

Songfest at Colburn

Songs of William Bolcom June 20, 2012 at 7:30pm · Zipper Hall

I.

Briefly It Enters (Jane Kenyon)

Who
The Clearing
Otherwise
February: Thinking of Flowers
Twilight: After Haying
Man Eating
The Sick Wife
Peonies at Dusk
Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks

Rachel Schutz, soprano; Tomasz Lis, piano

II.

Minicabs (Arnold Weinstein)

I Feel Good
People Change
Those
Food Song #1
Food Song #2
I Will Never Forgive You
Songette
Not Even a Haiku
Maxim #1
Maxim #2
Anyone
Finale: Mystery of the Song?

Soprano: Martina Caruso, MacKenzie Florence, Lynn Isnar, Julia Mendelsohn,
Irina Popescu, Hannah Tarder-Stoll, and Jessica Wright
Mezzo-soprano: Marisa Novak
Baritone: Matthew Giallongo and Paul Spanagel
Bass: Zachary Benton Burgess
Piano: Lucas Wong

III.

Laura Sonnets

Sonetto 286 (Petrarca)

Lorant Najbauer, baritone; Kwok-Wai Lui, piano

I Will Breathe a Mountain

The Bustle in a House (Emily Dickinson)

Laura Choi Stuart, soprano; Javier Arrebola, piano

How the Swing Those Obligatos Around (Alice Fulton)

Kate Tombaugh, mezzo-soprano; Bobby Pace, piano

Intermission

IV.

WORLD PREMIERE

*Gettysburg: July 1, 1863 (Jane Kenyon)

Nathan Wyatt, baritone; Lucas Wong, piano

V.

Let Evening Come

Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield (Maya Angelou)

'Tis Not That Dying Hurts Us So (Emily Dickinson)

Let Evening Come (Jane Kenyon)

Laura Strickling, soprano; Laura Pearson, viola, Liza Stepanova, piano

VI.

Cabaret Songs, Volumes 1 & 2 (Arnold Weinstein)

Toothbrush Time

Aumna Iqbal, mezzo-soprano; Stanton Nelson, piano

Waitin'

Jonathan Cooper, baritone; Stanton Nelson, piano

Amor

Mary-Elizabeth O'Neill, mezzo-soprano; Evan Roider, piano

Over the Piano

Loralee Songer, mezzo-soprano; Hyanghyun Lee, piano

George

Siobahn Sung, mezzo-soprano; Hyueeun Ham, piano

~~~

\*Gettysburg: July 1, 1863 was commissioned by SongFest with generous funding from the Sorel Organization. We gratefully acknowledge the Sorel Organization for their support in making these commissions possible.

# 🌿 A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon 🌿

## Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks (1995-96)

Music by William Bolcom | Text by Jane Kenyon

Rachel Schutz, *soprano* | Sophie Wingland, *soprano* | Tomasz Lis, *piano*

Bolcom's song cycle *Briefly It Enters*, which sets nine poems of Jane Kenyon.

### 1. Who

These lines are written  
by an animal, an angel,  
a stranger sitting in my chair;  
by someone who already knows  
how to live without trouble  
among books, and pots and pans...

Who is it who asks me to find  
language for the sound  
a sheep's hoof makes when it strikes  
a stone? And who speaks  
the words which are my food?

### 2. The Clearing

The dog and I push through the ring  
of dripping junipers  
to enter the open space high on the hill  
where I let him off the leash.

He vaults, snuffling, between tufts of moss;  
twigs snap beneath his weight; he rolls  
and rubs his jowls on the aromatic earth;  
his pink tongue lolls.

I look for sticks of proper heft  
to throw for him, while he sits, prim  
and earnest in his love, if it is love.

All night a soaking rain, and now the hill  
exhales relief, and the fragrance  
of warm earth. . . . The sedges  
have grown an inch since yesterday,  
and ferns unfurled, and even if they try  
the lilacs by the barn can't  
keep from opening today.

I longed for spring's thousand tender greens,  
and the white-throated sparrow's call  
that borders on rudeness. Do you know—  
since you went away  
all I can do  
is wait for you to come back to me.

### 3. Otherwise

I got out of bed  
on two strong legs.  
It might have been  
otherwise. I ate  
cereal, sweet  
milk, ripe, flawless  
peach. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I took the dog uphill  
to the birch wood.  
All morning I did  
the work I love.

At noon I lay down  
with my mate. It might  
have been otherwise.  
We ate dinner together  
at a table with silver  
candlesticks. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I slept in a bed  
in a room with paintings  
on the walls, and  
planned another day  
just like this day.  
But one day, I know,  
it will be otherwise.

### 4. February: Thinking of Flowers

Now wind torments the field,  
turning the white surface back  
on itself, back and back on itself,  
like an animal licking a wound.

Nothing but white--the air, the light;  
only one brown milkweed pod  
bobbing in the gully, smallest  
brown boat on the immense tide.

A single green sprouting thing  
would restore me. . . .

Then think of the tall delphinium,  
swaying, or the bee when it comes  
to the tongue of the burgundy lily.

# ❧ A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon ❧

## 5. Twilight: After Haying

Yes, long shadows go out  
from the bales; and yes, the soul  
must part from the body:  
what else could it do?

The men sprawl near the baler,  
too tired to leave the field.  
They talk and smoke,  
and the tips of their cigarettes  
blaze like small roses  
in the night air. (It arrived  
and settled among them  
before they were aware.)

The moon comes  
to count the bales,  
and the dispossessed--  
Whip-poor-will, Whip-poor-will  
--sings from the dusty stubble.

These things happen. . .the soul's bliss  
and suffering are bound together  
like the grasses. . .

The last, sweet exhalations  
of timothy and vetch  
go out with the song of the bird;  
the ravaged field  
grows wet with dew.

## 6. Man Eating

The man at the table across from mine  
is eating yogurt. His eyes, following  
the progress of the spoon, cross briefly  
each time it nears his face. Time,

and the world with all its principalities,  
might come to an end as prophesied  
by the Apostle John, but what about  
this man, so completely present

to the little carton with its cool,  
sweet food, which has caused no animal  
to suffer, and which he is eating  
with a pearl-white plastic spoon.

## 7. The Sick Wife

The sick wife stayed in the car  
while he bought a few groceries.  
Not yet fifty,

she had learned what it's like  
not to be able to button a button.

It was the middle of the day—  
and so only mothers with small children  
or retired couples  
stepped through the muddy parking lot.

Dry cleaning swung and gleamed on hangers  
in the cars of the prosperous.  
How easily they moved—  
with such freedom,  
even the old and relatively infirm.

The windows began to steam up.  
The cars on either side of her  
pulled away so briskly  
that it made her sick at heart.

## 8. Peonies at Dusk

White peonies blooming along the porch  
send out light  
while the rest of the yard grows dim.

Outrageous flowers as big as human  
heads! They're staggered  
by their own luxuriance: I had  
to prop them up with stakes and twine.

The moist air intensifies their scent,  
and the moon moves around the barn  
to find out what it's coming from.

In the darkening June evening  
I draw a blossom near, and bending close  
search it as a woman searches  
a loved one's face.

## 9. Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks

I am the blossom pressed in a book,  
found again after two hundred years. . . .

I am the maker, the lover, and the keeper. . . .

When the young girl who starves  
sits down to a table  
she will sit beside me. . . .

I am food on the prisoner's plate. . . .

I am water rushing to the wellhead,  
filling the pitcher until it spills. . . .

## 🌿 A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon 🌿

I am the patient gardener  
of the dry and weedy garden. . . .

I am the stone step,  
the latch, and the working hinge. . . .

I am the heart contracted by joy. . .  
the longest hair, white  
before the rest. . . .

I am there in the basket of fruit  
presented to the widow. . . .

I am the musk rose opening  
unattended, the fern on the boggy summit. . . .

I am the one whose love  
overcomes you, already with you  
when you think to call my name. . . .

---

### COMPOSER NOTES

*Donald Hall, Kenyon's husband and also a poet, wrote the following preface for the song cycle:*

“Jane Kenyon’s passion for music was as great as her genius for writing poetry. Before we left Michigan in 1975, we came to know William Bolcom and Joan Morris, who visited us several times on our farm in New Hampshire. When Jane contracted leukemia in 1994, Bill had already set Jane’s “Let Evening Come” in a cantata.

“While she was ill she listened over and over again, with the greatest pleasure, to a tape of Benita Valente singing her words.

“She loved Bill’s music and Benita Valente’s voice. Bill was already planning *Briefly It Enters*, for Benita Valente, which was a thrill for Jane to imagine. She corresponded with Bill about the choice of poems before she died at forty-seven on 22 April 1995.”

-William Bolcom

---

I was first introduced to Jane Kenyon by Tory Browers, a wonderful singer and friend. I was drawn to the warmth and openness I felt in her poems and, at the suggestion of John Musto and Lucas Wong, I decided to ask William Bolcom to write a commission for *SongFest*. I had hoped he would agree to set one of Kenyon’s poems and actually had chosen a few favorites. Mr. Bolcom graciously accepted and commented that he had been waiting for an opportunity to set *Gettysburg: July 1, 1863* by Kenyon. We are so privileged to have such wonderful artists come to *SongFest* and share their stories and view of the world through words and music.

I am often asked what it is that we do and why? A friend wrote “... this often neglected genre of voice and piano song will provide the singers and pianists with a rich view of this world which will nourish them for their entire lives.”

-Rosemary Hyler Ritter

# ❧ A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon ❧



## Let Evening Come

Laura Strickling, *soprano* | Laura Pearson, *viola* | Liza Stepanova, *piano*

**Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield (1994)**

Music by William Bolcom | Text by Maya Angelou

“Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield” is the first song of Bolcom’s cycle *Let Evening Come*, which sets the poetry of Maya Angelou, Emily Dickinson and Jane Kenyon for soprano, viola and piano.

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses  
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,  
the air around us becomes  
light, rare, sterile.  
We breathe, briefly.  
Our eyes, briefly,  
see with  
a hurtful clarity.  
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,  
examines,  
gnaws on kind words  
unsaid,  
promised walks  
never taken.

Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to

them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,  
now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance,  
fall away.  
We are not so much maddened  
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance  
of dark, cold  
caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always  
irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

– Maya Angelou

## ❧ A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon ❧

### 'Tis Not That Dying Hurts Us So

'Tis not that Dying hurts us so—  
'Tis Living—hurts us more—  
But Dying—is a different way—  
A Kind behind the Door—

The Southern Custom—of the Bird—  
That ere the Frosts are due—  
Accepts a better Latitude—  
We—are the Birds—that stay.

The Shrivens round Farmers' doors—  
For whose reluctant Crumb—  
We stipulate—till pitying Snows  
Persuade our Feathers Home.

– Emily Dickinson

### Let Evening Come

Let the light of late afternoon  
shine through chinks in the barn, moving  
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing  
as a woman takes up her needles  
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned  
in long grass. Let the stars appear  
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.  
Let the wind die down. Let the shed  
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop  
in the oats, to air in the lung  
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't  
be afraid. God does not leave us  
comfortless, so let evening come.

– Jane Kenyon

---

### COMPOSER NOTES

#### *Let Evening Come* (1993)

*Preface to the score of Let Evening Come, by William Bolcom:*

In 1993 I was requested to write a singing duet for Tatiana Troyanos and Benita Valente, two wonderful artists. We discussed possible texts, and then very unexpectedly Tatiana died, a blow to all of us. I was then approached by the sponsors of the commission: Would I write a duo anyway, with...[soprano, piano, and viola], the violist in some way representing the departed Tatiana? The present cantata is the result.

The three poems chosen describe with ever greater acceptance the phenomenon of death. Maya Angelou's poem is still raw with the shock of so many lost artists of the African-American pantheon but observes with an almost journalistic candor the state we, the survivors, pass through after the death of a powerful person. Emily Dickinson's continues in the same dispassionate vein, observation not softening the grief but resolving it through deeper understanding; Jane Kenyon's invites us to contemplate the elegant beauty in death's resolution.

The violist's role did not turn out to be a ghostly recreation of Troyanos' spirit but, perhaps, that of a choral commentator on the poems' events. Though each setting is detachable from the other two, the viola-and-piano interlude between the last two poems is not; it serves as gateway to the "coming of evening."

-William Bolcom

# ❧ A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon ❧

WORLD PREMIERE

## Gettysburg: July 1, 1863

Nathan Wyatt, *baritone* | Lucas Wong, *piano*

*Commissioned by SongFest with funding from the Sorel Organization*

The young man, hardly more  
than a boy, who fired the shot  
had looked at him with an air  
not of anger but of concentration,  
as if he were surveying a road,  
or feeding a length of wood into a saw:  
It had to be done just so.

The bullet passed through  
his upper chest, below the collarbone.  
The pain was not what he might  
have feared. Strangely exhilarated  
he staggered out of the pasture  
and into a grove of trees.



He pressed and pressed  
the wound, trying to stanch  
the blood, but he could only press  
what he could reach, and he could  
not reach his back, where the bullet  
had exited.

He lay on the earth  
smelling the leaves and mosses,  
musty and damp and cool  
after the blaze of the open afternoon.

How good the earth smelled,  
as it had when he was a boy  
hiding from his father,  
who was intent on strapping him  
for doing his chores  
late one time too many.

A cowbird razzed from a rail fence.  
It isn't mockery, he thought,  
no malice in it ... just a noise.  
Stray bullets nicked the oaks  
overhead. Leaves and splinters fell.

Someone near him groaned.  
But it was his own voice he heard.  
His fingers and feet tingled,  
the roof of his mouth,  
and the bridge of his nose....

He became dry, dry, and thought  
of Christ, who said, I thirst.  
His man-smell, the smell of his hair  
and skin, his sweat, the salt smell  
of his cock and the little ferny hairs  
that two women had known

left him, and a sharp, almost sweet  
smell began to rise from his open mouth  
in the warm shade of the oaks.  
A streak of sun climbed the rough  
trunk of a tree, but he did not  
see it with his open eye.

– Jane Kenyon



# William Bolcom

*Composer, Pianist*



© Kathryn Conlin

Named 2007 **Composer of the Year** by Musical America, and honored with multiple Grammy Awards for his groundbreaking setting of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, William Bolcom is a composer of cabaret songs, concertos, sonatas, operas, symphonies, and much more. He was awarded

the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his *Twelve New Etudes* for piano.

As a pianist he has recorded for Advance, Jazzology, Musical Heritage, Nonesuch, Vox, and Omega. With his wife, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris, he has performed in concert for more than 35 years throughout the United States, Canada, and abroad.

In May 2010 there were two premieres of new works: *Romanza* by violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg with the New Century Chamber Orchestra in San Francisco and *La fantome du Clavecin* by harpsichordist Andreas Skouras in London.

2009 saw the premieres of *First Symphony for Band* in February by the University of Michigan Symphony Band in Ann Arbor, Michigan; *Shakyamuni* in February by Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for the reopening of Alice Tully Hall; and in May, *Introduzione e Rondo: HAYDN GO SEEK* by the Haydn Trio Eisenstadt in Eisenstadt, Austria and *Lady Liberty* by The Master Singers of Lexington [Mass.] and The Ann Arbor Vocal Arts Ensemble.

In February 2008 his *Eighth Symphony* was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood Festival Chorus conducted by James Levine in Boston, MA and Carnegie Hall/New York. Within the same month the Guarneri and Johannes String Quartets premiered Bolcom's *Octet: Double Quartet*. Other 2008 premieres: *Ballade* in January 2008 by pianist Ursula Oppens; *Lucrezia*, a one-act comic opera for 5 singers and 2 pianists, in March 2008

by New York Festival of Song; *Four Piedmont Choruses* in May 2008 by the Piedmont Chamber Singers; *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* in June 2008 at the University of Chicago.

In 2007 Bolcom was feted in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, with a two and a half-week festival of his music, including master classes, recitals, and concerts of his organ and chamber music. Titled *Illuminating Bolcom*, the festival was highlighted by two performances of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* accompanied by animated projections of Blake's illuminations. The animations were commissioned by VocalEssence and created by projection designer Wendall K. Harrington.

In September 2006 Bolcom's *Canciones de Lorca* with tenor Plácido Domingo, the Pacific Symphony, and conductor Carl St. Clair, was premiered at the gala opening concert of the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Costa Mesa, CA.

Bolcom taught composition at the University of Michigan from 1973-2008. Named a full professor in 1983, he was Chairman of the Composition Department from 1998 to 2003 and was named the Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor of Composition in the fall of 1994. He retired from teaching in 2008.

In addition to their performances, Bolcom and Morris have recorded over two dozen albums together. Their first one, *After the Ball*, garnered a Grammy nomination for Joan Morris. Recent recordings include: two albums of songs by lyricist E. Y. "Yip" Harburg and Gus Kahn on Original Cast Records; Bolcom's complete *Cabaret Songs*, written with lyricist Arnold Weinstein, on Centaur; and *Someone Talked! Memories of World War II* with tenor Robert White and narrator Hazen Schumacher, available now at [www.equilibri.com](http://www.equilibri.com).

Recent recordings of his works include: *From the Diary of Sally Hemings*, written with playwright Sandra Seaton, performed by soprano Alyson Cambridge and pianist Lydia Brown, and available on White Pine Records; *Little Suite of Four Dances and Concert-Piece* with clarinetist Maureen Hurd and available on MSR Recordings. For more information, consult RECORDINGS.

This is Bolcom's first season at *SongFest*.

# ❧ A Tribute to William Bolcom and Jane Kenyon ❧

## JANE KENYON

(1947-1995)



New Hampshire's poet laureate at the time of her untimely death at age forty-seven, Jane Kenyon was noted for verse that probed the inner psyche, particularly with regard to her own battle against the depression that lasted throughout much of her adult life. Writing for the last two decades of her life at her farm in northern New England, Kenyon is also remembered for her stoic portraits of domestic and rural life; as essayist Gary Roberts noted in *Contemporary Women Poets*, her poetry was "acutely faithful to the familiarities and mysteries of home life, and it is distinguished by intense calmness in the face of routine disappointments and tragedies."

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Kenyon spent her first two decades in the Midwest, attending the University of Michigan in her hometown through completion of her master's degree in 1972. It was while she was a student at the University of Michigan that Kenyon met her future husband, the poet Donald Hall, who taught there. After her marriage, Kenyon moved with Hall to Eagle Pond Farm, a New Hampshire farm that had been in Hall's family for generations and where she would spend the remainder of her life.

Kenyon published only four volumes of poetry during her life: *From Room to Room*, *The Little Boat*, *Let Evening Come*, and *Constance*. Despite her relatively small output, her poetry was highly lauded by critics throughout her lifetime. As fellow poet Carol Muske remarked in the *New York Times* when describing Kenyon's *The Boat of Quiet Hours*, "These poems surprise beauty at every turn and capture truth at its familiar New England slant. Here, in Keats's terms, is a capable poet." Indeed, Kenyon's work has often been compared with that of English Romantic poet John Keats;

Roberts dubbed her a "Keatsian poet" and noted that, "like Keats, she attempts to redeem morbidity with a peculiar kind of gusto, one which seeks a quiet annihilation of self-identity through identification with benign things."

The cycles of nature held special significance for Kenyon, who returned to them again and again, both in her variations on Keats's ode "To Autumn," and in other pastoral verse. In *Let Evening Come*, her third published collection—and one that found the poet taking what *Poetry* essayist Paul Breslin called "a darker turn"—Kenyon explored nature's cycles in other ways: the fall of light from day to dusk to night, and the cycles of relationships with family and friends throughout a long span of years brought to a close by death. *Let Evening Come* "shows [Kenyon] at the height of her powers," according to Muske in a review of the 1990 volume for the *New York Times Book Review*, with the poet's "descriptive skills . . . as notable as her dramatic ones. Her rendering of natural settings, in lines of well-judged rhythm and simple syntax, contribute to the [volume's] memorableness."

*Constance* began Kenyon's study of depression, and her work in this regard has been compared with that of the late poet Sylvia Plath. Comparing the two, Breslin wrote that "Kenyon's language is much quieter, less self-dramatizing" than that of Plath, and where the earlier poet "would give herself up, writing her lyrical surrender to oblivion, . . . Kenyon fought to the end." Breslin noted the absence of self-pity in Kenyon's work, and the poet's ability to separate from self and acknowledge the grief and emotional pain of others, as in her poems "Coats," "Sleepers in Jaipur," and "Gettysburg: July 1, 1863," which imagines a mortally wounded soldier lying in wait for death on the historic battlefield.

In *Otherwise*, a posthumous collection containing twenty poems written just prior to her death as well as several taken from her earlier books, Kenyon "chronicles the uncertainty of living as culpable, temporary creatures," according to *Nation* contributor Emily Gordon. As Muske added in the *New York Times Book Review*, Kenyon avoids sentimentality throughout *Otherwise*. "The poet here sears a housewife's apron, hangs wash on the line, walks a family dog and draws her thought from a melancholy, ecstatic soul as if from the common well, 'where the fearful and rash alike must come for water.' In ecstasy," Muske continued, Kenyon "sees this world as a kind of threshold through which we enter God's wonder."