

CHELSEA HART MELCHER

SO SMOOTH, SO SWEET SONGS OF ALLEN SAPP

Chelsea Hart Melcher soprano | Paul Melcher piano





1952 WAS A YEAR OF SONG FOR THE YOUNG HARVARD UNIVERSITY COMPOSER ALLEN SAPP.

The 29-year-old junior professor spent that summer “house-sitting” with his wife Norma Bertolami Sapp in the Boston home of his senior colleague and mentor Archibald T. Davison. Here, he began composing three song cycles, *The Lady and the Lute*, *Nursery Rhymes*, and *Seven Epigrams (Both Sweet and Sour)*. Sapp greatly enjoyed exploring Davison’s vast private library, from which he found the texts for these song cycles. For *The Lady and the Lute*, he selected eight poems from Robert Herrick’s *Hesperides* (1648), mostly lyrics of delicate intimacy and sensuality, save only for the seventh, “Goe, Perjur’d Man!,” which to Sapp “seemed to be an appropriate foil for all of the lusciousness” of the other texts.

Sapp conceived of this set as eight songs in the form of a circle, with the first and final songs anchoring the entire work. These two songs share many traits: They are fairly similar in length, each marked “Con tenerezza” (with tenderness) in 3/4 time, have identical tempos (quarter note = 75), and begin with soft, mid-range solo passages for the soprano. The texts of these outer songs both refer to the sense of hearing, the voice (or singing), and the lute. In the composer’s words, “The lute, for me, is a rich word, a referent to a whole series of pictures of an instrument, and often a beautiful performer, in the iconography of 15th to 17th-century art. It’s very sound, pure, musical, resonant in itself, a word that invites the composer. That it is an instrument of wondrous variety, shapeliness, and delicacy is another point.” Harmonically, these two songs are focused on the tonal center of C.

The first performance of the Herrick songs was in Paine Hall at Harvard in the late summer of 1952 by soprano Jean Lunn, accompanied by Norma at the piano. In 1965, Carol Plantamura performed *The Lady and the Lute* at Carnegie Recital Hall, accompanied by George Crumb on harpsichord. Sapp later commented that he had come to prefer that this work be performed with piano accompaniment: “The color, and in particular the harmonic nature of the keyboard part, required a sustaining instrument” (i.e., the piano), and that with the harpsichord accompaniment, “there was simply not enough bite.”

The second song cycle of 1952, included on this album, is *Nursery Rhymes*, a set of four short songs (each about one minute in length) written around the time of the birth of his first son

Christopher. These nursery rhymes are set very simply and charmingly, with diatonic melodies set with a neoclassic accompaniment. This collection of songs may have been composed as a private family document, as the composer never made a fair copy of the score or sought a public performance.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Sapp was deeply immersed in his career as an administrator at several universities and private foundations, and wrote considerably less music than at other periods of his life. Beginning in 1980, Sapp returned to composing in earnest, writing more than 50 compositions over the next 10 years. These included six additional sets of songs with piano, including the final two works on this album.

Affliction (1983) for mezzo-soprano and piano is a setting of the soul-searching poem “Affliction (I)” from the English poet George Herbert’s collection *The Temple* (1633). Herbert’s 11-stanza poem, an autobiographical account of his spiritual reflections, is set by Sapp in 11 separate songs, depicting the wide array of dispositions of the poem. The dominant thematic element in most songs is the climbing or descending diatonic scale, occasionally with whole-tone shadings, alluding to the spiritual themes in the poem. In the climactic final song, Sapp sets Herbert’s text to the melody and slightly transformed harmony of J. S. Bach’s “Komm, süßer Tod” (Come, Sweet Death), in counterpoint to the characteristic ascending melodic lines of *Affliction*.

In 1988, Sapp composed his next set of songs, simply titled *Two Songs*, written for and premiered by Sharon Radionoff. Sapp asked her if she had any favorite texts in mind, and she suggested that he set “these two kids’ poems I have always loved, that my mom used to read to us when we were little”: The anonymous children’s poem *Mister Nobody*, and the poem *Raggedy Man* by James Whitcomb Riley. Sapp also asked Radionoff about the styles of music that she liked to sing, and she requested that he write these songs in the musical theater style. In program notes for the 1993 premiere, Sapp wrote “The notion is to set them in very contrasting styles, one [‘Anonymous Eponymous’] a kind of recitative and aria in pseudo-Handelian resonances, the other [‘Riley Set Wryly’] as a no-nonsense, tough sort of jazzy piece to be rendered freely, with rhythms strong, lots of syncopations, and plenty of bitter-sweet harmonies.”

— Notes by Alan Green



CHELSEA HART MELCHER

“Her voice is like a cello, with such a deep and beautiful resonance!” – Libby Larsen

“The climaxes are wonderfully secure and exciting to hear. . . and what is also wonderful is her dramatic involvement, which is total — she lives every line.”

– Roger Pines (*Lyric Opera of Chicago*)

Chelsea Hart Melcher has been described as “cooly captivating,” “ethereal and sublime,” and “a woman to be reckoned with” onstage. A national finalist in Sherrill Milnes’ “Opera Idol” competition, Melcher earned a Performance Diploma from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, a Master of Music from The Ohio State University, and a Bachelor of Music from Central Michigan University. She has worked with numerous symphonies and opera companies across the nation, and was the soprano soloist for the American premiere of *Requiem Novum* by Märten Jansson. Melcher has also performed as soloist in Verdi’s *Requiem*, Strauss’ *Vier Letzte Lieder*, Handel’s *Messiah*, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Mass in C and *Choral Fantasy*, Mahler’s Second Symphony, Dan Forrest’s *Requiem for the Living*, Haydn’s *Requiem in C*, Mozart’s *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass*, and others. Her operatic roles include Micaëla and Frasquita in *Carmen*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Valencienne in *The Merry Widow*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Mimi and Musetta in *La Bohème*, Violetta and Annina in *La Traviata*, Nedda in *I Pagliacci*, Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Adina in *L’Elisir d’amore*, Suor Genovieffa in *Suor Angelica*, Butterfly in *Madama Butterfly*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Mariuccia in *I Due Timidi*, Female Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia*, Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, and Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte*. Melcher is director of Opera and Musical Theater at the Capital University Conservatory of Music, and serves on the faculty of Columbus Children’s Theatre. She is the Founder of Vocal Career Academy and Nerves Be Gone Academy (chelseamelcher.com), and Co-Founder with her husband Paul Melcher of Red School of Music in suburban Columbus.



ALLEN SAPP (1922–1999) was a prolific composer, an inspiring music professor, and a leader in the American performing arts community. He composed over 140 substantial works, including nine song cycles, four of which are featured on this album. Sapp was born and raised in Philadelphia, and where he was trained in composition, harmony, and counterpoint with William Happich. He attended Harvard University (1939–1942) where he studied with Walter Piston, then privately with Aaron Copland and Nadia Boulanger. Sapp then spent five years of service in Europe as a U.S. Army cryptanalyst during and immediately

following World War II. In 1948 he returned to Harvard for graduate studies, and served on the music faculty there from 1950 to 1958. For most of the following two decades, Sapp worked in higher-education administrative roles at SUNY-Buffalo, Florida State University, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He completed his career at Cincinnati as a professor of composition, retiring in 1993. Late in his career, when asked to describe his music, he slyly stated that he “admires brevity, welcomes wit, subscribes to craftsmanship, appreciates risk, and remains fascinated with eccentricity.”



Pianist and composer **PAUL MELCHER** currently serves as the Director of Music for St. Brigid of Kildare Church in Dublin OH. He studied piano with Aviram Reichert, Kent McWilliams, and Alexandra Mascolo-David. Melcher holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from St. Olaf College, where he toured with the St. Olaf Choir under renowned conductor Anton Armstrong, and was a featured piano soloist for the special “Christmas in Norway” broadcast on PBS. Melcher also holds a Master of Music degree in Piano and Vocal Performance from Central Michigan University. He has served as music director for various opera

company programs and accompanied professional singers and choirs, including Opera Columbus, Opera Project Columbus, Bay View Music Festival, Grand Rapids Ballet, and BalletMet of Columbus. As a composer, Melcher was a semi-finalist for two consecutive years in the Fidelio International Piano Composition Competition and has written more than 70 works (including several published with ILP Music), including numerous arrangements of sacred music.

TEXTS

THE LADY AND THE LUTE (1952)

Texts by Robert Herrick

I.

So smooth, so sweet, so silvery is thy voice,
As, could they hear, the damn'd would
make no noise,
But listen to thee, walking in thy chamber,
Melting melodious words, to lutes of amber.

II.

Clear are her eyes,
Like purest skies.
Discovering from thence
A baby there
That turns each sphere,
Like an intelligence.

III.

Her pretty feet
Like snails did creep
A little out, and then,
As if they started at Bo-Peep,
Did soon draw in again.

IV.

Put up your silks; and piece by piece
Give them the scent of amber-greece;
And for your breaths too, let them smell
Ambrosia-like, or nectarell;
While other gums their sweets perspire,
By your own jewels set afire.

V.

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows

That liquefaction of her clothes;
Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
That brave vibration each way free;
O how that glittering taketh me!

VI.

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness;
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrals the crimson stomacher;
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribands to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility:
Do more bewitch me, than when art
Is too precise in ev'ry part.

VII.

Goe, perjurd man; and if thou ere return
To see the small remainders in mine urne,
When thou shalt laugh at my religious dust,
And ask: where's now the colour, form and trust
Of woman's beauty? and with thy
hand far more rude
Rifle the flowers which the virgins strewed:
Know, I have prayed to Furie, that some wind
May blow my ashes up, and strike thee blind.

VIII.

When I thy singing next shall heare,
I'll wish I might turne all to eare,
To drink in notes and numbers, such

As blessed soules can't hear too much
Then melted down, there let me lie
Entranced, and most confusedly;
And by thy musique stricken mute,
Die, and be turn'd into a lute.

NURSERY RHYMES (1952)

I. Ride a Cock-horse

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady upon a white horse;
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And so she makes music wherever she
goes. — *Mother Goose*

II. Old Mother Hubbard

Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she came there,
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none!

She went to the cobbler's
To buy him some shoes,
But when she came back,
He was reading the news.

The dame made a curtsy,
The dog made a bow;
The dame said, "Your servant"
And the dog said, "Bow-wow."
— *Sarah Catherine Martin*

III. Little Jack Horner

Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner,

Eating his Christmas pie;
He put in his thumb,
And took out a plum,
And said, "What a good boy am I!"
— *Mother Goose*

IV. Hickory Dickory Dock

Hickory, dickory, dock,
The mouse ran up the clock;
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down again,
Hickory, dickory, dock.
— *Mother Goose*

TWO SONGS (1988)

I. Anonymous Eponymous

I know a funny little man,
As quiet as a mouse,
Who does the mischief that is done
In everybody's house!
There's no one ever sees his face,
And yet we all agree
That every plate we break was cracked
By Mister Nobody.

'Tis he who always tears our books,
Who leaves the door ajar,
He pulls the buttons from our shirts,
And scatters pins afar;
That squeaking door will always squeak,
For prithee, don't you see,
We leave the oiling to be done
By Mister Nobody.

He puts damp wood upon the fire
That kettles cannot boil;

His are the feet that bring in mud,
And all the carpets soil.
The papers always are mislaid;
Who had them last, but he?
That tosses them about
But Mister Nobody.

The finger marks upon the door
By none of us are made;
We never leave the blinds unclosed,
To let the curtains fade.
The ink we never spill; the boots
That lying round you see
Are not our boots, they all belong
To Mister Nobody.
— *Anonymous*

II. Riley Set Wryly

O the Raggedy Man he works fer Pa;
An' he's the goodest man ever you saw.
He comes to our house every day,
An' waters the horses, an' feeds 'em hay;
An' he opens the shed—an' we all ist laugh
When he drives out our little
old wobble-ly calf;
An' nen, ef our hired girl says he can,
He milks the cow fer 'Lizabuth Ann.
Ain't he a' awful good Raggedy Man?
Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

W'y, The Raggedy Man he's ist so good,
He splits the kindlin' and chops the wood;
An' nen he spades in our garden, too,
An' does most things 'at boys can't do.
He clumbed clean up in our big tree
An' shaked a' apple down fer me,

An' 'nother 'n', too, fer 'Lizabuth Ann,
An' 'nother 'n', too, for The Raggedy Man.
Ain't he a' awful kind Raggedy Man?
Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

An' The Raggedy Man, he knows most rhymes,
An' tells 'em, ef I be good, sometimes,
Knows 'bout giants, an' griffins, an' elves,
An' the Squidgicum-Squees 'at swallers
the'rselves:
An', wite by the pump in our pasture-lot,
He showed me the hole 'at the Wunks is got,
'At lives 'way deep in the ground, an' can
Turn into me, er 'Lizabuth Ann!
Er Ma, er Pa, er The Raggedy Man!
Ain't he a funny old Raggedy Man?
Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!

The Raggedy Man, one time, when he
Wuz makin' a little bow'n' ary fer me,
Says: "When you're big like your Pa is,
Air you go' to keep a fine store like his—
An' be a rich merchant—an' wear fine
clothes?—
Er what air you go' to be, goodness knows?"
An' nen he laughed at 'Lizabuth Ann,
An' I says: 'm go' to be a Raggedy Man!
I'm ist go' to be a nice Raggedy Man!"
Raggedy! Raggedy! Raggedy Man!
— *James Whitcomb Riley*

AFFLICTION (1983)

Text by George Herbert

I.

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,
I thought the service brave;

So many joyes I writ down for my part,
Besides what I might have
Out of my stock of naturall delights,
Augmented with thy gracious benefits.

II.

I looked on thy furniture so fine,
And made it fine to me;
Thy glorious household-stuffe did me entwine,
And 'tice me unto thee.
Such starres I counted mine: both
heav'n and earth;
Payd me my wages in a world of mirth.

III.

What pleasures could I want,
whose King I served,
Where joyes my fellows were?
Thus argu'd into hopes, my thoughts reserv'd
No place for grief or fear.
Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,
And made her youth and fiercenesse
seek thy face.

IV.

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetneses;
I had my wish and way;
My dayes were straw'd with flow'rs
and happinesse;
There was no moneth but May.
But with my yeares sorrow did
twist and grow,
And made a partie unawares for wo.

V.

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,
Sicknesses cleave my bones;
Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,
And tune my breath to groanes.
Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce believed,
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived.

VI.

When I got health, thou took'st away my
life,
And more, for my friends die;
My mirth and edge was lost,
a blunted knife
Was of more use than I.
Thus thinne and lean without a
fence or friend,
I was blown through with ev'ry
storm and winde.

VII.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town;
Thou didst betray me to a ling'ring book,
And wrap me in a gown.
I was entangled in the world of strife,
Before I had the power to change my life.

VIII.

Yet, for I threaten'd oft the siege to raise,
Not simp'ring all my age,
Thou often didst with academic praise
Melt and dissolve my rage.
I took thy sweet'end pill, till I came neare
I could not go away, nor persevere.

IX.

Yet lest perchance I should too happie be
In my unhappinesse,
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me
Into more sicknesses.
Thus doth thy power cross-bias me, not making
Thine own gift good, yet me from my wayes
taking.

X.

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show;
I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just.

XI.

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
In weaknesse must be stout;
Well, I will change the service, and go seek
Some other master out.
Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.



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