

Music 999 Seminar in Composition: From Poem to Song

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15, Hill Hall 205

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Course description:

It is a commonplace to say that for the ancient Greeks, poem and song were one. But, poets of all historical periods do fill their writing with music. The first stage in setting a poetic text to music is understanding the music already present in that text: the ways that a contemporary poem by Paul Muldoon plays upon the underlying 'grid' of the sonnet, or of groups of iambic feet, for example. This is a similar skill to understanding how the dance movement of a Mozart symphony toys with the conventions of the minuet and trio. In this seminar we will dig into the musical elements inherent in various poems (with a particular focus on modern American poetry). We will then discuss ways of accentuating, subverting and countering a text's music with an original musical setting of that text. We will compose several miniature songs as études, and then work toward a cycle of songs for solo voice and accompanying instrument(s).

Prerequisites: Graduate standing in music composition, or advanced undergraduate standing in music composition with permission of instructor.

Required Texts:

Pinsky, Robert. *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.

Strand, Mark and Eavan Boland, Eds. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Other Resources:

Westergaard, Peter. "Sung Language." Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference, American Society of University Composers, 1969. (Deals with the problems of text-setting in terms of modern linguistics.)

Stanford, W.B. *The Sound of Greek: Studies in the Greek Theory and Practice of Euphony*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967.

Anhalt, Istvan. *Alternative Voices: Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

Rorem, Ned. *Music from Inside Out*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1967