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# BEN MOORE

The music of Ben Moore has been performed by many leading singers, including soprano Deborah Voigt, mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, tenors Jerry Hadley and Robert White, and four-time Tony winner Audra McDonald. Voigt premiered four of Moore's songs and reprised his encore piece "Wagner Roles" in her Carnegie Hall recital debut. In September 2005 EMI released Voigt's first recital CD, *All My Heart*, which includes eight of Moore's songs. *Opera News* wrote: "Eight songs by Ben Moore form the centerpiece of the disc, and their easy tunefulness and effective settings offer Voigt plenty of emotional range...the romantic sweep and dark urgency of Elizabeth Bishop's 'I am in need of music,' the gently lyrical 'In the dark pine-wood' and the richly internalized imagery of Moore's restrained setting of Keats' 'Darkling I listen'...a heartfelt and richly communicative recital." Moore's association with Voigt also includes a tribute to Montserrat Caballé commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera Guild.

Ben Moore's music spans many styles and genres, from text settings of great poets to comic material for cabaret and concert stages, many to his own lyrics. Robert White has performed Moore's setting of the Yeats poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" at numerous venues across the country and on international radio. In 2005 the Marilyn Horne Foundation and the ASCAP Foundation/

Charles Kingsford Fund commissioned the song cycle *So Free Am I*. Set to the poetry of women authors, it reflects the experiences of women across centuries and cultures. Among several commissions from the Metropolitan Opera is his duet "We Love the Opera," which was featured on their radio broadcast on New Year's Day, 2005, as well as three songs for Met managing director Joseph Volpe's Farewell Gala in 2006.

Special comic material for opera singers includes "Sexy Lady" for Susan Graham, as well as "Wagner Roles" for Deborah Voigt. "Sexy Lady," which *Gramophone* magazine called "gloriously funny," is featured on the CD *Susan Graham at Carnegie Hall*, released by Warner Classics. In *The New York Times* review of Miss Voigt's Lincoln Center recital in 2002, of "Wagner Roles" critic Allan Kozinn called it "the clear highlight...a brilliant comic song." In 1999 Jerry Hadley commissioned the chamber musical *Henry and Company*, a four-character memory piece with a text by Barry Kleinbort set in small town America.

Born on January 2, 1960, in Syracuse, New York, Moore grew up in Clinton, New York and graduated from Hamilton College. With an MFA from The Parsons School of Design, he also pursues a career as a painter.

## P R E F A C E

The songs in this album were written over the course of about three years. Many of them are settings of poems that have attracted me since childhood. They are intended for the concert stage and may be performed in any groupings singers may wish to create. The texts, for the most part, are about love, but love in quite a wide variety of modes and orientations. Here are some brief notes on each piece:

“In the dark pine-wood” is the first of three songs in this album set to a poem from James Joyce’s collection, *Chamber Music*. Unquenchable longing is beautifully expressed in this short verse with its carefully chosen images. Though my setting may have a certain gentleness, there should always be a keen sense of desire in the performance.

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” was commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the tenor Robert White in 2001. It was premiered there in an evening of new songs by contemporary American composers. The text is one of W.B. Yeats’ most celebrated poems, which may be interpreted as a yearning for peace on many levels: in the world, through death, or within the “heart’s core.”

“I am in need of music” is a setting of a sonnet by Elizabeth Bishop. It is one of the few poems I know that speaks effectively of the healing power of music. The poem is not celebratory, but rather declares a deeply felt need for music that will act as a kind of spiritual cleansing. The return of the opening motif should be highlighted to signify the “magic made by melody.”

“When I was one-and-twenty” expresses the poet A.E. Housman’s ever-present theme of lost innocence in a text which on the surface is merely lighthearted and witty. My setting is jaunty and rhythmic but its modal melody is meant to convey the sadness of disillusionment.

“To the Virgins to Make Much of Time” is set to what may be the most memorable poem, among so many, with the injunction to “seize the day.” Bearing in mind its familiarity, I chose to add a dash of irony—in falling chromatic phrases—in order to tweak the notion that a woman must have a husband.

“Bright cap and streamers,” with text by James Joyce, announces an unabashed lustiness. The song can hardly be performed with too much zeal.

“Darkling I listen” is a setting of the sixth stanza of Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*. It speaks of the wish for escape from a world of sorrows, and at the same time expresses the ecstasy of oneness with nature. I have set a sustained melody against a texture of continually undulating 16th-note figures in order to evoke a dream-like state of mind. This song, together with “I am in need of music,” was written specifically for soprano Deborah Voigt.

“I would in that sweet bosom be” explores one of Joyce’s recurring themes: that of unrequited desire. The phrases should be imbued with the kind of ardor that comes only when the love object is unattainable.