# **TENNESSEE WILLIAMS SONGS**

**Twelve Songs for Voice and String Quartet** 

Poems by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Music by BRUCE TRINKLEY

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### Poems by Tennessee Williams Music by Bruce Trinkley

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Tennessee Williams was born March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi. He began writing and publishing his poetry while a student at the University of Missouri. Although he always wanted to be a poet, he began a remarkable career as a playwright with the success of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944. He wrote several volumes of poetry, many short stories, as well as the plays and screenplays for which he is most famous. He died in New York City on February 25, 1983.

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*Tennessee Williams Songs* was composed during a residency at Dorland Mountain Arts Colony in Temecula, California in March 2017. The cycle was transcribed for voice and string quartet in State College, Pennsylvania in September and October 2020.

The string quartet version is dedicated to all those who are battling or have suffered from the Coronavirus pandemic.

**Duration: approximately 19 minutes.** 

#### 1. Salutation

It hasn't all been useless. Unless the box is destroyed the words that had value will rise again. Mine, all that mattered much of me except my response to your love, mostly that given me by those whom I never met: so many letters unanswered because the letter to you all was still being written: if writing survives, in mine you'll find all my answers, signed with my love. All my writing has been a letter to you, 'you all' as we say in the South.

#### 2. We Have Not Long To Love

We have not long to love. Light does not stay. The tender things are those we fold away.

Coarse fabrics are the ones for common wear. In silence I have watched you comb your hair.

Intimate the silence, dim and warm. I could, but did not, reach to touch your arm.

I could, but do not, break that which is still. (Almost the faintest whisper would be shrill.)

So moments pass as though they wished to stay. We have not long to love. A night. A day . . . .

#### 3. Youth Must Be Wanton

Youth must be wanton, youth must be quick, Dance to the candle while lasteth the wick,

Youth must be foolish and mirthful and blind, Gaze not before and glance not behind,

Mark not the shadow that darkens the way – Regret not the glitter of any lost day,

But laugh with no reason except the red wine, For youth must be youthful and foolish and blind!

### 4. Cried the Fox

I run, cried the fox, in circles narrower, narrower still, across the desperate hollow, skirting the frantic hill

and shall till my brush hangs burning flame at the hunter's door continue this fatal returning to places that failed me before!

Then, with his heart breaking nearly, the lonely, passionate bark of the fugitive fox rang out clearly as bells in the frosty dark,

across the desperate hollow, skirting the frantic hill, calling the pack to follow a prey that escaped them still.

### 5. Kitchen Door Blues

My old lady died of a common cold. She smoked cigars and was ninety years old. She was thin as paper with the ribs of a kite, And she flew out the kitchen door one night.

Now I'm no younger'n the old lady was, When she lost gravitation, and I smoke cigars. I feel sort of peaked, an' I look kinda pore, So for God's sake, lock that kitchen door!

### 6. The Ice-Blue Wind

Being expert on the zither he gave concerts twice a winter

And to these occasions twain some would come unless it rained.

Swiftly did their number thin as he played *The Ice-Blue Wind*.

No cries of Bravo nor encore But, Oh, he dreamed, they long for more!

So he'd play it once again and again and still again.

His fingers knew *The Ice-Blue Wind* that single score and nothing more.

But what of that? It did suffice to close him in a wall of ice,

Tinged with distance, always blue, which somehow warmed him through and through.

Long, long after all had gone, and in the hall crept winter dawn,

He would strike a final string, take a bow and proudly shin

Up a column to the roof, in union with The Absolute.

#### 7. Temples to the Red Earth Shook

The poets of less than twenty years ago, That bravely stood and fell against the sword, From underneath those fields where poppies blow With terrible voice oppose the rising horde: Listen again to the songs of Rupert Brooke And all the young that sang and singing died Beholding their temples to the read earth shook, And Beauty above the whole world crucified: Poets, of every campus, town, and field, This is the ultimate hour of your labor; Lift song, lift song, your weapon and your shield Against the threatening shadow of the sabre – For beauty's voice may still oppose the tide – Speak, fearless poets! Shall these horsemen ride?

#### 8. Little Horse

Mignon he was or mignonette avec les yeux plus grands que lui. My name for him was Little Horse. I fear he had no name for me.

I came upon him more by plan than accidents appear to be. Something started or something stopped and there I was and there was he.

And then it rained but Little Horse had brought along his *parapluie*. *Petit cheval* it kept quite dry till he divided it with me.

For it was late and I was lost when Little Horse enquired of me, What has a bark but cannot bite? And I was right. It was a tree.

Mignon he is or mignonette avec les yeux plus grands que lui. My name for him is Little Horse. I wish he had a name for me.

#### 9. They That Come Late to the Dance

They that come late to the dance more wildly must dance than the rest though the strings of the violins are a thousand knives in their breast.

They that come late to the dance must dance till their slippers are thin and the last white notes of the flute are lost in the dawn-blowing wind.

They that come late to the dance must dance till the lanterns expire and the hearts they uncovered too late are broken before they can tire.

#### **10. Gold Tooth Blues**

Now there's many fool things a woman will do To catch a man's eye, she'll wear a tight shoe, She'll wear a light dress and catch a bad cold And she'll have a tooth pulled for a tooth of gold.

*I'm a gold tooth woman with the gold tooth blues 'Cause a gold tooth makes a woman look old!* 

Now gold in the bank is a wonderful thing, And a woman looks nice with a nice gold ring, But, honey, take a tip, and the tip ain't cold, Your mouth's no place to carry your gold!

*I'm a gold tooth woman with the gold tooth blues 'Cause a gold tooth makes a woman look old!* 

Some late Sunday mawnin' when you're still in the hay And you want a little lovin', your sweet man'll say, With a look that'll turn your heart's blood cold, Woman, that gold tooth makes you look old!

*I'm a gold tooth woman with the gold tooth blues 'Cause a gold tooth makes a woman look old!* 

When he don't have a dollar but he must have his drink, He'll sneak up behind you at the kitchen sink, And before you can holler, I'm telling the truth, He'll brain you with a blackjack and pull your gold tooth!

*I'm a gold tooth woman with the gold tooth blues 'Cause a gold tooth makes a woman look old!* 

### 11. Why Do I Want To Go Away?

Why do I want to go away? I don't have no reason to stay.
Do this, do that, they name the hour. My heart is in a tall clock tower
And keeps striking hours that say: "Time for you to slide away."
What should I do? Of course, obey?
And there's no profit in delay. Never mind Number 1202\*
(I think the number is thirteen) Going, going, almost gone – Done my bit and travelled on.

\* "Number 1202" was the room number of the 12<sup>th</sup> (or perhaps 13<sup>th</sup>) floor room that Williams occupied in the Hotel Elysée at 60 East 54<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City for the last 15 years of his life. The room was known as the "Sunset" suite and was where he died of a barbiturate overdose on February 25, 1983.

### 12. Valediction

It hasn't all been useless. Unless the box is destroyed the words that had value will rise again. Mine, all that mattered much of me except my response to your love, mostly that given me by those whom I never met: so many letters unanswered because the letter to you all was still being written: if writing survives, in mine you'll find all my answers, signed with my love. All my writing has been a letter to you, 'you all' as we say in the South.

# **1. Salutation**

### Poem by Tennessee Williams

**Music by Bruce Trinkley** 

from "Goodbyes Are Sentimental, But -- " unpublished\*







March 25, 2017 Dorland Mountain, Temecula, California

# 2. We Have Not Long To Love

### Poem by Tennessee Williams

### **Music by Bruce Trinkley**









# 3. Youth Must Be Wanton

### Poem by Tennessee Williams

### **Music by Bruce Trinkley**

from The Night of the Iguana (1961)













# 4. Cried the Fox

### Poem by Tennessee Williams

### **Music by Bruce Trinkley**













# 5. Kitchen Door Blues

Music by Bruce Trinkley



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Poem by Tennessee Williams



## 6. The Ice-Blue Wind

### Poem by Tennessee Williams

**Music by Bruce Trinkley** 









March 24, 2017 Dorland Mountain, Temecula, California

# 7. Temples to the Red Earth Shook









March 27, 2017 Dorland Mountain, Temecula, California

# 8. Little Horse

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March 30, 2017 Dorland Mountain, Temecula, California

## **9. 9.** They That Come Late to the Dance









March 31, 2017 Dorland Mountain, Temecula, California

#### **10e minor. Gold Tooth Blues Poem by Tennessee Williams**

Music by Bruce Trinkley











March 31, 2017 Dorland Mountain Arts Colony, California

### 11. Why Do I Want To Go Away?

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# **12. Valediction**

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