

Now That You See the Night

(2008)

three songs for soprano and harpsichord

poetry by Joyce Carol Oates, Sarah White, and Wallace Stevens

music by Carson P. Cooman

I. On This Morning of Grief (for Joyce Carol Oates on her 70th birthday)

II. Yucca on White Sands

III. Sonatina to Hans Christian (for Jeff and Katharine)

Now That You See the Night (2008) for soprano and harpsichord is a cycle of three songs on poems of three American poets: Joyce Carol Oates, Sarah White, and Wallace Stevens. The first song alternates and integrates slower, wide-ranging lyrical lines in the voice with faster, dramatic figuration in the harpsichord. The second song is simple and ballad-like. The third song is fierce and driving.

Carson P. Cooman

June 2008

Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Performance note: No dynamic markings are given in the harpsichord part. On an instrument with a variety of stops and timbres available, the player should make musical choices to support and match the voice.

On This Morning of Grief

Joyce Carol Oates

Cupped in your hands you bring me
an abandoned wrens' nest—
exquisite in miniature
the fine-woven grasses like silk,
moss that's still green,
soiled string, milkweed seed, white cat fur—
and in the precise center a hollow
and in the hollow a single eggshell
from which life
has pecked its way free, and flown:
smaller than my smallest fingernail,
delicately brown-speckled—
the egg's halves parted
like an eye on the verge of opening.

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Yucca on White Sands

Sarah White

My mother, the dune,
gave me these bells
and said "Rattle them. Summon
the rain, your infrequent father."

She made a spiny skirt
and said "Wear this.
You live by yourself."

She said: "Here comes the wind.
I'll be shifting. Remember
your thousands of toes—

Curl them
in clumps of cold, dark sand,
and hold on."

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Sonatina to Hans Christian

If any duck in any brook,
Fluttering the water
For your crumb,
Seemed the helpless daughter

Of a mother
Regretful that she bore her;
Or of another,
Barren, and longing for her;

What of the dove,
Or thrush, or any singing mysteries?
What of the trees
And intonations of the trees?

What of the night
That lights and dims the stars?
Do you know, Hans Christian,
Now that you see the night?

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Now That You See the Night

three songs for soprano and harpsichord

3

Carson P. Cooman
Opus 770

for Joyce Carol Oates on her 70th birthday
I. On This Morning of Grief

Joyce Carol Oates

A $\text{♩} = 100$

Soprano

always dramatic

mf $\text{♩} = 60$, freely

Cupped in your hands

B $\text{♩} = 100$

you bring me an abandoned wren's nest—

C $\text{♩} = 60$, freely

mp *p*

ex-qui-site in min-ia-ture the fine wo-ven grass-es like silk, moss that's still

D

mf *p*

green, soiled string, milk-weed seed, white cat fur—

(freely, not aligned with voice)

E

$\text{♩} = 100$ $\text{♩} = 60, \text{freely}$

mp

and in the pre-cise cen-ter

F

p *mf*

a hol-low and in the hol-low a sin-gle egg-shell from which life has

G

f *mp* *f*

pecked its way free, and flown: small-er than my small-

H

mp *mf*

est fin - ger - nail, — de - li - cate - ly brown - speck - led — the egg's

J

halves part - ed — like an eye — on the verge of o - pen - ing. — (hum) —

K

(♩ = 60) unsynchronized, separate tempos to end

p *p*

(hum) —

♩ = 100

rit.

c. 2 min.

II. Yucca on White Sands

Sarah White

Simply (♩ = 104)

mp

My moth-er, the dune, gave me these bells and said "Rat-tle them. Sum-mon the

mf

rain, your in-freq-uent fath-er." She made a spi-ny skirt and said "Wear this. You

f

live by your-self."

p

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COOMAN: Now That You See the Night

22 *mf* *f*

She said: "Here comes the wind. _____ I'll be shift-ing. Re-mem-ber

28 rit. a tempo *mp*

your thou-sands of toes— Curl them in clumps of

34 *mf* *mp* *f* rit. *pp*

cold, _ dark sand, _____ and hold on. _____

c. 1¼ min.

for Jeff and Katharine
 III. Sonatina to Hans Christian

Wallace Stevens

Fierce (♩ = 136)

(♩ = ♩ sempre)

ff

If a - ny duck in a - ny

with force

5

brook, _____ Flut - tering the wa - ter _ For your crumb

10

Seemed the help - less daugh - - ter Of a moth - er Re -

15

gret - ful that she bore her; _ Or of a - noth - er, Bar - ren, and

20

long - ing for her; _ What

25

of the dove, Or thrush, _ or _ a - ny

29

sing - ing mys - ter-ies? What of the trees And in - to - na - tions of

10

34

mf

trees? What of the night That lights and dims the

38

ff

stars? Do you know, Hans Chris - tian,

41

*(ff)**sub. mp**ffff*

Now that you see the night?

c. 1 min.

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— Coram Deo —
Duration: c. 4½ min.