

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Culture Corner

Premiere of a New Conceptual Work of Music: "Sacred and Profane Love"

BERNIE LANGS

In the last two years or so, I composed and recorded a thematic work of music, "Sacred and Profane Love." The piece is eighteen minutes long with shifting musical structures centered on rock and pop stylizations. Several extraordinary vocalists perform on the recording, each of whom has improved the melodies of the original score. Without these artists, the finished product could not have expressed my intention as a composer. Gretchen Farrar magnificently handles the largest role, and my cousin, Matt Murphy, sings the other lead with his typical brilliance. The quality of the work was dynamically enhanced by their complex emotional idealizations and interpretations of contrasting musings on "sacred" and "profane" love.

Bill Millard's vocals as "Greek Chorus" and "Omniscient" provide one of the invaluable revelatory keys towards unlocking the philosophical intentions of the song. I'm awed by each of his performances. Peter Weidman wonderfully took on that exact same role (Chorus and Omniscient) and sang the only section of the score that directly addressed the listener while simultaneously singing to "specters" of both principals. He later returns to present a mysterious pause in the central mythic tale, a dreamy, brief retelling of the story of Jacob's Ladder from the *Torah*. Bill, Peter, and I performed in a rock band decades ago, and we enjoyed this magical reunion, even with Pete singing virtually from Pennsylvania.

The lyrics proved to be difficult to craft with many early attempts discarded. As they stand now, the listener hears a mix of my own lyrical phrases bundled with targeted quotes or allusions and nods to works by Dante, Shake-

spere, Ovid, James Joyce, and many others. The music and lyrics gently allude to a multitude of rock and pop songs from the 1960s and 1970s as well. There is only one very close borrowing of chords and texture that I perform from a song composed by David Bowie, "Heroes." Bill sang that song with our band in 1980, so naturally he takes on the Bowie homage in the new piece.

I was very fortunate that Gretchen Farrar, a beautiful and versatile opera singer, readily agreed to the time commitment required to learn and record the lead vocal. It is simply an honor that she appears on this recording and she "kills" it—and completes it. Some of the varying emotional qualities of the character of "profane love" are abstractions of my own ideas and struggles as well as at times an extreme representation of my cousin Matthew Murphy's suave "gentleman adventurer" personality, in the best sense of the notion (aunt Claudia, I did *not* say "sophisticated *rogue*"!). Matt is without doubt the greatest and most talented rock and roll vocalist I've ever had the pleasure of working with since I started strumming a guitar at age fourteen in the mid-1970s.

The composition is dedicated to Merle Langs, my aunt, an extraordinary musician and composer who taught piano to countless young students for over half a century, and continues to do so to this day. Sincere, heartfelt gratitude goes out to the following individuals for their encouragement and continued artistic inspiration: Brett Gingold, musician, sculptor, and painter; Izzi Ramkissoon, musician, educator, and composer; and the late Roland Kohloff, timpanist *extraordinaire* of the New York Philharmonic orchestra.

The Players:



"Sacred Love": Gretchen Farrar, Oregon; opera singer, vocalist, and composer



"profane love": Matthew Murphy, Floral Park, New York; composer, vocalist, musician, and performing artist

CONTINUED TO P. 2

PHOTO COURTESY OF BERNIE LANGS





"Greek Chorus" and "Omniscient": Bill Millard, Ph.D., New York, New York; composer, vocalist, and bassist with the band, Shanghai Love Motel



Rob Fragnito, Millington, New Jersey; studio mixing engineer who greatly improved the sound and textures of the recording and skillfully balanced the 260-plus tracks of "Sacred and Profane Love"



"Greek Chorus" and "Omniscient": Peter Weidman, Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania; composer, pianist, guitarist, and vocalist



"Greek Chorus" and "Omniscient": Bernie Langs, Gillette, New Jersey; composer, musician, videographer, and novelist

"Sacred and Profane Love" Lyrics:

Gretchen (Sacred Love):

You give me life
Mais tu es ma mort
 Love has been our wine
 Flowing like the river of heaven

Remember me as you walk by,
 As you are now so was I,
 As I am now,
 Prepare yourself to follow me down.

Render to me what in love's my due
 Lover, do unto me as I do unto you
 Dark is your soul tonight
 Should I be a Beatrice would you see the light?

I was once as you are
 Will you be as I am now?
 Was I blind and can *you* not see?
 What becomes of one, if not two, three—
 how much 'til you let it be?

Matt (profane love):

Your name's a summons to my foolish blood

There's no word tender enough, to be your name.

Drunken Joyce Beckett sits in a pub.
 As I obliterate all memory of your love
 To be your name.

Down to the river goes I,
 Drowning in Guinness, O'Hara's, and rye
 Beamish, Egans, Teeling—*aye*.

River Jordan, Sea of Galilee
 Easier to walk across
 Than to swim to thee,
 You can raise the Dead Sea
 But you can't raise me.

I'm drunken Dylan Thomas on a White Horse.
 Thinks he's so clever
 Exactly what's the cost?

Gretchen:

Ah my man, ah, you men—ah, men—*amen*

Natural Selections

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A Note from the Editorial Board

Dear Readers and Contributors,

Natural Selections will be going on hiatus until 2022. If you're interested in joining our Editorial Board or contributing content to *Natural Selections* upon our return, please fill out [this form](#) or contact us at nseditors@rockefeller.edu. We are already looking forward to our return and would like to encourage our contributors to keep writing!

The Editorial Board
Natural Selections

CONTINUED FROM P. 2 📖

Apollo's first love was Daphne of old
Cupid's arrow striking hard and bold.
Tavern drunk Apollo that is you
Opium smoke hazing cloudy and blue.

Matt:
Halfway through the journey of my life
I found myself in a gloomy wood.

Chanced upon a stranger
He sang to me,
“Abandon hope all ye who enter here.”

Gretchen:
And, as one handling skillfully the harp,
Attendant on skillful songstress' voice
Like the accordant twinkling of two eyes,
Beamy circlets, dancing to the sounds.

Gretchen (con't):
Hear me, my love,
My eyes they speak
Clearer than thought or word
What is that rain knows or dew feels in the
morning calm
But of what I say

Matt:
Resistance!—is life!
Revolution!—am I!
Never a man betray a true cause
I'll kill the king
I'll nail him to the cross

You!!!

Notes from the underground
Invisible man.
The Molotov cocktail blows up in your hand.

Bill (Greek Chorus and Omniscient):
And I—I must step back
And—and you—you came in a harsh dream—

The undiscovered dream,
Aye—*that's* the rub
Perchance a-towered sharpshooter's nest
As my arms grasp and grope
Towards your love!

And I—will I step back?
To allow my Queen
To pass me by blind

Throw off the misty cloak, courtier
You have nothing to lose save muddy boots.
Sheath your dagger
The king's lost his head

You've got no excuse—you've nothing to
lose!

Peter with Bernie (both Greek Chorus and Omniscient):

I was once as you are
Will you be as I am now?
Peasants and Lords create the fruit of the
vine.
But there's no prayer for the thoughts
Running through my mind!

Remember me as you walk by,
As you are now so was I—
As I am now,
Prepare yourself to be
Follow me down, follow me down

Gretchen:
Turn thee, and list'
These eyes are thy *only* Paradise

Matt:
A memory that became you
Drunk I remember my blues
Where are your gibes now you merciless
jester?

I watched the angel fall from the sky
As birds o'er Dottie's rainbow high
Clever boy never know when yer sinking

Gretchen:
Come walk with me a while
Row a boat Sunday-park style
Ah, you men—*amen*

Bernie:
Robin Hood choked on his cigarette
The hookah opium resin left

Peter:
From that I dreamed and behold a ladder
Set up on the earth its top reached to heaven
And there—there—you angels were ascend-
ing and descending on it...

Bernie:
Opium heaven

Gretchen:
I look at you all there
Darling mystery of mine
My heart breaks it beats
Your world is spinning
Round, round, round
I look at you all there—here, everywhere

Gretchen:
At long last

I grasp you
I feel you
Feeling me

Matt:
I grasp you—I *grasp* you

Gretchen:
O comfortable friar! where is my lord?
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.

Bill:
He's Drunken Joyce Beckett in a pub
Tryin' to obliterate memory of her love
To be her name.

Down to the river there he goes
Drowning in Guinness, 'pill his lows
To be her name

Bill:
The River Jordan, Sea of Galilee
Easier to walk across
Than to swim to thee,
Doesn't believe that she can raise the Dead
No Lazarus he
Won't be easily led.

Gretchen:
I was once as you are
And you will be as I am now
I was once as you are
And you will be as I am now

Gretchen (con't):
Como el manzano entre los árboles del bosque,
Así es mi amado entre los hijos.
Me senté bajo su sombra con gran alegría,
Su fruto era dulce a mi paladar.

Translation (from the Biblical "Song of Songs"):
As the apple tree among the trees of the for-
est,
So is my beloved among children.
I sat under its shadow with great joy,
Its fruit was sweet to my palate.

Bill with Matt:
You will never be lovelier than you are now
We will never be here again...

Gretchen:
Ah, my man,
Ah, men"
Amen

Sacred and Profane Love can be heard online
at <https://soundcloud.com/bernie-langs/sacred-and-profane-love>

Natural Expressions

Art

Susan Stair, art teacher at the Child and Family Center at The Rockefeller University, would like to announce two events. One event, *Tree Power*, will take place on Sunday, October 3 from 2-4 p.m. in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem in the Southeast corner by the basketball courts. Stair is the artist in charge of this free event, which is open to both individuals and families. In the event of rain, *Tree Power* will take place on Sunday, October 10 from 2-4 p.m. The second event is a year-long art installation, *Ascending the Mountain*, that will be up in Marcus Garvey Park until July of 2022. *Ascending the Mountain* addresses trees using clay and mosaics and is funded by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council as well as the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone. More about Susan Stair and her art can be found on her [website](#).

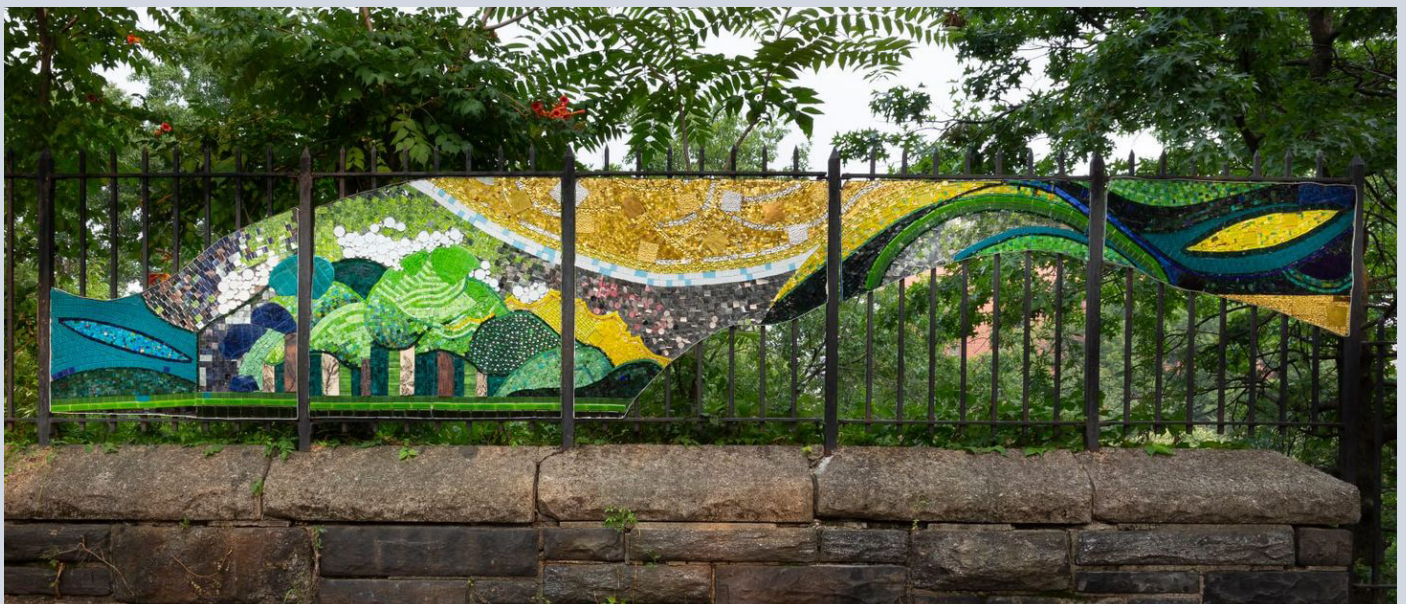
Email Megan E. Kelley at mkelley@rockefeller.edu to submit your art/music/performance/sporting/other event for next month's "Natural Expressions" and follow [@NatSelections](#) on Twitter for more events. Digital and online events/releases are welcome!



Ascending the Mountain part 1, Roots in Rock, 2021; photo by Salem Krieger



Ascending the Mountain part 2, Growing Powerhouse, 2021; photo by Salem Krieger



Ascending the Mountain part 3, Canopy Celebration, 2021; photo by Salem Krieger

New York Rhymes: TONES

KONSTANTINA THEOFANOPOULOU

TONES

-Jazzing around the blue skies
It was so long ago-
So long
But for you I've still got the
blues
Jazz me up
or
Rock and
Roll me away

-but I've still got the blues for you. -

by Konstantina

Poetry: Dr. Konstantina Theofanopoulou (instagram: [@newyork_rhymes](https://www.instagram.com/newyork_rhymes))

COLOSSEO (OUTSIDE)

TERME DI CARACALLA

Life on a Roll

Rome—the Eternal City

NAN PANG

Rome is often referred to as the "Eternal City"—the term was supposedly coined in the first century B.C. by the Roman poet Tibullus. This is because ancient Romans believed that no matter what happened to the world, or how many empires rose or fell, that Rome would go on forever. While walking through the Roman Forum and the Thermae, I felt an indescribable awe thinking that people really built these structures two thousand years ago. If they successfully impress people today after nearly two millennia, I can only imagine how visitors reacted back then.

In the evening, hanging out around the Trevi Fountain is a fun activity where you often see people toss coins. The legend says, tossing one coin into the fountain means you'll return to Rome, tossing two coins means you'll return and fall in love, and tossing three coins means you'll return, find love, and marry. How many did I toss?

FONTANA DI TREVI

COLOSSEO (INSIDE)



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