*, recited pitch, restatements of text, and text painting to musically paint the images found with Sandburg and Cather's poetry.

It is the hope of the author that the analysis and discussion of *Prairie Songs* has brought the reader an insight to the technical aspects involved with the songs throughout the cycle. In addition, the reader might see the importance of communicating the underlying images, moods, and emotions of the poetry, as Walker's songs are primarily driven by the text. It is also the author's hope that by composing this document, Walker's songs will continue to gain popularity and will continue to be studied and performed, as her songs certainly deserve a permanent place in the repertoire of contemporary American art song.

Appendix A

The poems in the order of the cycle All poems are Public Domain

Carl Sandburg selections from **Prairie** in *Cornhuskers* (1918), adapted by Gwyneth Walker

Prairie by Carl Sandburg

I WAS born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a knowledge...

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and cow pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire or a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the pistons hiss and the wheels curse.
On the prairie the overland fits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

Willa Cather selections from *April Twilight* (1923), adapted by Gwyneth Walker

Going Home by Willa Cather

(Burlington Route)

How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;
Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.
The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;
The sharp curves and windings left behind,
The roadway wide open,
(The crooked straight
And the rough places plain.)
They run smoothly, they run softly too.
There is not noise enough to trouble the lightest sleeper.
Nor jolting to wake the weary-hearted.

I open my window and let the air blow in,
 The air of morning,
 That smells of grass and earth—
 Earth, the grain-giver.
 How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;
 Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.
 The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;
 They run like running water,
 Like Youth, running away...
 They spin bright along the bright rails,
 Singing and humming,
 Singing and humming.
 They run remembering.
 They run rejoicing,
 As if they, too, were going home

Prairie by Carl Sandburg

I am here when the cities are gone.
 I am here before the cities come.
 I nourished the lonely men on horses.
 I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.
 I am dust of men.

Prairie Dawn by Willa Cather

A crimson fire that vanquishes the stars;
 A pungent odor from the dusty sage;
 A sudden stirring of the huddled herds;
 A breaking of the distant table-lands
 Through purple mists ascending, and the flare
 Of water ditches silver in the light;
 A swift, bright lance hurled low across the world;
 A sudden sickness for the hills of home.

Prairie by Carl Sandburg

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.
 They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driving steers
 to the railroad cattle pens.
 They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to
 a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and
 Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the
 bypaths and kissing bridges.
 They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying

good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.
They are mine.

Prairie Spring by Willa Cather

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and somber and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
The toiling horses, the tired men;
The long empty roads,
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
The eternal, unresponsive sky.
Against all this, Youth,
Flaming like the wild roses,
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
Youth with its unsupportable sweetness,
Its fierce necessity,
Its sharp desire,
Singing and singing,
Out of the lips of silence,
Out of the earthy dusk.

Prairie by Carl Sandburg

O prairie mother, I am your daughter.
I have loved the prairie as a woman with a heart shit full of pain over love.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon
of fire or a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the
prairie arms, on the prairie heart.

Original Sandburg *Prairie* Poem:

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes
of its women, gave me a song and a slogan.

Here the water went down, the icebergs slid with gravel, the gaps and the valleys
hissed, and the black loam came, and the yellow sandy loam.

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, here now
 a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber
 claims and cow pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches.
 Here the gray geese go five hundred miles and back with a wind under their
 wings honking the cry for a new home.
 Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky
 moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water.

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the
 prairie arms, on the prairie heart. . .

After the sunburn of the day
 handling a pitchfork at a hayrack,
 after the eggs and biscuit and coffee,
 the pearl-gray haystacks
 in the gloaming
 are cool prayers
 to the harvest hands.

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the
 pistons hiss and the wheels curse.
 On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil
 between them muffle the pistons and cheer the
 wheels. . .

I am here when the cities are gone.
 I am here before the cities come.
 I nourished the lonely men on horses.
 I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.
 I am dust of men.

The running water babbled to the deer, the cottontail, the gopher.
 You came in wagons, making streets and schools,
 Kin of the ax and rifle, kin of the plow and horse,
 Singing Yankee Doodle, Old Dan Tucker, Turkey in the Straw,
 You in the coonskin cap at a log house door hearing a lone wolf howl,
 You at a sod house door reading the blizzards and chinooks let loose from
 Medicine Hat,
 I am dust of your dust, as I am brother and mother
 To the copper faces, the worker in flint and clay,
 The singing women and their sons a thousand years ago
 Marching single file the timber and the plain.

I hold the dust of these amid changing stars.
 I last while old wars are fought, while peace broods mother-like,
 While new wars arise and the fresh killings of young men.
 I fed the boys who went to France in great dark days.
 Appomattox is a beautiful word to me and so is Valley Forge and the Marne and
 Verdun,

I who have seen the red births and the red deaths
Of sons and daughters, I take peace or war, I say nothing and wait.

Have you seen a red sunset drip over one of my cornfields, the shore of night
stars, the wave lines of dawn up a wheat valley?
Have you heard my threshing crews yelling in the chaff of a strawpile and the
running wheat of the wagonboards, my
cornhuskers, my harvest hands hauling crops, singing dreams of women,
worlds, horizons? . . .

Rivers cut a path on flat lands.
The mountains stand up.
The salt oceans press in
And push on the coast lines.
The sun, the wind, bring rain
And I know what the rainbow writes across the east or west in a half-
circle:
A love-letter pledge to come again.. . .

Towns on the Soo Line,
Towns on the Big Muddy,
Laugh at each other for cubs
And tease as children.

Omaha and Kansas City, Minneapolis and St. Paul, sisters in a house together,
throwing slang, growing up.
Towns in the Ozarks, Dakota wheat towns, Wichita, Peoria, Buffalo, sisters
throwing slang, growing up.. . .

Out of prairie-brown grass crossed with a streamer of wigwam smoke—out of a
smoke pillar, a blue promise—out of
wild ducks woven in greens and purples—
Here I saw a city rise and say to the peoples round world: Listen, I am strong, I
know what I want.
Out of log houses and stumps—canoes stripped from tree-sides—flatboats
coaxed with an ax from the timber
claims—in the years when the red and the white men met—the houses and
streets rose.

A thousand red men cried and went away to new places for corn and women: a
million white men came and put up skyscrapers,
threw out rails and wires, feelers to the salt sea: now the smokestacks bite the
skyline with stub teeth.

In an early year the call of a wild duck woven in greens and purples: now the
riveter's chatter, the police patrol, the
song-whistle of the steamboat.

To a man across a thousand years I offer a handshake.

I say to him: Brother, make the story short, for the stretch of a thousand years is short....

What brothers these in the dark?
 What eaves of skyscrapers against a smoke moon?
 These chimneys shaking on the lumber shanties
 When the coal boats plow by on the river—
 The hunched shoulders of the grain elevators—
 The flame sprockets of the sheet steel mills
 And the men in the rolling mills with their shirts off
 Playing their flesh arms against the twisting wrists of steel:
 what brothers these
 in the dark
 of a thousand years? . . .

A headlight searches a snowstorm.
 A funnel of white light shoots from over the pilot of the Pioneer Limited crossing
 Wisconsin.

In the morning hours, in the dawn,
 The sun puts out the stars of the sky
 And the headlight of the Limited train.

The fireman waves his hand to a country school teacher on a bobsled.
 A boy, yellow hair, red scarf and mittens, on the bobsled, in his lunch box a pork
 chop sandwich and a V of gooseberry pie.

The horses fathom a snow to their knees.
 Snow hats are on the rolling prairie hills.
 The Mississippi bluffs wear snow hats. . . .

Keep your hogs on changing corn and mashes of grain,
 O farmerman.
 Cram their insides till they waddle on short legs
 Under the drums of bellies, hams of fat.
 Kill your hogs with a knife slit under the ear.
 Hack them with cleavers.
 Hang them with hooks in the hind legs. . . .

A wagonload of radishes on a summer morning.
 Sprinkles of dew on the crimson-purple balls.
 The farmer on the seat dangles the reins on the rumps of dapple-gray horses.
 The farmer's daughter with a basket of eggs dreams of a new hat to wear to the
 county fair. . . .

On the left-and right-hand side of the road,
 Marching corn—
 I saw it knee high weeks ago—now it is head high—tassels of red silk creep at
 the ends of the ears. . . .

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.
 They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driving steers
 to the railroad cattle pens.
 They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to
 a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and
 Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the
 bypaths and kissing bridges.
 They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying
 good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.
 They are mine, the old zigzag rail fences, the new barb wire. . . .
 The cornhuskers wear leather on their hands.
 There is no let-up to the wind.
 Blue bandannas are knotted at the ruddy chins.

Falltime and winter apples take on the smolder of the five-o'clock November
 sunset: falltime, leaves, bonfires, stubble,
 the old things go, and the earth is grizzled.
 The land and the people hold memories, even among the anthills and the
 angleworms, among the toads and woodroaches—among
 gravestone writings rubbed out by the rain—they keep old things that never
 grow old.

The frost loosens corn husks.
 The Sun, the rain, the wind
 loosen corn husks.
 The men and women are helpers.
 They are all cornhuskers together.
 I see them late in the western evening
 in a smoke-red dust. . . .

The phantom of a yellow rooster flaunting a scarlet comb, on top of a dung pile
 crying hallelujah to the streaks of daylight,
 The phantom of an old hunting dog nosing in the underbrush for muskrats,
 barking at a coon in a treetop at midnight, chewing
 a bone, chasing his tail round a corncrib,
 The phantom of an old workhorse taking the steel point of a plow across a forty-
 acre field in spring, hitched to a harrow in
 summer, hitched to a wagon among cornshocks in fall,
 These phantoms come into the talk and wonder of people on the front porch of a
 farmhouse late summer nights.
 "The shapes that are gone are here," said an old man with a cob pipe in his teeth
 one night in Kansas with a hot
 wind on the alfalfa. . . .

Look at six eggs
 In a mockingbird's nest.

Listen to six mockingbirds
 Flinging follies of O-be-joyful

Over the marshes and uplands.

Look at songs
Hidden in eggs. . .

When the morning sun is on the trumpet-vine blossoms, sing at the kitchen pans:
Shout All Over God's Heaven.

When the rain slants on the potato hills and the sun plays a silver shaft on the
last shower, sing to the bush at the
backyard fence: Mighty Lak a Rose.

When the icy sleet pounds on the storm windows and the house lifts to a great
breath, sing for the outside hills: The Ole

Sheep Done Know the Road, the Young Lambs Must Find the Way. . .

Spring slips back with a girl face calling always: "Any new songs for me? Any
new songs?"

O prairie girl, be lonely, singing, dreaming, waiting—your lover comes—your
child comes—the years creep with
toes of April rain on new-turned sod.

O prairie girl, whoever leaves you only crimson poppies to talk with, whoever
puts a good-by kiss on your lips and never
comes back—

There is a song deep as the falltime redhaws, long as the layer of black loam we
go to, the shine of the morning star over
the corn belt, the wave line of dawn up a wheat valley. . .

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys.

I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love.

Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky
moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water. . .

I speak of new cities and new people.

I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes.

I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down,
a sun dropped in the west.

I tell you there is nothing in the world
only an ocean of to-morrows,
a sky of to-morrows.

I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say
at sundown:

To-morrow is a day.

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Appendix C

A Complete List of Gwyneth Walker's Selected Vocal Music

Songs and cycles for high voice types (soprano, tenor)

- As a Branch in May* (1988) (3'30") ECS#6349 (Soprano [or Treble], Piano)
- As a Branch in May* (1988) (3'30") ECS#6350 (Soprano [or Treble] Duet, Piano)
Text by Gwyneth Walker
- Ballads Alive!* (2015) (25') GW (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto Soli, Piano)
Traditional text (adp. composer)
- Be Thou My Vision* (2016) (4') GW (Voice, Piano)
Traditional text
- Birds of Peace* (2015) (9'05") GW (High Voice, Flute, Piano)
Texts by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Ewan McColl, and Siegfried Sassoon
- Come Life, Shaker Life!* (2017) (21'15") GW (High Voice, Clarinet, Piano, and opt. Children's Chorus) Traditional Shaker texts (adp. composer)
- Crossing the Bar* (2000) (3') ECS#5758 (Voice, Piano)
Text by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- Deep Peace* (2020) (3' GW (High Voice, Piano)
- Deep Peace* (2009) (3'15') GW (Soprano, Alto, String Quartet)
Traditional text (adp. composer)
- The Dying of the Light* (2011) (10'10") ECS#8329 (Tenor, Piano)
Optional accompaniment for string quartet available.
Score #8330, Parts #8331
Texts by Dylan Thomas
- Emily! (from New England)* (2014) (14') ECS#8317 (Soprano, Piano)
Version for soprano, clarinet, and piano available.
Version for soprano, clarinet, and string quartet available.
Texts by Emily Dickinson
- Good Shepherd* (2008) (4') ECS#8071 (Two Tenors or Two Treble Voices, Organ)
Text by Henry W. Baker (adp. composer)
- The Grace of the World* (2020) (7'30") (High Voice, Piano)
Texts by Wendell Berry
- Handfuls of Love!* (2006) (6'30") website download (Soprano, Piano)
- Handfuls of Love!* (2007) (6'30") website download (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Piano)

Traditional Shaker texts

I've Known Rivers (2018) (12') ECS#8825 (Tenor, Piano)

Texts by Langston Hughes

The Laughter of Women (2000) (16') website download (Soprano, Violin, Piano)

The Laughter of Women (2002) (16') website download (Soprano, Clarinet, Piano)

Texts by Lisel Mueller

Let the Life I've Lived Speak for Me (2016) (3') ECS#8662 (Voice, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

Let Us Break Bread Together (2017) (3') ECS#8649 (High Voice, Piano)

Version for string orchestra available. Score #8649A;

Parts #8649B

Traditional text (adp. composer)

Love Shall Live Forever (2017) (8'15") ECS#8918 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Sidney Lanier, W. B. Yeats, Lord Byron, and from the Song of Solomon

(adp.composer)

Mornings Innocent (1993) (12') ECS#5132 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by May Swenson

Mother to Son (2007) (3'45") ECS#8469 (Soprano, Piano)

Text by Langston Hughes

My Father Lived His Soul (2016) (5'45") GW (Voice, Piano)

Text by E. E. Cummings

My Love Walks in Velvet (1978) (4'30") ECS#4515 (Medium/High Voice, Piano)

Text by Gwyneth Walker

No Ordinary Woman! (1997) (15') ECS#5728 (Soprano, Piano)

Version for string orchestra available (Score ECS#6541, Parts ECS#6542)

"Selections" version (two songs) available for soprano, clarinet, and piano

Texts by Lucille Clifton

On Christmas Eve (2020) (9'30") GW (Soprano, Brass Quintet, Percussion, and Organ)

Traditional texts and Christina Rossetti (adp. Composer)

Passion and Remembrance (2019) (11'30") ECS#8879 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Peace, My Heart (2012) (3'15") ECS#8073 (Voice, Piano)

Peace, My Heart (2012) (3'15") ECS#8074 (Voice, Opt. harmony, Piano)

Text by Rabindranath Tagore (adp. composer)

Peace Like a River (2020) (3'30") GW (Voice or Treble Duet, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

The Peace of Wild Things (2009) (2'45'') GW (Soprano, Tenor, Piano)

Text by Wendell Berry

Prairie Songs (2020) (14'30'') ECS#8994 (Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Carl Sandburg and Willa Cather

The Promised Land (2009) (16') ECS#8247 (Soprano, Piano)

Version for orchestra available. (Score ECS#8245, Parts ECS#8246)

Traditional texts (adp. composer)

Psalms 23 (1998, 2000) (2'15'') ECS#5740 (Voice, Piano)

Text from the Bible

Sacred Songs (2012–13) ECS#8066 (Voice, Organ)

Collection of nine songs, transcribed from original versions, various authors

Sacred Songs, Vol. 2 (2020) GW (High Voice, Organ)

Collection of thirteen songs in four groupings, various authors

Sleep, Little Bird (1982) (2'45'') website download (Voices, Flute, Piano — various versions) Text by Jean Merrill

Songs for the Christ-Child (2013) (16') ECS#8121 (Voice, Piano)

Traditional texts (adp. composer)

Songs from the High Sierra (2014) (15'15'') ECS#8318 (High Voice, Piano)

Text by John Muir (adp. composer)

Songs for Voice and Guitar (1966–79) (20') website download (Voice, Guitar)

Texts by A. E. Housman, George Mackay Brown, E. E. Cummings, Gwyneth Walker, and Anonymous

Songs of Ecstasy (2012) (11') ECS#7934 (Tenor, Organ)

Texts by Thomas Merton

Songs of the Night Wind (1982) (15') website download (Soprano, Cello)

Songs of the Night Wind (1982) (15') website download (Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Louise Bogan, Lisel Mueller, and H.D.

Songs of the Spirit (2013) (17'30'') ECS#8123 (Soprano, Piano)

Traditional texts (adp. composer)

The Sun is Love (2002) (20') ECS#6162 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Jelaluddin Rumi (translated by Coleman Barks)

Suffrage Songs (2019) (7'35'') (Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Lucille Clifton and traditional sources (adp. composer)

Tagore: Songs of Heaven and Sky (2020) (6') (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Rabindranath Tagore

La Ternura (Tenderness) (2008) (22') ECS#7576 (Soprano, Piano)

Version for chamber orchestra (oboe, percussion, strings) available (Score
ECS#7577, Parts ECS#7578) Texts by Gabriela Mistral

Though Love Be a Day (1979) (17') ECS#4319 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by E. E. Cummings and Gwyneth Walker

A Thousand Prayers (2014) (13') (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Anne Sexton

Three Songs for Lucille (2007) (5') website download (Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Lucille Clifton

Three Songs on Poetry of E. E. Cummings (2006) (8'30") ECS#6843 (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by E. E. Cummings

Wayfaring Stranger (2020) (3'10") GW (Voice, Piano)

Traditional text

Weave No Cloak Against Tomorrow (1974, rev. 1986) (4') website download (Voice and

Piano)Text by Jean l'Heureux

The Wings of a Dove (2020) (14'20") GW (High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Henry Richard McFayden, Caroline Goodenough, Gerald Manley
Hopkins, and traditional (adp. composer)

Songs and cycles for low voice types (mezzo-soprano, alto, baritone, bass)

As a Branch in May (1988) (3'30") ECS#6349 (Soprano [or Lower Voice], Piano)

As a Branch in May (1988) (3'30") ECS#4309 (Medium Voice, Guitar)

Text by Gwyneth Walker

Ballads Alive! (2015) (25') GW (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto Soli, Piano)

Traditional text(adp. composer)

Be Thou My Vision (2016) (4') GW (Voice, Piano)

Traditional text

Collected Songs for Medium-Low Voice (1978-2003) #6642 (Medium-Low Voice, Piano)

Collection of nine songs transcribed from original versions, various authors

Deep Peace (2009) (3'15") website download (Soprano, Alto, String Quartet)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

The Dying of the Light (2011) (10'10") ECS#8332 (Baritone, Piano)

Optional accompaniment for string orchestra available.

Score #8333, Parts #8334

Texts by Dylan Thomas

Emily! (from New England) (2016) (14') ECS#8460 (Mezzo-Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Emily Dickinson

From the Depths of the Soul (2016) (14'30") website download (Contralto, Viola)

From the Depths of the Soul (2016) (14'30") website download (Contralto, Piano)

From the Depths of the Soul (2017) (14'30") website download (Bass-Baritone, Cello)

From the Depths of the Soul (2017) (14'30") website download (Bass-Baritone, Piano)

Traditional texts (adp. composer)

Handfuls of Love! (2007) (6'30") website download (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Piano)

Traditional texts

I Feel the Spirit (2018) (13'20") website download (Contralto or Baritone, String Trio or

Piano) Four traditional hymns/spirituals arranged for solo voice and strings

I've Known Rivers (2018) (12') ECS#8826 (Baritone, Piano)

Texts by Langston Hughes

The Laughter of Women (2002) (16') website download (Mezzo-Soprano, Clarinet, Piano)

Texts by Lisel Mueller

Let the Life I've Lived Speak for Me (2016) (2'30") ECS#8662 (Voice, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

Let Us Break Bread Together (2017) (3') ECS#8650 (Low Voice, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

Love Shall Live Forever (2017) (8'15") ECS#8919 (Low Voice, Piano)

Texts by Sidney Lanier, W. B. Yeats, Lord Byron, and from the Song of Solomon (adp. composer)

My Father Lived His Soul (2016) (5'45") GW (Voice, Piano)

Text by E. E. Cummings

My Love Walks in Velvet (1978) (4'30") ECS#4516 (Medium/Low Voice, Piano)

Text by Gwyneth Walker

No Ordinary Woman! (1997) (15') ECS#5729 (Mezzo-soprano, Piano)

Texts by Lucille Clifton

Peace Like a River (2020) (3'30") GW (Voice or Treble Duet, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

Peace, My Heart (2012) (3'15") (Voice, Piano)

Text by Rabindranath Tagore (adp. composer)

The Poet's Heart (2009) (17') ECS#7498 (Mezzo-soprano, Piano Quartet)

Parts ECS#7499

Texts by Emily Dickinson

Prairie Songs (2019) (14'30") ECS#8970 (Contralto, Piano)

Texts by Carl Sandburg and Willa Cather

Prayers and Blessings (2004) (10') (Bass-Baritone, Cello, Organ)

Score ECS#6591; Cello part ECS#6592

Prayers and Blessings (2004) (10') ECS#6593 (Bass-Baritone, Piano)

Prayers and Blessings (2015) (10') ECS#8348 (Baritone, Piano)

Texts by Christopher Brunelle (trans.), Saint Francis, and Traditional Gaelic

Sacred Songs (2012–13) ECS#8066 (Voice, Organ)

Collection of nine songs, transcribed from original versions, various authors

Sleep, Little Bird (1982) (2'45") website download (Voices, Flute, Piano -- various versions) Text by Jean Merrill

Songs for the Christ-Child (2013) (16') ECS#8121 (Voice, Piano)

Traditional texts (adp. composer)

Songs in Motion (2015) (16') GW (Mezzo-Soprano, Piano)

Texts by Virginia Hamilton Adair

Songs for Voice and Guitar (1966-79) (20') website download (Voice, Guitar)

Texts by A. E. Housman, George Mackay Brown, E. E. Cummings, Gwyneth Walker, and Anonymous

Suffrage Songs (2019) (7'35") (Contralto, Piano)

Texts by Lucille Clifton and traditional sources (adp. composer)

Why We Must Change (2014) (7'20") website download (Medium-High Voice, Piano)

Texts by Alice Walker

Songs and cycles for solo voice and strings

The Dying of the Light (2011) (10'10") ECS#8329 (Tenor, Piano)

Optional accompaniment for string quartet available.

Score #8330, Parts #8331

Texts by Dylan Thomas

The Dying of the Light (2011) (10'10") ECS#8332 (Baritone, Piano)

Optional accompaniment for string orchestra available.

Score #8333, Parts #8334

Texts by Dylan Thomas

From the Depths of the Soul (2016) (14'30") website download (Contralto, Viola)

From the Depths of the Soul (2017) (14'30") website download (Bass-Baritone, Cello)
Traditional texts (adp. composer)

I Feel the Spirit (2018) (13'20") website download (Contralto or Baritone, String Trio or Piano) Four traditional hymns/spirituals arranged for solo voice and strings

Let Us Break Bread Together (2017) (3') ECS#8649 (High Voice, Piano)

Version for string orchestra available.

Score #8649A; Parts #8649B

Traditional text (adp.composer)

No Ordinary Woman! (1997) (15') ECS#5728 (Soprano, Piano)

Version for string orchestra available (Score ECS#6541, Parts ECS#6542)

Texts by Lucille Clifton

The Poet's Heart (2009) (17') ECS#7498 (Mezzo-soprano, Piano Quartet)

Parts ECS#7499

Texts by Emily Dickinson

Staged Works (Opera)

Ballads Alive! (2015) (25') GW (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto Soli, Piano)

Traditional text (adp. composer)

An Expedition to the Pole (1989, rev. 2008) (60') website download (Singers, Dancers, Chamber Ensemble) a story with music based on the short story by Annie Dillard

Evangeline (2014) (60') website download (SATB Soli, Piano, Violin [Fiddle], Narrator)
a chamber opera based on the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Prayers from the Ark (2011) (23') website download (SATB Solo Quartet, Piano)

Songs of Noah and his animals (a dramatic, staged work)

Version for string quartet available.

Texts by Carmen Bernos de Gasztold (translated by Rumer Godden)

Version 21 January 2021

www.gwynethwalker.com

Appendix D

Transcript of Interview

September 17, 2020-Interview with Gwyneth Walker

People involved: Kiya Fife (singer), Michael Cotton (accompanist), Dr. Jamie Reimer Seaman (supervisor), and Dr. William McMullen (professor at the Glenn Korff School of Music)

Dr. Jamie Reimer: Welcome everyone to this interview with Gwyneth Walker. I am Dr. Jamie Reimer Seaman. I'm on the voice faculty here at the Glenn Korff School of Music and it is my pleasure to introduce our guests to you today. First, I am going to hand the floor over to Kiya Fife, who will speak briefly about the reason that Dr. Walker is joining us this afternoon.

Kiya Fife: Hello everyone. Like Dr. Reimer said my name is Kiya Fife and I am a third year DMA student here at UNL. I was first introduced to the songs of Gwyneth Walker in August 2018 when I was given a small set of her art songs to sing. After looking at the scores, I was immediately impressed with her beautiful melodies and exquisite accompaniments and began researching Walker. After learning the few songs that Dr. Reimer had assigned to me, I contacted Dr. Walker and asked if I could commission a song cycle from her. She generously agreed and immediately we began discussing potential poets for the work. After some deliberation it was decided that the new song cycle would include poems by Nebraska author and University of Nebraska alumna Willa Cather and Carl Sandburg. Once Walker agreed to the commission, I started the process of applying for the graduate students scholarly and creative grant. For this grant I had to compose a proposal for the project, include a brief biography, and have a

letter of recommendation from my faculty supervisor, which in my case is Dr. Reimer. I was awarded the graduate student scholarly and creative activity grant and graciously the Glenn Korff School of Music funded the rest of this project.

JR: Widely performed throughout the country the music of American composer Gwyneth Walker is beloved by performers and audiences alike for its energy, beauty, reverence, drama, and humor. Dr. Walker is a graduate of Brown University and the Harrt School of Music. She holds a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Music, and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in music composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin Conservatory. She stepped down from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly thirty years she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont, but now divides her time between her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut, and the musical community of Randolph Vermont. Her catalogue includes over 350 commissioned works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus, and solo voice. A special interest has been dramatic works that combine music with readings, acting, and movement. The music of Gwyneth Walker is published by AC Schirmer and the Lauren Kaiser music. So please give a warm silent Nebraska welcome to Dr. Gwyneth Walker. Dr. Walker and Kiya I leave the floor to you.

KF: Dr. Walker and I have selected some sections from *Prairie Songs* that we are going to present to all of you. Dr. Walker would you like me to sing one section at a time and then we can discuss them?

Gwyneth Walker: Maybe you should say what they are before we even listen so that we have some idea of what we are hearing first.

KF: The first section is from song number one entitled "Prairie" with poetry by Carl Sandburg.

Kiya sings small section from "1. Prairie"

GW: The reason that I wanted this as one of our excerpts was that at the beginning you heard the glissando-two of them-glissandi on the piano and in the score, it says, "a slow glissando to represent the broad expanse of the prairie." So, I am trying right away to give a sense of broad expanse, now I must add I live in New England, everything is close by. Trees everywhere ponds everywhere. So instead, we're going to talk about something different. We have the prairie and in a live performance Kiya would move her hand across the stage. And the audience might think this is different. I should pay attention to what's happening. Why is she doing that? And then when she says, "I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat and the red of its clover the eyes of the women. Gave me a song and a knowledge." So, this is what she's talking about. And that's why I selected that as one of the segments. All right, what's the next one?

KF: The next selection is also from "1. Prairie" beginning on page four.

GW: Okay. And before you start this time, I'll clue in our audience that this is one of the themes of the song cycle that reoccurs several times. And after a few

measures of introduction, the singer Kiya sings “the prairie sings to me in the forenoon, and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms on the prairie heart.” I thought that these were really nice words of Carl Sandburg, so instead of just talking about the expansive of the prairie now it’s an emotional attachment. Okay.

Kiya sings another small section from “1. Prairie”

GW: That’s nice Kiya! You have a nice voice! You’ll notice that when she’s singing about the prairie arms and the prairie heart that she’s in the low range she’s on a B(3). You would hardly sing the world heart on a high range unless it was to break your heart, but she’s in love with the prairie. So, I used the depths of the voice and because she’s a contralto and this was commissioned for contralto so many times in the song cycle when talking about the land, the prairie, and the emotions. This works well with the rich, lowest range of the voice. I am not a singer, but I have written for singers. Jamie you’re a soprano, aren’t you?

JR: That’s correct.

GW: So, for you to sing a low B is even deeper? It’s at the bottom down there.

JR: Right.

GW: But for Kiya it’s a comfortable nice note. What is our next section?

KF: Our next section is all the way to song five once again entitled “Prairie” with poetry by Carl Sandburg. We are starting in measure 13 and going all the way to measure 32.

GW: Okay. Um, this is hard to explain before, so go ahead and play it and then I’ll explain it after. Okay, go ahead and play.

Kiya sings a small section from “5. Prairie”

GW: It does come through. It works! I’ve never heard this before. Okay, there’s a lot of activity and its one of the other main themes. “I am the prairie mother of men waiting” which is what she sings first, and I chose that because it’s just a nice line. Then there’s these words “They are mine. The threshing crew eating beef steak, and this is mine” says Carl Sandburg. Then we get to the crowd gathering for the fourth of July. “The crowds of people at a fourth of July basket picnic listening to a lawyer read the declaration of independence.” And I stuck in the Star-Spangled Banner in the piano, and I could hear it! So that’s the thing. Now, I don’t know how familiar you are with Charles Ives, but I am living right near where Charles Ives, the composer, and he would have quoted something like that. He would have done that. Put in some bit of Americana right in the middle of this. It has absolutely nothing to do with Carl Sandburg, but it has everything to do with the crowd gathering. I mean, you think they’re gathering there might be fireworks there might be a little league baseball game, there might be some occasion where the national anthem would be played. So that’s why I chose that. So, your role is fine to get the words across, but the pianist is actually

the star of that section and I could hear it. So, thank you. Oh, all right Dr. McMullen is with us now. Do you want to proceed back to him? Kiya I think that that worked well with playing the music through the speaker. As well as could be expected. I'd rather hear you live.

WM: I was very interested with our guest composer here to tell us more about her style, it seems to me that I keep using the word Americana, and with a lot of the repertoire that you have written whether you like that term or if you don't like it.

GW: Well, I would just say American. I write American music, some of it sounds like the old Americana from the past, and some of it sounds more like today's jazz and stuff. I don't know if Jamie or Kiya if you know my Lucille Clifton songs "No Ordinary Woman" but she's an African American poet and that's not Americana. That's just very American. So, I live here in Connecticut not far from where Aaron Copland lived in Katona so if people ask me to describe your style I say, I think I sound like Aaron Copland with a sense of humor. And then people say, oh okay, you know because it is fairly tonal and sometimes melodic, but he wasn't nearly as funny as I am. So that's the difference.

WM: Well, sometimes people use that word as sort of a derogatory word. I didn't mean that. As like a non-serious music. But that's not really what I meant. It seemed like a lot your repertoire that you have chosen like Carl Sandburg you know, and others that definitely represent America. I think that's fascinating.

GW: Well, I'm very American. My family has been in this country since 1630 as I am a Quaker. They fled here to avoid persecution so it would be very unamerican or un-quaker of me to have some sort of European affectation when I am such a down to earth person here in this country. I can almost see where my family was back then.

GW: I chose the poems. Kiya commissioned this work from me. I don't think that I had to write about any particular topic. I wanted to write something for her, but it should be extended, not just one little song. Okay. And I thought Nebraska. Nebraska. How about using some Willa Cather as I know how much interest there is in Nebraska and in Lincoln, particular for her writings, but most of the time people are interested nowadays in her longer works her later works novels and things that are more dark and that's not me. I liked her poetry. I like Emily Dickinson. So, I found just those poems and then I added the Carl Sandburg poems to it. But I didn't have to. Okay, I just thought this would be appropriate. I mean better to write about Carl Sandburg than Emily Dickinson for the folks out your way.

WM: How do you get in touch with a composer who's active right now? You know, I mean, I'd be scared, almost, you know if I was a student trying to contact a composer who's had a lot of commissions and had major works at Carnegie Hall and other places. How did you do this?

KF: You know it was very nerve wracking. I will say that I have never don't anything like this before. But Walker has a very nice cohesive website that I was

able to find online. On the homepage of the website, it talked about her active collaboration with students and musicians and so everything was just listed there on the site, so I emailed her and that's kind of how we got the ball rolling.

WM: She's a real person. You mean.

KF: Yes! She is a real person and I think students need to know that they are.

GW: The thing is that composers who have works performed a lot do have a website. So, it's not like you have to do a lot of sleuthing to find us. For me if you just type Gwyneth Walker in the search then boom my website comes up. So, we are not trying to hide or anything. I'm sure that there are some composers that are more scary but I am the least scary.

KF: What knowledge of the poets did you have previous to composing the song cycle?

GW: Yes, I actually did not know Willa Cather's poetry at all. I was hoping that she had wrote some poetry because I really couldn't deal with the volumes that she wrote. I am not a dark person and you know prairie life in the winter or something that she didn't enjoy wouldn't appeal to me. I didn't know that she had poems and I was lucky that I found some. But there wasn't enough of them to make a song cycle, so I stumbled upon the Sandburg because I had been using some of his other poems for a project that I wrote about the Great Lakes. He wrote about Lake Michigan. He lived in Chicago for a certain point, so I had a

whole volume of his poetry, a huge thing. And there I saw the prairie poem that one many multifaceted poem that he had. And I said oh, I could chop that up and stick that between the Willa Cather and that would work. So, I sort of knew Carl Sandburg I didn't know Willa Cather. I'm not a novel reader. When I'm not writing music, I'm playing tennis or reading poetry bang! You know I don't sit for hours reading novels so that's that.

Michael Cotton: Hi. This is related to the poets. When you read a poem, what is it about the poetry that sparks your musical imagination. Is this the visual imagery that it conjures it up? Is it the musicality? The sound of the words themselves?

GW: Yes. Let's forget visual as I've already explained to Kiya I'm so nonvisual I don't even really know where I am half of the time. I am lost in thought. But it is the conjuring up images and it also has to be singable. When I read a poem, I read the lines and I say oh that would sound nice-- "the prairie sings to me in the forenoon, and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms on the prairie heart." That's good! Those are good lines. You could say those to me across the room and I wouldn't say what is he talking about that's too confusing or too boring. It's not neither. It's interesting yet comprehensible, but that isn't visual. I'm not visualizing a prairie heart/. It's not visual. Its conjuring up some emotions that you feel you could put into music. And that would work vocally. "Heart, easy in the prairie arms" you aren't getting stuck on words here. I want the sentiments to be somewhat universal that most people could say, enough though I've never been to the prairie I can get a sense of the prairie here. So, you

want to speak beyond just one little thing. Often, I like fairly short poems that don't ramble. Let me use the opposite example Walt Whitman. Whitman tends to write about himself and it goes on and on and on. But if you excerpt his poetry you can get some really nice Walt Whitman lines. But if you're attempting the whole thing it's too much and I don't like it when it's always about the self. The "I feel this" "I feel that" and when I was looking at this, I thought, of that. You know that really doesn't speak to me. So, when somebody is talking about a landscape or their feelings about something or their feelings about something or a Fourth of July picnic, you know, any of these things appeal to me so. And for poetry I prefer American poetry. I'm an American person and I have occasionally used other poetry. Somebody got me to set some Spanish poetry or Chilean poetry for a very special project. It took a lot of help from this singer who could sing in Spanish, to even guide me, but I thought, just let me go back to my America, and especially New England.

KF: We have kind of already touched upon question number two by saying that you aren't a visual person but it's interesting to me because in your vocal works there are a lot of poetic images and you really can hear them throughout your music.

GW: Yeah, I'm just thinking about them.

KF: It is very fascinating that you don't actually see those images, but that you indicate that you hear them.

GW: Well, I think I feel them and also, we're talking about poems. I'm trying to set to music poems about the prairie not the prairie but poems about the prairie. There are just so many wonderful lines in these different poems about how people feel about the prairie. For some reason I am to translate feelings into music better than some people. There are things that I don't do as well as some composers, but my strength seems to be that my feelings come out in the music. It's just a gift and so I go with it! But it's not that I see the prairie. Instead, I sense how Carl Sandburg or Willa Cather felt in a certain poem, and I tried to capture that. But of course, you know, I want the landscape to be the broad prairie so I will do that, but I can't picture the prairie. I can just feel what that poet was saying.

KF: Was there anything unusual about the compositional process of this song cycle?

GW: I know that one of your questions was, have I done this kind of similar thing before? Was the creation of this song cycle different from any of the others? This is when I thought of my other song cycle *Songs from the High Sierra*. I realized how similar the process was to create these works emphasis is on the fact that these are song cycles. There are many songs involved. How do I structure them? That is the critical thing. You don't just say oh well there are six songs so here we go we will start at number one and I'll end up at number six and give them to Kiya. That's doesn't work. What works is that you plan the whole process. You pick the poems that you like and even if that means bringing back some of the first poem at the end. I believe that's what I did here. I took

some of the motifs even from the first I really loved the lines I've been reading about "rest easy in the prairie heart." And I thought that's great for the opening and for the end. So, I already had the beginning and the end. And then I had to figure out what I wanted to go in between. I knew that I wanted to have the Willa Cather poems with the Carl Sandburg interspersed and I wanted to make sure that these were different—one poem from the next -and that they were probably going to be in different keys too so that we weren't bored with that so that I could explore different vocal ranges. So, the whole thing is an overall plan, and you don't just do it just like that. What you do is you start in from getting the poems and trying to type them all in just a few pages so that you can sort of see them. I even tape them together so it's more like piece—you can even staple them together. Because I used to travel a lot with the music (I hope to be able to travel again) this is something that I can take with me on the train or the plane or in the hotel room or whatever and pick away at. I can read the poems and say, oh, I need a little more of this one in here. And then I'll say I'll put this aside and then on the next flight I will say no, I need more of this. There's no rush. I just need to plan it and then I think well I can excerpt from the Sandburg so let me plan that and let me think about that for some time. I realized that I planned your piece in about five different states of the United States. I even did one during a church event where I rehearsed with the choir and there was time before the service started and while everyone else was eating coffee cake or something or other and I was sitting there with this in my lap, once again, to finally get it to something that I want. This was very similar to what I did for *Songs for the High Sierra*. The planning was done in bits and pieces as I traveled so I could kind of mull it over and then get to the final. Then finally, the last thing that happens is

you put notes on the page. But you don't worry if you can finish the piece because you probably have already written the end in the beginning. It's more just filling it in. There is my special spiel.

JR: As an instructor of singers, I would love if you could reinforce that point about how critical understanding the text is first and how the music is the last thing that happens.

GW: If you can't get in the spirit and if you don't know what the poem is about, or the song is about then you aren't going to be able to produce it. As technicians you know would be vocalizing and maybe you as the teacher would be helping them to smooth over the *passagio*—technical technical. Wait a minute I don't think that I know what this song is about. I think that I can hit the note, but I don't think I know what the song is about. So, it's very important to just read the poem as a poem and not be insecure saying that I didn't study literature very much in college I don't know this and that. It doesn't matter what you studied it's a matter of what you sense the poem means to you. You need to realize that your audience has probably never heard the poem either, so they are not going to be more scholarly than you. They just have to know what it is that you feel is coming out in this song. That's true. So, when I write something with a text, I spend a lot of time selecting the poems pairing them down and trying to think of the dramatic impact you know too. Some of the poems in the middle of this set "I am the prairie. Mother of men waiting" the one in the middle right after the Star-Spangled banner part comes in it goes into the highest range "I am the prairie

mother of men...waiting...they are mine" all of these things in the prairie are mine so that is very dramatic. But I do write things that don't have text.

MC: With this cycle you had not heard Kiya's voice before, right?

GW: Right.

MC: Is that difficult when you are given a commission not to know their voice?

GW: Good question. I'm a utilitarian composer who makes my living from my writing. Therefore, if I wrote and spent all this time writing *Prairie Songs* only for Kiya's voice and not thinking well many contraltos could do this—some better some not as well I have to think of the big picture as well as the specific singer. I knew that she was a contralto and I believe that I even asked her a bit about her range. I know other contraltos although some don't really want to go higher than the E(5) but she does. They may be older that's all. So, I wrote for contralto, generic contraltos. I think what would be more specific, would be the personality. I mean, I don't think some of Lucille Clifton funny African American songs would have worked as well for Kiya here in Nebraska. I think that the person and the personality and the venue would be more critical. But that's a good question. But once it's been premiered it's published. I would hope that just as it reached Jamie and Kiya before I knew them that I would hope in the future that it would reach other singers, whom I have never met and will never meet. Good question.

KF: Have you ever been to Nebraska?

GW: I have. But again, I don't remember looking at it that much. I have worked with your very own Nebraska brass on several occasions. They came and played my music in Omaha and once we took a trip to Lincoln. But I don't remember what it looked like. I'm sorry. I remember Omaha, because I had nice walks in a park somewhere. I have only come and gone. My concert travels have taken me to just about every state in the United States. It's true, but not on vacation it's always for work.

WM: In music history classes they often talk about the term word painting. How is that different from what you are doing? I sense that you are looking at a bigger picture of your emotions in writing music, rather than particular words that you are trying to describe musically.

GW: We are talking about a whole song cycle here, so we need to have a broader picture, but I word paint as much as the next composer in the specific. I'll have specific things. I don't know if we had enough examples here today. Well, there's a line about couples kissing and I have the piano mimicking little kissing. I mean that's literally the word. So, I do a lot of word painting, but word painting can sometimes mean that what comes in between, isn't very meaningful and I would hope that I would get the whole with the harmony and the rhythm and everything else try to capture the large meaning and feelings of the poem. And then specific words could come out. So, word painting is like a subcategory of writing songs and expressing the music I would say.

GW: When I write the music, I'm in that world. My mind is in that world. And I was working on those songs. I've already told you that I was working on the *Prairie Songs* while sitting in the church. When I was working on the Sierra songs, I was in Vermont in someone's home with a piano and a little desk. It is perfect for me. I guess I was so wrapped up in composing that I had stayed in my little room for the whole day. And my friend, Nancy, who's house I was staying in, her sisters who were visiting didn't know anything about music or me and they thought that this was odd this person was upstairs and hadn't left the room. They were still trying to get a handle on who I was, I guess so I came downstairs at the end of the afternoon and they said "Gwyneth we've been so worried about you. You have been cooped up upstairs are you alright and I said, "I've been on top of Yosemite. I've been on a glacier!" I mean I had been all over the place. It had never occurred to me that physically I was in this little room and that someone might think that I was confined. So, I have been across the prairie and I've been to the Fourth of July picnic and heard the star-spangled banner even though I really haven't. but I have. And that's just how it works. I haven't been to most of these places, physically, but I have in my imagination. Kiya next question.

KF: Gwyneth sent me some research documents that I will be using as research for my document. When I looked through them, I noticed that you included a lot more stage direction or dramatization than there is now. I'm just wondering why you took them out?

GW: Yeah. I was going to have the singer sort of move between different places to sing, the Sandburg, the Cather, and then maybe to speak. The more that I

planned it out it logistically it started to make me dizzy! It seemed that there was too many places to go and too many things to do. I thought, maybe just inherently in the songs that there was plenty of drama and for your role in all of this that not only do you sing, but sometimes you read lines of poetry just per say, sometimes you read sections of poetry where there's portions of piano accompaniment, sometimes you sing a rhythm on a pitch like a recitative and like three other things you do and I thought that this is enough variety for what the singer does to get the words out. You are welcome to use the stage as you want. I was just trying to think now do I want two music stands? And then she reads in between? Well, I just couldn't make it work. Simply, it would be different if there was a definite A and B and an A and a B but this had readings and then crossing over and I just didn't do that. I figured between the straight singing and the recitatives it would be enough.

KF: Would you like to talk more about your blending of theater into some of your other song cycles?

GW: Well, of course, you can't restrain somebody who's got these impulses to have things happen. I don't know whether I can come up with an example right now but sometimes, oftentimes, if there's something that could be dramatized. I mean, I wrote a piece in Vermont called "Fanfare for the Family Farm." The whole percussion section is with pails and milk pails and you know all the farm equipment and everything. I can't remember it all. It was great though because some of those milk cans look just like conga drums, you know. The percussion section of our Vermont Philharmonic came out and they had their overalls on,

and they brought their pails out and they had them tune up to the conductor and you know people just expect that now. Well, my most famous piece is called "Match Point" and that was a tennis point that I dramatized with the racket being the conducting stick. I just wrote that for our local high school band and then Billie Jean King found it and she performed it at Lincoln Center, and I got all over the news and whatever. My neighbors always think of me as doing things like that. So, at one concert (this was a serious concert) there was nothing going to happen right before it started but, they had to stop because somebody in a wheelchair had to be brought in to sit somewhere and everybody was sure that I had done something funny, you know, and it wasn't funny at all. It was just a person in a wheelchair you needed somewhere to sit. So, I have songs for the family farm with a cow and a person dressed as a cow ringing a bell. So yeah, I tend to bring humor and drama staging into things.

KF: Do you have any advice for young musicians or composers?

GW: Okay, one thing is don't try to sound like somebody else. And I'm sure we all do that. Whether it's a singer or composer. You know, Benjamin Britten won all sorts of awards so a young musician might think maybe I should like Benjamin Britten and that doesn't do it. My other bigger advice is don't do this just for yourself, because you will get very tired of yourself quickly. If you're writing music, be sure that you're writing music for other people to play and enjoy. You need to get out of your own way and just give the music to other people. Don't take yourself so seriously. You know, if you do something for yourself you will get pretty tired of yourself. If you can do something for other

people with your music. Like right now I'm doing a lot of church music for just the solo voice and the organ because that's all they can handle. That brings me and other people a great deal of pleasure. So, if you can do something for other people and pardon me for interjecting this, but, if you have a sense of faith that should be tied in your music too because composing music for a living is not easy. You need everything to back you up so my Quaker faith helps me a great deal. So, do this for others and do this for the glory of God if that's your outlook on life.

KF: Beautiful. Does anyone else have anything for Gwyneth?

MC: This isn't a question so much as it is a comment, but I just think that what you said is such a wonderful reminder to us as musicians that it's really our imagination that is the most important artistic faculty that we have. I mean here you are a New England lady who's never really been to Nebraska and yet your music is so wonderfully evocative of it. I'm just reminded, for instance, that Schubert never saw the ocean and yet, he could write music that conjured that, and he never went to Venice, yet he conjured up the Gondoliers just through his imagination. I think that that's just a great reminder to all of us that we're not necessarily limited by what we've directly experienced. We can, in our imagination, go all over the place.

GW: Oh, that's good. That is well said.

WM: I just wanted to say that I'm very impressed by your imagination.

GW: Well, you know, I've never had a problem with imagination. I come from a long line of inventors. My father was a scientist an inventor, and several generations back one more eccentric than the next.

WM: Well, you mentioned in your little preview video that's on your website that your father would go around inventing little things and put things on doors as such to make them work better throughout the house and everybody thought that it was a little kooky, but it worked. It really worked! It has a very energetic spirit about it in your life and I'm very impressed.

JR: I failed to mention in my introduction of you earlier that the plan was to have Walker on campus and show her Nebraska and the prairie this fall but circumstances being what they are we need to do this now, but I hope that there is a time in the future when we can bring you to campus and have you in person.

GW: You know, as soon as it's safe, I'll come.

JR: We look forward to exploring more of your music and talking with you further. Thank you!

Appendix E

Transcript of emails between Gwyneth and Kiya

Email dialogue about commission #1- 1/3/19:

From: Gwyneth Walker
To: Kiya Fife

Dear Dr. Walker,

My name is Kiya Fife. I am currently a DMA student in vocal performance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, studying with Dr. Jamie Reimer. For my spring recital I am performing several of your songs for lower voices, including "As a Branch in May" and "I Will Be Earth". Having grown up in a small town in Idaho (in fact, like you, I was also raised on a dairy farm), I feel a deep connection to your music.

I am finalizing the focus for my doctoral research, which will be a performance guide for the music of American women composers, as well as an accompanying recording of selected works. My proposed dissertation will provide a style guide for a new song cycle that combines dramatic text and music (perhaps even a combination of spoken and sung selections). Would you be willing to write a new set of songs for me?

I appreciate your time and consideration, and I would enjoy the opportunity to collaborate with you. If this project interests you I am happy to send you recordings of my singing and information about my range.

Thank you, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Kiya Fife

Email dialogue about commission #2- 1/6/19:

From: Gwyneth Walker

To: Kiya Fife

Kiya,

I have looked up the various Amy Lowell poems that you recommended. And I can see their appeal. Perhaps they are a bit outdated for my taste, but they are not impossible.

I did have an alternative suggestion to present to you.

Knowing how beloved Willa Cather's writings are to Nebraskans (including your University, I am sure), I found a few Cather poems which might work as the basis for a song cycle. I might add one or two other poems.

The general topic would be something like **Songs of the Prairie**.

I am attaching one poem for your reading.

I realize that you seek a song cycle – a collection of four or five poems. And you envision a dramatic cycle (not simply *pretty* poems). I think that I could create such a work.

We did not discuss the **date** when you would need this music. But I do hope that it is well into the future! Do tell me about this.

In terms of a fee, if we are speaking of a song cycle for voice with piano accompaniment, I would say \$3000. You will probably want to discuss this with your University colleagues to get some guidelines on grants applications. Or perhaps you can come up with these funds yourself.

Perhaps you will want to suggest to the University that funds also be included to bring the composer to campus for a rehearsal and the premiere.

My composing schedule is completely filled for 2019, and into early 2020. But depending on when you need the music, we can try to make this happen.

Best wishes –
Gwyneth Walker

Email dialogue about commission # 3- 1/9/19:

From: Gwyneth Walker
To: Kiya Fife

Kiya --

This email documents that I agree to compose a new song cycle to be premiered by Kiya Fife. This will be a set of four or five songs, featuring musical settings of poetry of Nebraska poet Willa Cather. The tentative, working title is:

Songs of the Prairie

The commission fee will be \$3000.

It is expected that 1/2 of the commission fee (\$1500) be paid upon signing of a Letter of Agreement, and the remaining 1/2 (\$1500) be paid upon completion of the song cycle, no later than April 1,2020.

The composer is interested in traveling to Lincoln to attend the dress rehearsal and premiere of the new songs, schedule permitting, if travel and lodging funding can also be provided.

Sincerely,

Gwyneth Walker

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