



Stephen Whelan, composition

Obsidian Skies	Stephen Whelan, piano	Stephen Whelan
Flowers of my Past	Stephen Whelan, piano	
Walking Alone	Kiele Miyata, flute and Jordan Powell, cello	
By the Shore	Malia Durling, soprano and Stephen Whelan, piano	
She Walks in Beauty	Malia Durling, soprano and Stephen Whelan, piano	
Waltz in D	Stephen Whelan, piano	
One Perfect Rose	Malia Durling, soprano and Stephen Whelan, piano	
One Broken Rose	Stephen Whelan, piano	
If I Can't Have Your Love	Malia Durling, soprano and Stephen Whelan, piano	

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Music in Theory & Composition. Stephen Whelan is a student of Dr. Sarah Wald.

PROGRAM NOTES

STEPHEN WHELAN – APRIL 12, 2024

Growing up, I was always fascinated with space. Whether it be through the lens of Sci-Fi or seeing pictures of space in science class, space has such unique qualities to it. In one sense, it is slightly frightening knowing that our planet sits surrounded by so much emptiness. In another way though, seeing the stars and galaxies through telescopes, space is equally as beautiful as it is frightening. It was important to me to write this ***Obsidian Skies*** to express my love for both science as well as fiction such as Star Wars and Marvel. I start the piece in a very low register with a motif that repeats throughout the piece to signify this foreboding, eerie feeling. The cluster of notes that jumps across the piano can be associated with the glistening of stars.

During the composition process of this ***Flowers of my Past***, I was thinking a lot about my home town. The mountains that surround my town and how pretty it gets both with the vibrant flowers and green grass in the Spring as well as when the mountain tops sparkle and shine with snow in Winter. I also thought a lot about my time living there and sadly the negative parts. I wanted this piece to show those memories both as beautiful but troubled as well.

Walking Alone is a selection for flute and cello that I wrote in Fall 2023. This piece was commissioned for me to write to be played at the Crocker Art Museum by Professor Cathie Apple and Professor Tim Stanley. I struggled finding a story to write this piece about. After writing the first page, I showed it to another composer and they said how they felt as if they were walking through a forest. Once they said that, I decided to dive deep into that idea. I wanted to write a melody that would jump between the two instruments making one really not work without the other.

By the Shore is an art song that I wrote back in Spring of 2023. It originally started as its own art song but by the time of this recital, it has developed into the beginning of a four-song song cycle. We start with the piano playing a lonely and slow intro. The rhythms as well and the arpeggiation of the chords helps visualize walking alone on a beach and hearing the waves crash. This song is about someone who longs for love. Walking the beach, seeking more from life. As the song continues, we change from this lonesome feeling to one of promise and happiness when our character finds love. The poem for this piece was written by my sister, Julia Whelan.

By the Shore

*I sit by the shore
Seeking something,
I can't spot, I can't see, I can't say
I'm alone by the shore
Watching as the waves
Show me what I've forgot
You rise above the water
Above the sand, the sea, the salt
You give the silent call
I jump up to meet you
As you breeze across the beach
You smile as you see me
And you extend your reach
We two stand by the shore
Knowing we've found something more*

The second song in this song cycle, ***She Walks in Beauty*** is a completely different feeling than the previous piece. Now that our character has found this new love, they are sort of blindly, hopelessly in love. The repetition as well as the bouncy rhythms adds to this feeling as well as adding a sense of skipping. This is a piece that I set to a piece by Lord Byron (George Gordon).

She Walks in Beauty

I.

*She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.*

III.

*And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!*

II.

*One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling place.*

Waltz in D was a piece that I wanted to add as a piano interlude to help us transition between the genre change from "She Walks in Beauty" to "One Perfect Rose". The piano reiterates some of the main ideas from She Walks in Beauty but more into a waltz style. As this waltz develops, we move from this happy, bouncy feeling and key to a slightly deeper and sadder one. It was important that in some way I spent time to tell both sides of this "love story". While three of the four art songs are in the point of view of the male character, I thought that this piece as well as the next piano solo song were designed to share some of the narrative of our female character.

Throughout composing this whole program, ***One Perfect Rose*** gave me possibly the most unique challenge. This piece is the one art song that takes the perspective of our female character. The last few pieces show how happy and blind our male character is, but this piece shows us that this girl is not really interested in the guy. The challenge for me came from the text. I have started loving the works by Dorothy Parker these past few months and the text that she wrote here is so oddly sarcastic and fun. Now using this sarcastic and fun text, I wanted to switch styles yet again. In this song, we see our female character complain about how she only "gets one perfect rose" and seems uninterested in this gesture from our male character. This leads to her turning him down.

One Perfect Rose

*A single flow'r he sent me, since we met.
All tenderly his messenger he chose;
Deep-hearted, pure, with scented dew still wet—
One perfect rose.
I knew the language of the floweret;
"My fragile leaves," it said, "his heart enclose."
Love long has taken for his amulet
One perfect rose.
Why is it no one ever sent me yet
One perfect limousine, do you suppose?
Ah no, it's always just my luck to get
One perfect rose.*

One Broken Rose originally started as another waltz that would be an interlude, but slowly I wanted to use this piece to give us further context to our female character. Even though we do not have text, I wanted to show this character not as the sarcastic and upbeat persona developed in the previous song, but show us what our character really feels. I wanted "One Perfect Rose" to be a disguise for her. That confidence being a character that she plays. She acts like nothing is enough for her because she does not feel like she is enough. Deep down a simple act of affection means the world to her but she is scared to get close. I grew up listening to a lot of jazz and last year I fell in love with "Standards Vol. 3" by Wynton Marsalis. The whole album is a collection of ballads played by Wynton Marsalis on trumpet and accompanied by his father Ellis Marsalis and I do not think there is an album out there that I have felt more from while listening.. While composing this song, I wanted to tell this story while channeling all of that emotion that Marsalis did with slow, deep melodies that make every note have such an important impact.

For the final song on our program, **If I Can't Have Your Love**, I wanted to combine a few of my favorite sounds in music. Listening to bands such as Chicago and REO Speedwagon throughout highschool is one of the main reasons that I decided to go into music school. Those two bands write some of the best rock ballads as well as some of the best break up songs. I wanted to end this program with slight homage to those sounds. The 70s and 80s were such a beautiful time for vocal music because of all the vocal powerhouses such as Whitney Houston, Olivia Newton John and Aretha Franklin. You just can not get better than that. It has always been a dream for me to write something in that style and luckily I was able to do that with this song. The text for this song is written by Julia Whelan as well.

If I Can't Have Your Love

*I sit by the shore
Where I heard your call,
Your spirit in the sea
Still gazing there at me
With eyes that still enthral.*

*If I can't have your love
What can lie in store
Below, beyond, above
For your devotee?
I seek now to be free
If I can't have your love.*

*The rage behind the roar
Below the salty squall,
Sardonic, summons me,
The direst decree
That makes me feel the thrall.*

*If I can't have your love
What can lie in store
Below, beyond, above
For your devotee?
I seek now to be free
If I can't have your love.*

*Dark waters now implore
That I follow, that I fall.
That I will finally
Arrive in the debris
You don't notice at all.*

*If I can't have your love
What can lie in store
Below, beyond, above
For your devotee?
I seek now to be free
If I can't have your love.*