

# No Joke Program Notes

## The Texts

### Meditations On A Green Earth

Steven Stalzer

#### I. Radiance

There is no creation that does not have a radiance,  
be it greenness or seed, blossom or beauty.  
It could not be creation without it.

#### II. The Soul of The Earth

The soul is a breath of living spirit,  
that with excellent sensitivity,  
permeates the entire body to give it life.

Just so, the breath of the air makes the earth fruitful.  
Thus the air is the soul of the earth,  
moistening it, greening it.

#### III. The Underlying Natural Law

When in the fullness of its time this creation wilts,  
its vigor returns to its own source.  
This is the underlying natural law.  
When the elements of the world fulfill their function,  
they come to ripeness and their fruit is gathered back.

#### IV. Invisible Life

Invisible life that sustains all,  
I awaken to life  
in every waft of air.

The air is life,  
greening and blossoming.  
The waters flow with life.  
The sun is lit with life.  
The moon, when waning, is again rekindled by the sun,  
waxing with life once more.

#### V. Prophecy

Now in the people that were meant to green,  
there is no more life of any kind.  
There is only shrivelled barrenness.

The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil,  
selfish goings-on.

The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples.  
There pours forth an unnatural, a loathsome darkness,  
that withers the green, and wizens the fruit  
that was to serve as food for the people.

Sometimes this layer of air is full,  
full of a fog that is the source  
of many destructive and barren creatures,  
that destroy and damage the earth,  
rendering it incapable of sustaining humanity.

All nature is at the disposal of humankind.  
We are to work with it.  
Without it we cannot survive.

Texts reprinted with permission from *Meditations With Hildegard of Bingen*, by Gabrielle Uhlein,  
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The texts for this song cycle for piano and soprano come from the writings of Hildegard von Bingen,  
a 12th century German spiritual leader, composer, writer, and healer. Hildegard was born in 1098; the  
current year therefore marks the celebration of her 900th anniversary.

Notes by Steven Stalzer.

**Deux Poèmes de Ronsard  
Albert Roussel**

*Rossignol, mon mignon*

Rossignol, mon mignon, qui dans ceste saulaie  
Vas seul de branche en branche à ton gré voletant,  
Et chantes à l'envie de moi qui vais chantant  
Celle qu'il faut tousjours que dans la bouche j'aie,  
Nous souspirons tous deux:  
Ta douce vois s'essaie  
De sonner l'amitié d'une que t'aime tant,  
Et moi, triste, je vais la beauté regrettant  
Qui m'a fait dans le coeur une si aigre plaie.  
Toutefois, Rossignol, nous différons d'un point:  
C'est que tu es aimé et je ne le suis point,  
Bien que tous deux aions les musiques pareilles.  
Car tu fleschis t'amie au doux bruit de tes sons,  
Mais la mienne, qui prend à dépit mes chansons,  
Pour ne les escouter se bouche les oreilles.

Nightingale, my little one, who, in this lovely weather  
Go alone from branch to branch at your pleasure,  
And I, who envy your song, go singing a song that  
must remain unsung,  
We both take a breath:  
Your sweet voice tries to sound the friendship of one  
who loves you so much,  
And I, sad, go on, longing for the beautiful one who  
wounds my heart so bitterly.  
Nevertheless, Nightingale, we differ in one way:  
It is that you are loved and I am not,  
Even though we have equally beautiful music.  
Because you move your love to pity with the beauty  
of your sounds while mine, in order not to hear my  
songs, covers her ears.

*Ciel, ær, et vens*

Ciel, ær, et vens, plains et mons découvres,  
Tertres fourchus et forêts verdoïantes,  
Rivages tors, et sources ondoïantes,  
Taillis rasés, et vous bocages verts;  
Antre moussus à demi front ouvers,  
Près, boutons, fleurs, et herbes rousoïantes,  
Coutaus vineus, et plages blondoïantes,  
Gâtine, Loir, et vous mes tristes vers:  
Puis qu'au partir, rongé de soin et d'ire,  
A ce bel oeil, l'Adieu je n'ai sceu dire,  
Qui près et loin me détient en émoi:  
Je vous suppli, Ciel, ær, vens, mons, et plaines,  
Taillis, forêts, rivages et fontaines,  
Antres, près, fleurs, dites-le lui pour moi.

Sky, air and wind, plains and bare mountains  
Rolling hills and verdant forests,  
Winding rivers and rippling springs,  
Pruned copses and you, green trees;  
Mossy caves, half-covered opening,  
Fields, buds, flowers and reddening herbs,  
Wine red vines and golden beaches,  
Marshes, dormouse, and you, my sad verses:  
Since, at our parting, surrounded by pain and grief,  
I didn't know how to say farewell to those beautiful eyes,  
which, far and near keep me in turmoil:  
I beg you, Sky, air and wind, mountains and plains,  
Copse, forest, rivers and fountains,  
Antres, fields, flowers, tell him for me.

Translations by John Ranck

The first of these two songs was written for one of the *Revue Musicale*'s special editions, this one honoring the 400th anniversary of the poet Pierre de Ronsard's birth; the second song was written a few days later. Other composers writing for the occasion included Paul Dukas, Maurice Ravel, Arthur Honegger, Andre Caplet and Maurice Delage.

**Rossignol, mon mignon**

Nightingales (rossignol in French) enjoyed quite a musical vogue in the early part of the 20th Century; the most well-known compositions about the bird from this period include Berg's *Die Nachtigall* and Stravinsky's *The Nightingale* and *Song of the Nightingale*. Roussel's little nightingale song is nowhere near as ambitious as these other works. The flute takes the role of nightingale, singing happily while the voice sings unhappily of love.

**Ciel, aer et vens**

Roussel's favorite theme in his melodies is that of saying farewell to a loved one. He returns to this theme in this second song, which is an earnest and melancholy entreaty to the sky, air and wind (Ciel, aer et vens) to pass on a bittersweet message of farewell.

From [http://www.opus1.com/~ehoornaert/ROUSSEL/26\\_rons.htm](http://www.opus1.com/~ehoornaert/ROUSSEL/26_rons.htm).

**Deux Chansons Françaises**  
**Serge de Gastyne**

**I**

**À la Forest de Gastine**  
**Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)**

Couché sous tes ombrages verts,  
    Gastine, je te chante,  
Autant que les Grecs par leurs vers  
    La forest d'Érymanthe,  
Car malin, celer je ne puis  
    A la race future  
De combien obligé je suis  
    A ta belle verdure.  
Toy, qui sous l'abry de tes bois  
    Ravy d'esprit m'amuses,  
Toy, qui fais qu'à toutes les fois  
    Me respondent les Muses,  
Toy, par qui de ce meschant soin  
    Tout franc je me délivre,  
Lorsqu'en toy je me perds bien loin  
    Parlant avec un livre;  
Tes bocages soient tousjours pleins  
    D'amoureuses brigades,  
De Satyres et de Sylvains,  
    La crainte des Naïades!  
En toy habite désormais  
    Des Muses le collège,  
Et ton bois ne sente jamais  
    La flamme sacrilège!

Lying under your green shade  
    Gastine, I sing of you,  
As did the Greeks with their verses  
    About the forest of Erymanthe.  
Because I am malicious, I cannot conceal-  
    From our descendants  
How compelled I am  
    by your beautiful verdancy.  
You, who with delightful spirit, entertain me  
    under the shelter of your woods,  
You, who make it so that, always,  
    the Muses answer me,  
You, who are the means by which I free myself  
    from these wretched worries.  
When in you, I lose myself, in distant worlds,  
    In conversation with a book;  
May your copses be always full  
    of amorous brigades,  
Of Satyrs and Sylphs,  
    the dread of the Naiads!  
From now on, the school of the Muses  
    lives in you,  
And may your woods never feel  
    the sacrilegious passion.

## II

### II Bacio Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

BAISER! Rose trémière au jardin des caresses!  
Vif accompagnement sur le clavier des dents  
Des doux refrains qu'Amour chante en les coeurs ardents  
Avec sa voix d'archange aux langueurs charmeresses!

Sonore et gracieux Baiser, divin Baiser!  
Volupté nonpareille, ivresse inénarrable!  
Salut! l'homme, penche sur ta coupe adorable,  
S'y grise d'un bonheur qu'il ne sait épuiser.

Comme le vin du Rhin et comme la musique,  
Tu consoles et tu perces, et le chagrin  
Expiré avec la moue en ton pli purpurin. . .  
Qu'un plus grand, Goethe ou Will, te dresse un vers  
classique:  
Moi, je ne puis, chétif trouvère de Paris,  
T'offrir que ce bouquet de strophes enfantines:  
Sois bénin, et pur prix, sur les lèvres mutines  
D'Une que je connais, Baiser, descends, et ris.

KISS! Hollyhock in the garden of caresses!  
Vital accompaniment on the keyboard of teeth  
For the soft refrains that Love sings in ardent hearts  
With her archangel's voice to the beguiling langorousness.

Resonant and gracious Kiss, divine Kiss!  
Incomparable voluptuousness, drunkenness beyond words!  
Cheers! the man, bent over your adorable cup,  
becomes tipsy with a happiness that he doesn't know how  
to extinguish.

Like wine of the Rhine and like music,  
You console and you pierce, and chagrin  
dies with the pout of your crimson lips ...  
Let a greater man, Goethe or Will, present you with a  
classic verse:  
For I, wretched minstrel-of Paris, can only  
Offer you this bouquet of childish verse:  
Be gentle, and for all it's worth, on the mutinous lips of  
One I know, Kiss, descend, and laugh.

Translations by Margi Briggs.

## The Composers



**J.S. Bach**, one of the preeminent composers of the Baroque era, needs no introduction. His flute sonatas, a high point of the repertoire, are uniformly challenging and a delight. A point of interest in these works is their conversational aspect. Musical ideas are passed back and forth between the instruments as if the piano and flute were two friends discussing an interesting problem. The A major sonata on tonight's program is one of the most, well, optimistic of Bach's flute pieces. It seems filled with sunshine, especially in the final movement. As the piece approaches its close, the flute and piano join hands, if you will, in a unison passage before breaking apart in a joyous romp to the end.



Aaron Copland  
Culver Pictures, Inc.

**Aaron Copland**, 1900–90, was one of America's great twentieth century composers. The American character of his music is apparent in his use of jazz and folk elements. His *Duo for Flute and Piano* is dedicated to William Kincaid, for many years principal flutist with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I think Copland was trying to represent many aspects of American life in his *Duo*. There are, for example, passages that evoke the space of the Great Plains, the brutality of urban life, the rapture of a spiritual and the breathless whirl of a hoedown.

**Steven David Stalzer** (b. 1964) studied composition with Gary F. Nelson, Conrad Cummings, Randolph Coleman, Robert Lombardo, Christopher Roze', and John Clement Adams. He attended Oberlin College, where he received a BA in Computer Music; Harvard University, where he received his Masters in Education; and The Boston Conservatory, where he received his certification in music education. Mr. Stalzer's music explores a number of different compositional techniques, including aleatoric methods, improvisation, atonality, and serialism. He is Director of *The Just In Time Composers and Players*, a contemporary music ensemble in Boston which has premiered many of his works, and is also Director of Fine Arts for the Dedham Country Day School, where he teaches composition, music history, and band.



**Albert Roussel** (1869-1937) was the dominant French composer between World Wars. He is arguably the greatest French symphonist and the greatest French ballet composer. Some Frenchmen rate him their second-greatest composer of this century, behind Debussy but ahead of Ravel. A child of wealthy French industrialists, he was orphaned at the age of seven and was sent to live with his grandfather who died when Roussel was eleven. For the rest of his life Roussel sought order, routine, discipline; his songs continually return to the theme of saying farewell to a loved one. Tragedy, however, never crippled this man, who attained a level of maturity, generosity, humility and sanity that could serve as a model for us all.

From <http://www.opus1.com/~choornaert/ROUSSEL/life.htm>.

**Serge de Gastyne** was born in Paris, France, in 1930. After fighting with the French underground forces in World War II, he came to the United States and attended the University of Portland (Oregon), where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1950. He took further studies at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Howard Hanson and also at the University of Maryland, where he was awarded Master of Music and Doctor of Music Arts degrees. From 1953-1972, he was composer-in-residence with the U.S. Air Force Band in Washington, D.C. Concurrently, he taught at Northern Virginia Community College. He has composed over one hundred songs in many languages, symphonic and band compositions, as well as many chamber pieces that include percussion instruments.

From the *Heritage Encyclopedia of Band Music*.

## The Poets



**Hildegard** has often been called the "Grandmother of the Rhineland mystics," a spiritual movement centered around ideas of creation in which an elemental force is seen as imbuing all living things with their life. This force (not unlike "The Force" in the Star Wars trilogy, or Native American and Taoist ideas) binds all living things together. These texts struck me with their deep reverence for the vibrant greenness and energy of Nature. They also provide a warning of the effects of mistreating the earth, a message which is very relevant today. Notes by Steven Stalzer.



**Pierre de Ronsard** (1524-1585), was born near Vendôme. Ronsard moved to Paris in 1544, when he helped to form the famous Pléiade, a group of writers dedicated to reforming French language and literature. His works include *Odes* (5 volumes, 1550, 1552), scholarly poems modeled after those of classical Greek poet Pindar and Roman poet Horace; *Loves of Cassandra* (1552), a sequence of graceful love sonnets influenced by Italian poet Petrarch; *Continuation des amours* (1555); and *Hymnes* (1556).

From <http://encarta.msn.com/index/concise/0vol12/02194000.asp>.



**Paul Verlaine** (1844–96), while still a young man, formed a tempestuous liaison with a young poet, Arthur Rimbaud. The relationship ended tragically when Verlaine shot and wounded Rimbaud. Imprisoned for two years, he returned to the Catholic faith, but his later life was marked by drunkenness and debauchery. His poetry, possessing a rare musicality, includes such early Parnassian works as *Saturnian Poems* (1866); some noble religious verse from his prison years (in *Wisdom*, 1881); and *Romances without Words* (1874), establishing him as an early Symbolist. His only important prose work is *The Accursed Poets* (1884), about his fellow symbolists.

From the *Columbia Concise Encyclopedia*.

## The Performers

**Valerie Anastasio** appears frequently as a soloist and in choruses. With her collaborator, pianist Tim Harbold, she presents a cabaret act that combines traditional cabaret material with works and techniques more frequently found in a classical music setting. They were recently featured in an article about Boston cabaret in the *Boston Globe* Calendar.

**Bruce Berg** has a master's degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music and Bachelors degrees in music and religion from Oberlin Conservatory. He was Principal Percussionist with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and has also performed with, among others, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra and the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra. He has studied with Richard Weiner, Principal Percussionist, The Cleveland Orchestra and Michael Rosen, Oberlin Conservatory, among others.

**Jennifer Elowsky** has a master's degree from Boston University. She is on the faculty of the Community Music Center, the Southshore Conservatory and Boston College. She performs widely as a solo and duo pianist and in chamber ensembles. Recent appearances include the New England Reed Ensemble and the Arcadian Winds.

**Radmila Hvezda** is an active pianist in the contemporary music field. She performs frequently with many local groups, including the Just In Time Composers and Players.

**John Ranck** has been a faculty member at the Community Music Center since 1989. He has a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Manhattan School of Music where he studied with Thomas Nyfenger. His Master of Music degree is from SUNY-Stony Brook where he studied with Samuel Baron. He has Bachelors degrees in Flute Performance and in Slavic Literature from Lawrence University. Dr. Ranck has performed in recital across the United States and in Europe and has recorded for London Records with the Trinity Church Choir, Boston.