

SIDNEY LANIER SONGS

for Voice and Piano

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COMPOSER'S NOTE

Sidney Lanier was born on February 3, 1842, in Macon, Georgia. He died on September 2, 1881, in Polk County, North Carolina after a long battle with tuberculosis. He attended Oglethorpe College and fought on the Confederate side in the Civil War, refusing promotion to remain in the same unit with his younger brother.

Lanier had a great aptitude for and love of music, eventually becoming principal flautist in the Peabody Orchestra in Baltimore. He spent time in the northeast trying to establish a career and reputation as a writer, but also lived in San Antonio and Florida seeking relief from his tuberculosis.

SIDNEY LANIER SONGS was composed during a residency at The Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts and Sciences in Rabun Gap, Georgia, in October 2007. The composer first encountered the poetry of Sidney Lanier in junior high school, as many of us did. And coming across a collection of his poetry in the Rabun County Library renewed an interest in this most famous and gifted of southern poets.

THE SHIP OF EARTH

Thou Ship of Earth, with Death, and Birth, and Life, and Sex aboard,
And fires of Desires burning hotly in the hold,
I fear thee, O! I fear thee, for I hear the tongue and sword
At battle on the deck, and the wild mutineers are bold!

The dewdrop morn may fall from off the petal of the sky,
But all the deck is wet with blood and stains the crystal red.
A pilot, GOD, a pilot! For the helm is left awry,
And the best sailors in the ship lie there among the dead!

THOU AND I

So one in heart and thought, I trow,
That thou might'st press the strings and I might draw the bow
And both would meet in music sweet,
Thou and I, I trow.

THE STIRRUP-CUP

Death, thou'rt a cordial old and rare:
Look, how compounded, with what care!
Time got his wrinkles reaping thee
Sweet herbs from all antiquity.

David to thy distillage went,
Keats, and Gotama excellent,
Omar Khayyam, and Chaucer bright,
And Shakspeare for a king-delight.

Then, Time, let not a drop be spilt:
Hand me the cup whene'er thou wilt:
'Tis thy rich strirrup-cup to me;
I'll drink it down right smilingly.

A BALLAD OF TREES AND THE MASTER

Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent,
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When Death and Shame would woo Him last.
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a tree they slew Him - last
When out of the woods He came.

A SONG OF THE FUTURE

Sail fast, sail fast,
Ark of my hopes, Ark of my dreams;
Sweep lordly o'er the drownèd Past,
Fly glittering through the sun's strange beams;
Sail fast, sail fast.
Breaths of new buds from off some drying lea
With news about the Future scent the sea:
My brain is beating like the heart of Haste;
I'll loose me a bird upon this Present waste;
Go, trembling song,
And stay not long; oh, stay not long:
Thou'rt only a gray and sober dove,
But thine eye is faith and thy wing is love.