

A SINGER'S GUIDE TO GWYNETH WALKER'S SONGS FROM THE HIGH
SIERRA

by

Matthew Clegg

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Matthew Clegg, DMA

Advisor: Kevin Hanrahan

Songs from the High Sierra is a distinct addition to Gwyneth Walker's compositions. The text consists of a series of letters written by John Muir to Mrs. Jeanne Carr while the former was exploring the area now known as Yosemite National Park. Walker uses unusual compositional techniques to portray Muir's vibrant personality, to navigate the prose text, and to portray the majesty of the grand peaks being described. This study contains background information on Walker and Muir comprising Chapters One and Two. Chapters Three through Seven contain an analysis of each song and performance considerations. Appendices include a transcription of the author's interview with Walker regarding the cycle.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Gwyneth Walker	1
Chapter 2: John Muir	11
Chapter 3: Song 1: “Ascent: ‘Glacier Birds and Other Companions’”	18
Chapter 4: Song 2: “Glory in the Mountains”	35
Chapter 5: Song 3: “Yosemite Falls”	51
Chapter 6: Song 4: “Ice!”	68
Chapter 7: Song 5: “Descent: ‘Sequoia’”	84
Chapter 8: Conclusion.....	95
Bibliography	98
Appendix A: Transcription of Gwyneth Walker Interview with the Author.....	100
Appendix B: List of Musical Figures.....	141

Chapter One

“Music was something I wrote, and other people played.”

- Gwyneth Walker¹

Music and language have been linked together as far back as history can date. Whether or not they originated as a unit or separately, which was first initiated continues to be debated. Some theorists believe that pitch and rhythm were used in primal courtship and speech arose after it. Others believe that out of the emotions of speech, music was born. Still others argue that music and language occurred simultaneously as a singsong type of speech and then became separate entities.² No matter their origin, out of the perfect marriage of music and text came the stirring art of vocal music.

Songs from the High Sierra displays that symbiotic relationship between language and music. Gwyneth Walker paints the words of John Muir’s letters to his dear friend Mrs. Jeanne Carr so effectively that the listener and performer feel as though they are in the mountains. This expressive song cycle is an important setting of a prose text.

This song cycle, and further justification will be provided showing that this is indeed a song cycle, was written after Tana Rene Field-Bartholomew wrote, “A Performer’s Guide to the Songs of Gwyneth Walker” in 2007. This means that no significant analysis has been done on these new songs. Walker also does not use letters texts in any of her other songs which sets these songs apart from her other works.

¹ Gene Brooks, “An Interview with Gwyneth Walker,” *Choral Journal* (February 1999), Website of Gwyneth Walker—Composer, accessed September 01, 2020, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/walkinf5.html>.

² Oliver Sachs, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 2007), x.

Gwyneth Walker

It was the spring of 1947 when John Walker Jr. and Adele Van Anden Walker welcomed their newest daughter, Gwyneth van Anden Walker, into the world on March 22. They lived in New Canaan, Connecticut, but Gwyneth's grandfather, president of the New York Medical Society, insisted she be born in a New York hospital.³ John was a physicist and inventor who worked on television and radio, while Adele "was mostly a housewife."⁴ As the youngest of three girls, Walker had older sisters who began piano lessons while she was still very young.⁵ Hearing her sisters at the piano prompted her to try playing herself, and so began her path to becoming a renowned and respected American composer.

Music was always present in her parents' home. While neither was a trained musician, both John and Adele loved music. Walker credits her inventiveness to her father but feels that she received most of her musical ability from her mother.⁶ Adele loved opera, could sing, and would play melodies by ear on the piano. John and Adele encouraged Gwyneth in her piano lessons, but these lessons were short lived. Walker's interests lay in composing more than playing, and after only four lessons her teacher suggested that John and Adele let Walker develop her music abilities on her own.⁷

The majority of Walker's early music training came from her own exploration and discovery. Though she was mostly self-taught, she did study music theory privately with

³ Gwyneth Walker, Letter to Carolyn Clark, January 27, 2003, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/letrep.html#CLARK>.

⁴ Gwyneth Walker, Letter to Corin Maple and students, January 29, 2004, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/letrep.html#MAPLE>.

⁵ Brooks, "An Interview."

⁶ Gwyneth Walker, Letter to Carolyn Clark, January 27, 2003, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/letrep.html#CLARK>.

⁷ Brooks, "An Interview."

a teacher in high school.⁸ This was the only formal music training that she had until she went to college; however, that did not stop Gwyneth from composing throughout her childhood and adolescence.

By her own account, Walker has been composing since the age of two with her motivation most often being the opportunities at hand.⁹ Once young Gwyneth started attending school, she organized “orchestra practice” with her school friends each week. She would write the parts, hand out toy instruments and lead them all in playing music together.¹⁰ By the time she was twelve, her classmates frequently sought Walker’s compositions, and she was asked to arrange many popular songs.

Walker attended high school at Abbot Academy, a private school for girls in Andover, Massachusetts. During her time there, she was involved with many of the choruses including an octet that she assembled. These groups mainly performed folk songs, and they became so well-known that their school sent them to record some of their music. As a result of this experience, her appreciation of folk music grew and became an influence on her compositional style.¹¹

Though music was an important part of her life, Walker and her physicist father shared a common love of science and sports. She learned to play tennis at the local country club which her grandfather founded. Her family did not have enough money for professional lessons, so her father taught her. Her interest and skill led her to join the high school tennis team. Though Walker initially planned to attend Brown University to

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Brooks, “An Interview.”

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Vicki Lynne Burrichter, “The Choral Music of Gwyneth Walker: An Overview” (D.A. diss., University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, 2003), 88, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/pdf/burrdiss.pdf>.

pursue both physics and tennis, she became interested in the music courses. After meeting with the music department chair, she changed her major to music.

Despite being mostly self-taught, Walker was able to test out of the undergraduate theory requirements. She also composed and arranged for many department ensembles including the Brown Orchestra and the Chattertocks. The Chattertocks were a very exclusive female a cappella folk group who, at the time Walker joined, sometimes used guitar and percussion accompaniment.¹² She has said that her involvement in folk groups, both in her teenage years and in college, has influenced her compositions; however, she feels that the other composers have not significantly impacted her style. Because she began composing at age two, she feels that her style is uniquely hers.¹³

Walker completed her master's degree at the Hartt School of Music in 1970 and became the first graduate of the Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) composition program in 1976. As a doctoral student, she also taught several of the undergraduate ear training and theory classes, courses that she had never taken herself. She recalls, "I would have to take the textbook and teach myself."¹⁴

After obtaining her M.M. and D.M.A. degrees, Walker was hired at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She worked there from 1976-1980 followed by Hartford Conservatory from 1980-1982.¹⁵ While teaching, Walker noticed that she and her colleagues were not composing because of the demands of their teaching responsibilities. She decided to quit her position to become a full-time composer, and she eventually

¹² Encyclopedia Brunoniana, s.v. "Musical Clubs," accessed January 22, 2022, https://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=M0460.

¹³ Brooks, "An Interview."

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers, s.v. "Walker, Gwyneth Van Anden."

moved to Braintree, Vermont. She recalls that was a daunting decision to make, but she told herself, “I’m going to leave teaching because I don’t think I’m ever going to do my writing like this, and I don’t see anybody around me doing it. And if I don’t do this now, I am never going to be able to forgive myself!”¹⁶

A pivotal point in her career is credited to an influential colleague, Gerald Mack, who conducted the Worcester Chorus at Hartford Conservatory and programmed some of her music. As the students graduated and inherited their own choirs, they remembered Walker’s pieces with fond interest. These conductors began asking her for music, and as time went on the demand for her pieces only increased.

Her greatest successes came, and still come, from her choral music. In time, E.C. Schirmer agreed to publish some of her pieces such as “Cheek to Cheek” and “My Love Walks in Velvet” even though she was then largely unknown, and they attracted many customers at conventions. Walker credits this success to the singability of her music and the quality of the poetry she sets.¹⁷

While her mother did not discourage her compositional pursuit, Walker’s family was mostly unsupportive of her work as a musician and composer, and at times, “criticized and mocked” her.¹⁸ Her two older sisters disapproved of what they felt was a selfish attention to composing. Her father was disappointed that she did not spend more time in their shared interest of sports and sciences.¹⁹

¹⁶ Burrichter, 97.

¹⁷ Brooks, “An Interview.”

¹⁸ Gwyneth Walker, Letter to Taylor Cummings, November 29, 2007, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/letrep.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid

Walker's main supporters have come from sources outside of her family. Among her friends in Braintree, she is "supported by people who believe in [her]," and she often writes music she knows is "of interest to them." Other supporters include college professors and those who hear and perform her music; in particular, her Hartt graduate professor, Arnold Franchetti, who liked her writing and encouraged her to continue composing. Walker said that although she learned new things while studying with Franchetti and other teachers, "almost everything I do now with my writing, I taught myself...I borrow sounds of what is around me, but I do not hear a particular composer and decide I need to write like that person."²⁰

General Style

Though Walker was mostly self-taught, her compositional style is not unique; however, it does strike a refreshing balance between accessibility and sophistication. She takes popular and folk style traits and elevates them. Walker does not use existing folk songs as Benjamin Britten does. Instead, she incorporates folk and jazz elements into her music like Jake Heggie did in *The Faces of Love*.²¹ She takes these elements and use them in complex ways that often are driven by the text. She also chooses descriptive texts and sets them in a way that makes the words easily heard and understood by the audience.

Because the text of this cycle is taken from letters, it is helpful to compare it with works such as *Letters from Composers* by Dominick Argento and *Dear Theo* by Ben Moore. Argento employs rapid meter changes and declamatory melodies to accommodate

²⁰ Brooks, "An Interview."

²¹ Jake Heggie, *The Faces of Love*, Foreword.

the conversational nature of the text he sets. Moore uses a more consistent meter, and he employs a lyric melody throughout the majority of *Dear Theo* including during more conversational moments in the text. Walker's text setting strikes a balance between these two composers' methods. The meter in *Songs from the High Sierra* does not change often and it contains a significant amount of lyric melody, but she also employs recitative. This allows for rhythmic and metric freedom when necessary while allowing for metric regularity when desired. In other words, Walker sets the text's conversational sections in a conversational manner, and she sets the text's descriptive sections to lush sweeping melodies.

Looking at Walker's other songs will further facilitate a comparison between her general style and this cycle. The following studies will be used for this comparison:

- "Prairie Land, Prairie Heart, and Prairie Spirit: An Introductory Analysis and Performance Guide of Gwyneth Walker's Prairie Songs" by Kiya Fife
- "A Performer's Guide to Gwyneth Walker's Settings of Poetry by Lucille Clifton- No Ordinary Woman! and Three Songs for Lucille" by Ebony Preston
- "A Performer's Guide to the Songs of Gwyneth Walker" by Tana Rene Field-Bartholomew

Walker's melodies are tuneful, memorable, and tonally pleasing for audiences' ears.²² Her discussions and knowledge gleaned from singers has enabled her to write melodies which are easy to sing.²³ Melodic motives help the audience recognize important themes in the text by repeating familiar patterns.

²² Kiya Fife, "Prairie Land, Prairie Heart, and Prairie Spirit: An Introductory Analysis and Performance Guide of Gwyneth Walker's Prairie Songs" (DMA diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2021), 80, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1157&context=musicstudent>.

²³ Gwyneth Walker, interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

Walker sets her texts in a way that makes the words easily understood. Walker frequently writes quasi-recitative sections to allow intuitive singing and natural prosody. She repeats phrases giving emphasis to important text. For example, in “Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers” from her first song cycle *Though Love Be a Day* written in 1979, Walker repeats the text “do not fear” giving greater strength to those words.

Walker uses rhythmic patterns, particularly in the accompaniment, to set the mood and propel the piece forward. She often will change the rhythmic pattern to mark a new section and create a new energy. These patterns support the text by creating an appropriate atmosphere in which it resides. Of Walker’s song, “Turning,” Ebony Darshay Preston writes that her rhythmic figures “perpetuate movement and create an atmosphere of excitement and tension.”²⁴

Walker frequently uses quartal and extended tertian harmonies. In her own analysis of “Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers,” Walker notes “tonal ambiguity and unsettledness” are her goals when using quartal harmonies, and that “tertian harmonies are associated with the goals or answers.”²⁵ Walker specifically enjoys the use of 7th and 9th chords which can be observed in “Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers”, and “Homage to My Hair”.

Walker uses tonality to create a specific mood. There are also frequent shifts of tonality in her songs, and there is often a disparity between the key signature and the tonality being used. In “Circling the Sun,” Walker shifts to the key of E \flat Major on the

²⁴ Ebony Preston, "A performer's guide to Gwyneth Walker's settings of poetry by Lucille Clifton- No Ordinary Woman! and Three Songs for Lucille" (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2011), 53, https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1366&context=gradschool_dissertations.

²⁵ Tana Rene Field-Bartholomew, “A Performer’s Guide to the Songs of Gwyneth Walker” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2007), 12, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/pdf/bartdiss.pdf>.

word “sacredness” which Field-Bartholomew observes has been a key “historically associated with the divine.”²⁶ Field-Bartholomew also notes that Walker uses “constantly shifting tonal centers” in “Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers”²⁷ and in “Prairie Dawn” Walker shifts from Eb Major to Ab Major and then to C Major without changing the key signature.

The accompaniment in Walker’s songs contains important motivic material. This motivic material is frequently introduced in the prelude of a piece appearing in the vocal line. For example, in “Lily Has a Rose”, the first notes introduced in the accompaniment are echoed a short while later when the vocal line begins.

There are countless examples of text painting in Walker’s songs. In “Prairie”, a downward contour occurs in the vocal line on the words “I rest easy.” Of this passage, Fife writes “the melodic line descends just as one would lie down to rest.”²⁸ In another example, Preston writes that the accompaniment in “Homage to my Hips” is “conjuring the image of a top spinning.”²⁹ Many more such will be pointed out in the discussion of individual songs of *Songs from the High Sierra* below.

Walker uses musical form, articulation, and dynamic markings to support the text. The form of her music is often dictated by the text. The poem “Thy Fingers Make Early Flowers” is composed of three verses, and Walker writes three strophes in her setting. The staccato quarter notes in “Bones, Be Good!” help to depict the “clickin’” bones spoken of, and they display Walker’s ability to support the text through articulation

²⁶ Field-Bartholomew, 92.

²⁷ Field-Bartholomew, 11.

²⁸ Fife, 27.

²⁹ Preston, 62.

markings.³⁰ In “After All the White Horses Are in Bed,” she instructs the singer to perform “touch lightly my eyes” at a soft dynamic level matching the gentleness of the text.

A discussion of Walker’s style must include the topic of her stage directions. Walker is detailed and specific when writing stage directions and these directions enhance the text. “What the Mirror Said” contains a conversation between the narrator and her reflection in the mirror. Walker gives instructions such as, “singer admires herself in the mirror” followed shortly after by “she primps.”³¹ She also frequently indicates how the music should be played and sung using specific descriptive imagery, and at times encourages interaction between the soloist and pianist, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

³⁰ Preston, 44.

³¹ Preston, 103.

Chapter Two

“I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out,

I found, was really going in.”

- John Muir

Songs from the High Sierra

Songs from the High Sierra was commissioned by Tracy Lipke-Perry at the University of Minnesota-Duluth in 2014.³² It is interesting to note that while most commissioners of solo vocal works tend to be vocalists, Dr. Lipke-Perry is actually a pianist. Dr. Lipke-Perry suggested setting a text by John Muir, but it was Walker’s decision to set some of his letters.³³ She decided upon these letters because they were in the public domain so she could edit the texts to make them more singable.³⁴

John Muir

Known as the “Father of Our National Parks System,” John Muir was born to Ann Gilrye and Daniel Muir on April 21, 1838, in Dunbar, Scotland. Muir and his six siblings were surrounded by immediate and extended family. Daniel Muir worked as a successful merchant while Ann Muir completed the household responsibilities. When John was eleven years old, his family left Scotland behind and emigrated to the United States. The entire family worked daily to sustain a living on their farm near Portage, Wisconsin. Both as a boy in Dunbar, and as a farmer in America, he spent many hours taking in the land’s natural beauty and igniting a lifelong desire to explore.

³² I was unable at the present time to get more information from Dr. Lipke-Perry, but I plan to get more information in future research on this cycle.

³³ Gwyneth Walker, interview with author, September 25, 2020.

³⁴ Ibid

Ann cultivated Muir's appreciation for nature while his father, more forcefully, oversaw his education of the Bible. His early formal education included English literature, French literature, and English grammar; however, after emigrating to the United States he only received two additional months of schooling before going to college.

Despite the lack of significant formal schooling in his adolescence, Muir did not lack an education. Muir could commit almost anything he read to memory and became a self-taught inventor. Even though working on his family farm took most of the day, Muir found time to teach himself algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. His literary interests came from books he borrowed and those he bought with what little money he could obtain. William Frederic Badè wrote about John Muir, "Reading became a consuming passion with him, and he seems to have had a marked preference for poetry."³⁵

Muir left his family farm in 1860, and later that year, began attending the University of Wisconsin. Muir initially intended on entering medical school, but a growing interest in botany changed his mind. In 1863, Muir voyaged on a botanical and geological tour through Wisconsin and Iowa.³⁶ This tour would prove to be the first of many such trips that Muir would take.

During his life, Muir traveled all over the world; but his most important travels occurred mostly in the western United States. California became somewhat of a settling place for Muir in 1868, though his journeying did not end. The areas now known as the Sierra Nevada Range and Yosemite National Park caught his interest and he thoroughly

³⁵ William F. Bade, *The Life and Letters of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1924), 69, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924090289251&view=1up&seq=94>

³⁶ Bade, "John Muir," 97.

explored these areas collecting botanical samples and recording his surroundings with sketches and words.

Twelve years later, Muir married Louie Wanda Strenzel, and moved to Martinez, California.³⁷ Here, Muir used his farming skills to manage a fruit ranch with his father-in-law. It was here John and Louie had two daughters, Wanda and Helen; however, Muir did not stop his traveling, and he continued his journeys into the mountains.

His first forays into the Sierras in 1869 had brought to his attention the terrible toll that sheep and cattle were taking on the land. Muir also wrote articles about his travels, and they were published in magazines such as “Harper’s New Monthly Magazine” and “The Century Magazine.” As he gained success in and became renowned for his writings of the area, he also gained the great influence needed to do something about, what he called, the “hoofed locusts.”³⁸ In 1890, Congress created the Yosemite National Park with the Sequoia, Mount Rainier, Petrified Forest, and Grand Canyon National Parks following shortly behind. Muir’s writings and personal pleas to Congress to give protection to these areas were the main force behind the National Parks. It is for this reason that Muir is now known as “The Father of Our National Park System.”³⁹

Before Muir’s death in 1914 he continued exploring, writing about, and protecting the areas he explored. Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892 and served as its first president. He met with Theodore Roosevelt and helped design the President’s conservation programs. More than 100 years later, Muir’s vision of preserving the natural

³⁷ “John Muir”, John Muir: A Brief Biography, Sierra Club, accessed December 27, 2021, https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/pdf/john_muir_sierra_club_fact_sheet.pdf

³⁸ Bade, 201.

³⁹ “John Muir”, John Muir: A Brief Biography, Sierra Club, accessed December 27, 2021, https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/pdf/john_muir_sierra_club_fact_sheet.pdf

beauty found in the United States continues. Thanks to his efforts, 423 National Park Sites now exist.

Letters from John Muir to Mrs. Jeanne Carr

Muir wrote letters to many people throughout his life including Mrs. Jeanne C. Carr. Muir first met her in 1860 while displaying his inventions at the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society fair. A short time later, Muir encountered Mrs. Carr's husband, Professor Ezra Slocum Carr, when he began attending the professor's lectures at the University of Wisconsin. Finding Muir to be intelligent and engaging, the Carrs began inviting him to their home regularly.

Of the many people who influenced Muir during his life, Jeanne Carr (henceforward, Carr] was particularly significant. After Muir began his traveling, he continued his friendship with her through writing letters about his discoveries. These letters, spanning 1865 and 1895, reveal a shared interest in many topics. They also reveal a deep sense of kinship between the two.

On the surface, it is easy to regard their relationship with romantic interests; however, Muir deemed Carr more as a "spiritual mother."⁴⁰ The letters provided each of them "time, support, and understanding" which only a true friend can provide, and which were sorely missed when communication was disrupted.⁴¹ During one of Muir's first trips Carr wrote, "I feel very keenly the loss of you in my life."⁴² After several weeks without

⁴⁰ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, April 1, 1873, in *Kindred and Related Spirits*, ed. Bonnie Johanna Gisel (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2001)

⁴¹ Bonnie Johanna Gisel, *Kindred and Related Spirits* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2001), 10.

⁴² Muir to Carr, 61.

a letter from Mrs. Carr, Muir wrote “I am feeling lonely again, and require a word from you.”⁴³

The texts of *Songs from the High Sierra* are drawn from letters from Muir to Carr, one letter for each of the five songs in the set. While Muir wrote many journals detailing the landscape during his travels, Walker chose his letters because of the level of emotional and personal substance within them. Instead of being merely descriptive, Walker explained that “the letters displayed feelings—feelings about the mountains, and suggested feelings for Mrs. Carr. Even humor!”⁴⁴ This contrast can be seen in the following excerpts:

One of Muir’s journal entries:

The first heavy fall is usually from about two to four feet in depth. Then, with intervals of splendid sunshine, storm succeeds storm, heaping snow on snow, until thirty to fifty feet has fallen. But on account of its settling and compacting, and the almost constant waste from melting and evaporation, the average depth actually found at any time seldom exceeds ten feet in the forest region, or fifteen feet along the slopes of the summit peaks.⁴⁵

An excerpt from one of Muir’s letters to Carr:

I wish that you could see the edge of the snow-cloud which hovered, so soothingly, discharging its heaven-begotten snows with such unmistakable gentleness and love, moving from pine to pine, as if bestowing blessings upon each. I wish that you could see this.⁴⁶

⁴³ Muir to Carr, 123.

⁴⁴ Gwyneth Walker, email message to author, September 3, 2020.

⁴⁵ John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: The Century Co., 1907), 36, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31822013514203&view=1up&seq=11>

⁴⁶ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, Spring 1871, in *Kindred and Related Spirits*, ed. Bonnie Johanna Gisel (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2001)

Note that Walker does not set the five letters in chronological order. Rather, Walker uses an order which allows her to portray a journey. Walker notes that while choosing the letters' order she "tried to put them in the order of going up the mountain and coming down."⁴⁷

This letter, and the others in the cycle, are unmetred prose text. A challenge that Walker faced in setting these letters was transporting the listener to the grand, sweeping landscape of the mountains using a text lending itself more to a recitative style.

Addressing this challenge, Walker alters the original text. This most often involves the omission or rewording of smaller phrases. Walker chose to eliminate some of the more mundane aspects of a personal letter in favor of Muir's more depictive words. For example, she shortens the passage "I was thinking that a month or so might answer for the present, and then, instead of spending the winter in town, I would hide in Yosemite and write" to the more succinct and poetic phrase: "I was thinking I would hide in Yosemite and write." In the same section she removes Muir's plans for packing food, "I thought I would pack up some meal and dried plums to some deep wind-sheltered canyon back among the glaciers of the summits, and write there, and be ready to catch any whisper of ice and snow in these highest storms," and instead uses the text: "I would hike back among the glaciers of the summits, and be ready to catch any whispers of ice and snow."

The lengths of the letters were another reason for Walker to revise the texts as she did. When asked about the differences between setting letters and poetry, Walker noted that when she sets poetry there is very little she changes or leaves out; however, because

⁴⁷ Gwyneth Walker, interview with author, September 25, 2020.

of their very nature, in letters “people ramble,” and “you’ve got to excerpt.”⁴⁸ Walker’s version of the text omits some unequivocally beautiful phrases such as Muir’s description of the sunset: “After the splendid blessing, the afternoon was veiled in calm clouds, and one of intensely beautiful pattern[s] and gorgeously irised was stationed over Eagle Rock at the sunset.”⁴⁹ While these omitted sections contain appealing phrases, Walker found excluding them was a necessary part of setting a lengthy prose text.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Bade, 341

Chapter Three: Song 1: “Ascent: ‘Glacier Birds and Other Companions’”

The first song in *Songs from the High Sierra* is “Ascent: ‘Glacier Birds and Other Companions.’” The text comes from John Muir's letter dated August 5th, 1872, during his exploration of Yosemite Valley.

This song has components that are essential to the cycle. Walker introduces important motives that recur throughout the entire work. She also introduces a consistent pattern of setting conversational text to recitative melodies, and in contrast, setting descriptive text to more lyric melodies. Finally, as is suggested by the title, this opening song embodies the beginning of the listener’s journey and “ascent” into the Sierras. Walker’s invigorating music brings the grandness of the Sierras to the listeners’ heart.

Song Text

Your letter telling me to catch my best glacier birds, and come to you and the coast mountains, only makes me the more anxious to see you, and if you cannot come up, I will have to come down, if only for a talk. My birds are flying everywhere, into all mountains and plains, of all climes and times, and some are ducks in the sea, and I scarce know what to do about it. I would see the coast ranges, but I was thinking I would hide in Yosemite and write; I would hike back among the glaciers of the summits, and be ready to catch any whispers of ice and snow.

You sense all the bends and falls and rapids and cascades of my mountain life--you know that my companions are those who live with me in the same sky, whether in reach of hand or spirit. I am learning to live close to the lives of my friends without ever seeing them. No miles of any measurement can separate your soul from mine.

Analysis

Walker begins the piece, using black note clusters and high trills in the accompaniment to portray the birds' dance across the glacier. In the backdrop, a distant glacier emerges as the pianist executes a rapid, recurring descent from A5 to D5. Once the vocal line begins, there are occasional high trills in the accompaniment as though the birds are lingering. The glacier motif reappears in multiple songs, while the bird trills resurface in the fifth song.

Tempo ad libitum

playfully,
as birds hopping across a glacier
ascending black-note clusters

faster, scurrying
higher

just a few birds
very high

1 *p*

mf quasi recitative

mf quasi recitative

Dear Mrs. Carr: Your letter telling me to catch my best

pp barely noticed

rapidly, blurred, a glacier in the distance

Red.

glacier birds, and come to you and the coast mountains, only makes me the more

Sua---, Sua---,

Red.

an - xious to see you, and if you can not come up I

stop

(Pedal off)

(*red.*) _____

2 **Moderate tempo** ♩ = 108 *rit.*

will have to come down,

Moderate tempo ♩ = 108 *rit.*

Figure 1: “Glacier Birds” m. 1-3

The singer sings the text "Dear Mrs. Carr" using the Mrs. Carr theme. This theme repeats throughout the cycle, always on identical pitches. Walker uses G# as the central pitch for this theme because its lower range. This gives the theme a more spoken quality appropriate for a letter's tone.⁵⁰ The vocal line continues until m. 2, employing a quasi-recitative style leaping away from, and returning to G# multiple times.

⁵⁰ Gwyneth Walker, in an interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

The chords in mm. 17-18 hold significant importance within the cycle. They also appear later in m. 31, and also in songs three and five. About these chords Walker says, “I’m not going to be confusing about it. I just want to state boldly like blocks of sound that this is the mountain.”⁵¹ The sudden shift in texture immediately captures the listener's attention, akin to Muir's awe at the sight of majestic peaks.

The musical score for "Mountain Chords" mm. 17-18 is presented in a grand staff format. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, marked with a fermata. The middle and bottom staves are for piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is "Grandly" with a quarter note equal to 92. The piano part features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bass line includes a "Sua" marking with a dashed line underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand, with accents and breath marks.

Figure 2: “Mountain Chords” mm. 17-18

Throughout this cycle, Walker changes from lyric vocal line to a speechlike vocal line depending on the tone of the text. In the more mundane sections of the letters Walker employs two different types of speechlike material. Carol Kimball in her book “*Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*” defines two of these speechlike types. The first type she labels “recitative”, and I will refer to it thusly.⁵² Recitative employs speechlike

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), 5-6.

rhythmic patterns in the vocal line paired with some melodic material such as changing pitch on important syllables.⁵³ Kimball labels the second type of speechlike material as “lyric recitative”.⁵⁴ The important difference between recitative and lyric recitative is that lyric recitative has “substantial melodic contours” and are “likely to contain more organized rhythms”.⁵⁵ Kimball refers to a third type of vocal articulation called “lyric melody”. This type of articulation uses melodic contour and rhythms which serve the melody more than the text. Walker marks sections that are recitative as “quasi recitative”, and when speechlike patterns are being employed outside of such a marking, she is employing lyric recitative.

Comparing the accent and rhythm of the spoken and sung texts unveils Walker's keen phrasing sensitivity, which may not be evident in a quick analysis. Interestingly, the singer is given responsibility over prosody in some sections. In the first section of "Ascent: 'Glacier Birds and Other Companions,'" the vocal line is marked “quasi recitative”, devoid of rhythmic notation. This recitative section grants the singer the freedom to select their own rhythms, aligning with the conversational nature of the text. However, not all phrasing choices are left entirely to the singer. Walker composes syllabically with perfect fourth leaps on accented words.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

Tempo ad libitum
playfully,
as birds hopping across a glacier
ascending black-note clusters

faster, scurrying
higher

just a few birds
very high

p

mf quasi recitative

Dear Mrs. Carr: Your letter telling me to catch my best

rapidly, blurred, a glacier in the distance

pp barely noticed

Red.

glacier birds, and come to you and the coast mountains, only makes me the more

Sza---

Sza---

Red.

Figure 3: “Syllabic Emphasis” m. 1

Walker grants the singer further freedom through lyric recitative sections composed with sparse, unaccented accompaniment figures. For example, mm. 44-48 in 4|4 meter, if the singer emphasizes syllables on beats one and three, as suggested by the meter, that would yield the stressed syllables: "learning to live close to the lives of my friends without ever seeing them." However, this reading does not sound natural because it emphasizes the unimportant word "to" and deemphasizes the word "live". Natural emphasis could have been achieved by putting the word "live" on beat three; however, this would make the rhythms unwieldy. The singer can appropriately emphasize both "live" and "close" because Walker blurs the meter using triplet arpeggiations in the accompaniment, weakening the strength of beats one and three. Walker's composition also enables different singers, or even the same singer in different performances, to inflect the section differently. This approach ingeniously combines conversational prose with poetic musicality.

44 **a tempo** (♩ = 108) *mf*

I am learn - ing to live close to the lives of my

a tempo (♩ = 108) *mf*

friends with-out ev - er see-ing them. *rit.*

Figure 4: “Sparse, Unaccented Accompaniment” mm. 44-48

Walker uses another pattern in sections that combines lyric recitative with lyric melody. Each metered phrase contains a mixture of rhythms combining spoken rhythms with more dominant, sung rhythms that are musical in nature. Many phrases begin with a lyric melody which ignores the normally more complex rhythms of speech. Then in a lyric recitative section, shorter rhythms are introduced that match natural speech patterns more closely.

This pattern occurs in mm. 24-30 with the text “I would hike back among the glaciers of the summits and be ready to catch any whispers of ice and snow.” In mm. 24-27, the text is set to longer rhythms than natural speech would dictate. Then, in mm. 28-30, the text embraces the text’s natural spoken rhythm. This pattern results in the first half of these phrases serving the melody, with the second half reminding the listener of the natural conversation inherent in a letter.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 24-27. The vocal line begins at measure 24 with the lyrics "I would hike back a - mong the gla - ciers of the sum - mits, and be". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *cresc.*. The second system covers measures 28-30. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "read - y to catch an - y whis - pers of ice and snow." The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Dynamic markings include *mf*.

Figure 5: “Pattern of Lyric and Speech-like Melody” mm. 24-30

The song's final section illustrates well Walker's philosophy toward setting a text. During an interview where she talked about her treatment of the text, she stated that, "You do not want someone to be trying to sing some of the most important parts of your song on a high A quickly."⁵⁶ Her goal to "write words that can be sung and understood" is demonstrated in the way she sets the text in m. 43, and again starting in m. 49.⁵⁷

Both phrases convey the sentiment that deep human connection is possible despite vast physical distance. To match this sentiment musically, m. 43 is marked "slightly slower", and the accompaniment, initially only vaguely present, becomes silent half-way through the measure. Furthermore, while the melody begins on an F#3, there is an upward leap to C#4 on each noun. In mm. 49-53 there is an upward leap to A4 followed by a slow descent. These strategies contribute both to giving sonic clarity to the text and highlighting the quiet sincerity of Muir's words.

43 Slightly slower

wheth-er in reach of hand or spir - it.

The musical score for Figure 6 consists of two systems. The first system shows a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody begins on F#3 and moves to C#4. The piano accompaniment is shown in the second system, with both treble and bass clefs. The piano part is present in the first half of the measure and then fades out in the second half. The tempo marking 'Slightly slower' and the dynamic marking 'p' are placed above the vocal line.

Figure 6: "Fading Accompaniment" m. 43

⁵⁶ Brooks, "An Interview."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

47 *rit.* **Slowly**
f espr.
 friends with - out ev - er see - ing them. — No

rit. **Slowly**
as a bird hopping
ascending white-note clusters

50 *tenderly* **p**
 miles of an - y meas - ure - ment can sep - a - rate your soul from mine.

(ringing)
(poco)

Figure 7: “Slow Descent” mm. 47-53

In “Ascent: ‘Glacier Birds and Other Companions’” there are several examples of Walker evoking the mountain. In m. 5 the tonality shifts from D Lydian to G Lydian employing extended tertian harmonies alternating between E11 and G11. The melodic range in mm. 5-15 increases gradually as if Muir is beginning the climb up the mountain reaching a summit on F# in m. 13.

a tempo (♩ = 108)

mf *ecstatic*

My birds are fly - ing ev - ery - where,

a tempo (♩ = 108)

p *gentle tremoli, as birds in flight* *mf*

in - to all moun - tains and plains, _____ of all climes and times, _____

— and some are ducks in the sea, and I

scarce know what to do a - bout it.

Figure 8: “Evoking the Mountains” mm. 5-15

The melodic range in this section is another method used to evoke the mountains. The octave leap connecting mm. 18-19 supports the “Grandly” marking, but also evokes the sharply rising mountain peak. The melody is lower in range on the text “but I was thinking I would hide in Yosemite and write,” and this turns our attention away from the mountain just as Muir turns away his.

The shape of a mountain can also be found in the song’s form, and the song’s harmonic structure helps to outline the form of the piece. The key sequence is as follows:

A Major (D Lydian) ➔ D Major ➔ G Major (C Lydian) ➔ A Major (D Lydian) ➔
D Major

Figure 9: “Song 1 Key Sequence”

Here, the key sequence helps create a sense of a ternary form where the A Major, D Lydian and D Major portions serve as an A section, the G Major and C Lydian keys create a B section, and the return of the opening harmonic sequence implies an A' section to conclude.

Having already established that the chords in mm. 17-18 depict the mountains musically, it is easy to connect the B section with a mountain peak. In other words, section A leads toward section B and section A' leads away from section B. Just as a mountain peak stands out majestically from the foothills around it, the B section is both in vocal range and in the accompaniment’s sweeping chords the “peak” of this song and the song’s overall form is then in the shape of a mountain.

Performance Considerations

In the first section of the song (m. 1), the tonal center is not clear. The A5 played at the beginning of the repeating pattern could easily be heard as the tonal center. Indeed, the key signature suggests that this section is in A Major. There is also little harmonic support here, and so the tonal center could easily be subjective.

Tempo ad libitum
playfully,
as birds hopping across a glacier
ascending black-note clusters

faster, scurrying
higher

just a few birds
very high

p

mf quasi recitative

Dear Mrs. Carr: Your letter telling me to catch my best

rapidly, blurred, a glacier in the distance

pp barely noticed

Red.

glacier birds, and come to you and the coast mountains, only makes me the more

Szza---

Szza---

Red.

Figure 10: “Unclear Tonal Center” m. 1

The pianist must be responsible for helping the listener to hear D as the tonal center. According to Walker, the key here is D Lydian with the repeating D5 in the

accompaniment acting as a tonal center.⁵⁸ While, according to her, the G# does highlight the raised fourth scale degree of the Lydian scale, it also acts as a leading tone in A Major. To help counter this, pianist should solidify a sense of D Lydian by bringing out the D4 in the repeated figure.

There are several different markings given by Walker in this cycle. The sheer number (there are over one hundred not counting dynamic or tempo markings) of specific markings can be somewhat overwhelming, but they are informative and useful. Understanding the function of the different markings will help the performers give a more expressive performance.

In this song, and the others, there are three types of musical instruction. There are standard musical terms (“with motion”, “slightly slower”, “grandly”, “dynamics”, etc.), markings in parentheses which indicate a programmatic description of the accompaniment (“the grandeur of the mountains”, “the mountain top”), and italics which indicate the mood of how to express what is being playing in the accompaniment (“with reverence for the wilderness,” “in wonderment”).

⁵⁸ Gwyneth Walker, in an email to the author, September 3, 2020.

Chapter Four: Song 2: “Glory in the Mountains”

This letter was written in the Spring of 1871 while Muir was exploring Yosemite Valley, California.⁵⁹ During this time, Muir was working at J.M. Hutching’s sawmill in Yosemite. However, later that year Muir left his employment due, in part, to jealousy arising from his popularity as the Yosemite expert.⁶⁰

In this piece, Walker continues using motives introduced in the first song and utilizes the same helpful strategies to aid the singer with syllabic text stress. She utilizes harmonic textures evoking the feelings of reverence and awe conveyed in Muir’s words and these textures also portray the mountains’ untouched purity. Additionally, this song uses text painting to continue the climb up the mountains.

Song Text

“The Spirit” has led me into the wilderness, and I am once more in the glory of the Yosemite. I am filled with visions of snowy forests of the pine and spruce, and of mountain spires, pearly and half transparent, reaching into heaven blue not purer than themselves.

I wish that you could see the edge of the snow-cloud which hovered, so soothingly, discharging its heaven-begotten snows with such unmistakable gentleness and love, moving from pine to pine, as if bestowing blessings upon each. I wish that you could see this.

In a few hours, we climbed into a glorious storm-cloud. What a harvest of crystal flowers, and the wind song. We would not see before us in the storm, but as I was familiar with the general map of the mountain, we had no difficulty in finding our way.

I went out to watch the coming of the dark--most impressively sublime. Next morning was every way the purest creation I ever beheld!

⁵⁹ Bade, 242.

⁶⁰ Bade, 241.

Analysis

Walker continues using motives and other patterns in the vocal line. She also uses the same low range from the first song as well as a lyric recitative vocal line when Muir's tone is more conversational. There are leaps of a fourth from G3 to C4 throughout this song which will become important when discussing the tonality. In mm. 14, the vocal line contains a leap of a fifth. Because the preceding intervals are no larger than a major third, this leap stands out. The accompaniment changes from repeated eighth note chords in m. 13 to one rolled F9 chord in m. 14. These strategies help the audience visualize the "mountain spires" spoken of, and they convey the feelings of awe expressed by Muir.

13 *poco rit.* **Slightly slower** *f*

pine and spruce, and of moun - tain spires, pearl - y and half trans -

poco rit. **Slightly slower** *f*

16 *mf* *accel.*

par - ent, — reach - ing in - to hea - ven blue — not — pur - er than them -

mf *accel.*

19 *a tempo* (♩ = 96) *f*

selves. —

a tempo (♩ = 96) *f*

Rec.

Figure 11: “Fourth and Fifth Leaps” mm. 13-19

34 *poco rit.* **Slightly slower, grandly**
f
 pine, as if be - stow - ing bless - ings up - on

poco rit. **Slightly slower, grandly**
f

Figure 12: “Leap of a Fifth” mm. 34-35

It is apparent that Walker composed this song with syllabic stress in mind. In mm. 17 and 27 she emphasizes the first syllables of “heaven” and “soothingly” by placing them on strong beats and by using a leap of a fourth. Mm. 8-9 provide another example when the stressed syllables of “glory” and “Yosemite” line up with strong beats.

17 *mf*
 reach - ing in - to hea - ven blue

mf

27

sooth - ing - ly,

Trem.

Figure 13: “Emphasis of Important Syllables” mm. 17 and 27

Walker uses a minimalistic accompaniment evoking the feeling of reverence toward nature. The harmonic motion is frequently static, at times not changing for several measures. This can be seen in mm. 4-9 where an extended C chord is repeated continually in the accompaniment from m. 4 until m. 9 where it begins playing an F chord. In mm. 23-33 the accompaniment contains tremolos on variations of a CM7 chord. Finally in mm. 63-69 Walker carefully remains on C chords responding to Muir’s reverence as he watches the sunrise. This minimalistic pattern conveys a care to conserve the purity of Muir’s surroundings.

4 *mf* with reverence for the wilderness

"The Spir-it" has led me in-to the wil-der-ness,

7 and I am once more in the glo-ry of Yo-sem-i-te.

10 I am filled with

Figure 14: "Minimalistic Accompaniment" mm. 4-10

23

p in wonderment
gentle, quivering tremoli

1

Figure 15: "CM7 Tremolos" mm. 23-24

61

pur - est cre - a - tion I ev - er be - held!

rit.

rit.

rit.

Slowly, grandly

Slowly, grandly

rit.

mf mp p

8va

Figure 16: “Sparse Harmonic Texture” mm. 61-69

The tonality of “Glory in the Mountains” is a symbol of this purity. The song begins and ends in the key of C Major. Walker said, “I remember in Salome whenever John the Baptist was introduced, he was always in the key of C. He was pure, he was holy. So...of course I would always put something pure in the key of C.”⁶¹ Extended tertian harmonies built on C reinforce the key as do the frequent leaps to C4 in the vocal line.

⁶¹ Gwyneth Walker, in an interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

15

13 *poco rit.* *Slightly slower* *f*
 pine and spruce, and of moun - tain spires, pearl - y and half trans -
poco rit. *Slightly slower*

16 *mf* *accel.*
 par - ent, reach - ing in - to hea - ven blue not pur - er than them -
mf *accel.*

19 *a tempo* (♩ = 96) *f*
 selves.
a tempo (♩ = 96) *f*
 ped.

Figure 17: “Leaps to C4” mm. 13-19

Much of this song’s text painting occurs in the middle “storm” section. In mm. 39-44 Walker paints the snowstorm using flurrying quintuplets in the accompaniment’s right hand against triplets in the left hand. In m. 49 “blurred” tremolos increase the intensity of the storm as the climbers’ visibility is decreased. The tremolos stop in m. 51

but the sustain pedal is used to denote the storm is pausing. M. 52 is the first time there is silence in the accompaniment, indicating that all is well; the climbers know the way; and in m. 53 the accompaniment doubles the vocal line before resuming the triplet figures and the accelerando into the final section.

39 *a tempo* (♩ = 96)

a tempo (♩ = 96)
ascending the mountain

mf

In a few hours we

climbed in - to a glor - ious storm cloud.

What a

Figure 18: “Storm Section” mm. 39-44

49 *p* *rit.* Recited on pitch (matter-of-factly) *mf*

we would not see be - fore us in the storm, but as I was familiar with the
blurred tremolo, as if blinded in a storm *rit.* general map of the mountain,

52

we had no dif - fi - cult - y in find - ing our

Figure 19: “Blurred Tremolos” mm. 49-53

While much of the text painting happens in the “storm” section, Walker also paints the text using melodic contour. In mm. 13-16, she writes an ascending melodic line up to the word “mountain,” followed by a descending melodic line. The contour results in the shape of a mountain peak. In mm. 17-19, the contour is ascending in response to the text, “reaching into heaven blue”. The melody of mm. 35 begins on a G4 on the word “bestowing” and then descends as heaven’s snow “blessings” are bestowed upon the pine trees. In mm. 39-44 the vocal line’s pitch moves higher and higher while the text describes Muir’s climb up the mountain during a snowstorm (see Figure 18).

13 *poco rit.* **Slightly slower** *f*

pine and spruce, and of moun - tain spires, pearl - y and half trans -

poco rit. **Slightly slower** *f*

16 *mf* *accel.*

par - ent, — reach - ing in - to hea - ven blue — not — pur - er than them -

mf *accel.*

19 *a tempo* (♩ = 96) *f*

selves. —

a tempo (♩ = 96) *f*

Rec.

Figure 20: “Mountain in the Melody” mm. 13-19

34 *poco rit.* *f* Slightly slower, grandly
 pine, as if be - stow - ing bless - ings up - on

poco rit. *f* Slightly slower, grandly
 ped.

Figure 21: “Blessings Bestowed” mm. 34-35

Walker also frequently depicts the landscape in the accompaniment. In mm. 3-10, and again in mm. 67-69, she includes figures labeled as “the mountain top.” In mm. 14-15 the stacked ninth and eleventh chords portray the “mountain spires” while these same chords in mm. 34-35 illustrate the tall “pines”.

3

3

Figure 22: “Mountain Top Figure” m. 3

Performance Considerations

Walker writes phrases that are half lyric recitative and half lyrical melody. This occurs in mm. 7-9 where the words “and I am once more in the...” all occur on the same pitch while the words “glory of Yosemite” are set to a more fluid melody. The singer

may find it challenging to sing expressively while observing essential syllabic stress during the lyric recitative of the phrase.

The lyric recitative portion of phrases necessitates the singer taking responsibility for the prosody. It would be beneficial to decide which words and syllables to emphasize early in the learning process. The singer should take note of where the phrase becomes more lyrical and grow dynamically to that moment. In m. 17 for example, the first syllable of “reaching” could be emphasized, and a slight crescendo to the word “heaven” can be observed.

The image shows a musical score for three measures. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. Measure 16 is the start of the vocal line with the lyrics "par - ent, reach - ing in - to hea - ven blue not pur - er than them -". The piano accompaniment begins in measure 17. The score includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *accel.* and slurs over the vocal line.

Figure 23: “Reaching and Heaven” mm. 16-18

The vocal line at the end of the song has a high tessitura and ends on a high G. Getting past the high tessitura to the high G without becoming vocally fatigued can be difficult. The issue is exacerbated by the triplets in m. 62, which slow down the line rhythmically, as well as the ritardando in m. 63.

61

pur - est cre - a - tion _____ I ev - er be - held! _____

rit.

rit.

3

rit.

rit.

Figure 24: “High Tessitura” mm. 61-64

There are practices which can be used to prevent vocal fatigue at the end of the song. Observe accented and unaccented syllables in the high tessitura passage before the high G. Take note that Walker sets the words “ever beheld” to triplet rhythms to emphasize the text. It is tempting to begin the ritardando in m. 62, but the singer should trust that the rhythmic slowing from the triplets is enough and wait for m. 63 as it is written.

M. 21 contains sixteenth note figures marked by Walker “as a waterfall in the mountains.” These figures appear only briefly and are important in setting up the “quivering tremoli” that begin shortly after. If the singer puts the cutoff of “themselves” on beat one of m. 21, then it will cover the beginning of the waterfall figures in the accompaniment. The solution here is to place the cutoff on beat four of m. 20.

Cut off here
↓

19 *a tempo* (♩ = 96)
f

selves.....

a tempo (♩ = 96)
f

as a waterfall in the mountains

Figure 25: “Early Cutoff” mm. 20-21

There are repeated melodic phrases and text phrases which can sound dull in the hands of an uninspired singer. M. 35 has a melodic line that is very similar to the melody in m. 14. Another example of repetition, this time of a text phrase, appears in m. 38 which repeats the exact text that has already appeared in m. 37.

Varying the other components of the phrase will give the repeated components greater meaning. In m. 34 the singer should slow the tempo down more than in m. 13. This will allow m. 35 to be sung “grandly” as asked for by the composer. The singer should also vary where a breath is taken. In m. 13 it is advisable to breathe after the word “spruce” and carry after the word “spires” in m. 14. In mm. 33-34 the singer should take a breath before and then sing through “moving from pine to pine, as if bestowing blessings upon each” without taking a breath. Finally, in m. 37 the singer should emphasize the word “wish” and “see,” and in m. 38 the singer should emphasize the word “wish” and “this.” Each of these observances will give greater meaning to repeated sections.

13 *poco rit.* Slightly slower *f*
 pine and spruce, and of moun - tain spires,
poco rit. Slightly slower *f*

33 *poco rit.* Slightly slower, grandly *f*
 mo - ving from pine to pine, as if be - stow - ing bless - ings up - on
poco rit. Slightly slower, grandly *f*

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 13-14) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a melodic phrase with lyrics 'pine and spruce, and of moun - tain spires,'. The piano accompaniment has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Performance instructions include 'poco rit.', 'Slightly slower', and 'f'. The second system (mm. 33-35) continues the vocal line with lyrics 'mo - ving from pine to pine, as if be - stow - ing bless - ings up - on'. The piano accompaniment includes a fermata over a chord in the right hand and a 'Ped.' marking in the left hand. Performance instructions include 'poco rit.', 'Slightly slower, grandly', and 'f'.

Figure 26: “Similar Phrases” mm. 13-14 and mm. 33-35

36 *p freely*
 each. I wish that you could see this, I wish that you could see this...
p
 (Ped.)

The musical score shows a single system starting at measure 36. The vocal line has a melodic phrase with lyrics 'each. I wish that you could see this, I wish that you could see this...'. The piano accompaniment has a simple harmonic accompaniment. Performance instructions include '*p freely*', '*p*', and '(Ped.)'.

Figure 27: “Suggested Emphasis” mm. 36-38

Chapter Five: Song Three: “Yosemite Falls”

On April 2, 1871, Muir had taken an evening journey to Yosemite Falls. These waterfalls can be seen from the valley; however, it would have taken a six-to-eight-hour hike to reach the upper Yosemite Falls. Shortly after midnight on April 3, 1871, Muir wrote this letter to Mrs. Carr describing the falls and the moonlit scene before him.

Walker captures the intense passion of Muir’s letter. A wide range of emotion is expressed through an equally wide range of compositional techniques in the vocal line and the accompaniment. This song also contains both static and lyrical vocal phrasing but contains more sweeping lyricism than the other pieces in the cycle. Finally, this song is the peak of the cycle’s mountain climbing journey and Walker highlights this expertly.

Song Text

O Mrs. Carr, that you could be here to mingle in this night moon glory! I am in the Upper Yosemite Falls, and can hardly calm myself to write, but you have been so present in my thought.

In the afternoon, I came up to the mountain, with a blanket and a piece of bread, to spend the night in prayer among the spouts of the Fall. I can only wish again that you would expose your soul to the rays of this heaven.

Silver from the moon lights this glorious creation which we name the Falls, and has laid a double rainbow at its base. O the music that is blessing me now! The grandest notes of the yearly anthem. They echo every fiber of me.

I am going to stop here until morning, and pray a whole blessed night with the Falls and the moon.

Analysis

Walker uses the vocal line's pitch range to evoke different emotions from the listener. The opening section employs the Mrs. Carr theme, resides within the same "bland" range used in song one and utilizes a lyric recitative melody. However, in the text, Muir can't resist injecting awe-inspiring descriptions of his environment into an otherwise formal letter. For example, mm. 5-8 contain a lyric recitative melody on the words, "O Mrs. Carr, that you could be here to mingle in this..." M. 9, in stark contrast, ends with the descriptive words, "night moon glory!" In response to this contrast, Walker uses a lyric melody, briefly abandons the lower range and writes a sweeping melodic line culminating in a G# on the word "glory!"

5 *mf* tenderly

O Mrs. Carr, _____ that you could be here to

min - gle in this night moon glo - - ry! _____

f

Figure 28: “Range Used to Express Text” mm. 5-10

Walker uses distinct phrase shapes in the vocal line of “Yosemite Falls” preserving the text’s intense emotion. The song contains further examples of phrases that utilize recitative in the first half, and then become more lyrical in their second half. A noteworthy example is in mm. 28-35. In m. 28 the entire measure remains on one pitch. M. 29 contains some leaps and a stepwise ascending line. Mm. 30-31 are relatively static, but less so than m. 29. Finally, in mm. 32-35 the phrase is lyrical, and it ascends until it reaches the climactic A natural in m. 34. Another example in m. 54 stacks progressively larger intervals on the text, “I am going to stop here until morning and pray a whole

blessed night with the falls and the moon” as if the singer’s attention is slowly moving away from the letter and back toward the beauty of the surroundings.

28 *poco rit.* **Slower**

I can on-ly wish a - gain that you would ex - pose your soul _____ to the

poco rit. **Slower**

Red. _____

f *a tempo* (♩ = 108)

rays, _____ of this heaven. _____

a tempo (♩ = 108)

Figure 29: “Static to Lyric Melody” mm. 28-35

54 Free measure
p reverently

I am going to stop here un-til morning, and pray a wholebles-sed night with the Falls and the moon.

Figure 30: “Progressively Larger Intervals” m. 54

Walker's keen sensitivity to the text is evident in her use of triplet rhythms in the melody, emphasizing significant words and passages. Frequently, these triplets occur when Walker is changing from lyric recitative to lyric melody. In m. 9 the words “night moon glory” are set to half note triplets providing contrast to the less descriptive text surrounding them. Another example is in m. 52 when the word “fiber” is emphasized by quarter note triplets.

5 *mf* tenderly

O Mrs. Carr, _____ that you could be here to

min - gle in this night moon glo - - ry!

f

Figure 31: “Night Moon Glory” mm. 5-10

52

ech - o ev - ery fi - ber of

mf

f

Figure 32: “Quarter Note Triplets” m. 52

Walker expresses the text using a wide variety of figures in the accompaniment including tremolos, arpeggios, and block chords. Some are used for text painting, but Walker uses others to evoke a certain emotion. For example, in m. 20 Walker indicates that the accompaniment should play a “gentle tremolo, with excitement and anticipation.” In m. 48 she adds the marking “celebratory” in the accompaniment above block chords.

a tempo (♩ = 108)
with excitement and anticipation

20

af - ter - noon, I came

a tempo (♩ = 108)
gentle tremolo, with excitement and anticipation

mf

Ped. Ped.

Figure 33: “Gentle Tremolo” mm. 20-21

48 *celebratory*

Ped.

Figure 34: “Celebratory Chords” m. 48

Many elements in this cycle bring images of mountains to the listener’s mind, and the harmonic progression of this song sets out to accomplish the same ambition. This song has more frequent modulations compared with the other songs. In the first half, each modulation is a perfect fifth below its predecessor. The piece begins in A major and moves to: D major in m. 13, G major in m. 20, and C major in m. 25. This modulation cycle then repeats itself starting in m. 34 with one exception; M. 46 modulates to C Lydian instead of G major. Notice that the chords in mm. 46-47 are very similar to the chords in mm. 17-18 of song one. Of her choice to use Lydian mode, Walker said, “Of course I would use the Lydian mode while climbing a mountain.”⁶² She explained further that if this section was played with an F natural that “it no longer sounds like a mountain.”⁶³

46 *a tempo* (♩ = 108), *grandly*

f

f

8^{va}

Figure 35: “Mountains in Lydian Mode” mm. 46-47

As mentioned previously, Walker frequently uses the accompaniment in this song to depict the mountains and other phenomenon. There are triplet figures in the

⁶² Gwyneth Walker, an interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

accompaniment throughout the song and in m. 1 these figures are labeled, “as a waterfall.” In m. 46 the same theme from song one depicts, in Lydian mode, the grand mountains (see Figure 35). Mm. 48-51 have block chords in the accompaniment which sound like bells playing “the grandest notes of the yearly anthem.” The accompaniment in mm. 55-57 contains progressively ascending tremolos depicting the moonlight shining through the mists of the falls.

1 **Flowing** ♩ = 108
as a waterfall

mf

Reo.

Figure 36: “Waterfall Figures” mm. 1-3

49 *mf*

bles - sing me now! — The grand - est notes of the year - ly an - them! They

Reo.

Figure 37: “Anthem Bells” mm. 49-51

55 *a tempo* *rit.*

a tempo
8^{va}
gently, as moonlight *rit.* *pp*

(p)

Ped. Ped.

Figure 38: “Moonlight Figures” mm. 55-57

The mountain can be seen again by examining the pitch range of the vocal line throughout the entire song. The pitch range reaches its highest point, both in this song and the entire cycle, on an A4. This occurs just past the song’s halfway point. Afterward, the pitch range becomes lower in the song’s second half. In other words, the song’s contour is again in the shape of a mountain peak.

Performance Considerations

Because the text is prose, the phrases are often irregular lengths. This can pose a challenge to the singer’s phrasing choices, especially regarding breathing. In mm. 5-10, Walker gives ample time to take a breath in m. 5 after “Dear Mrs. Carr” but mm. 7-10 contain no convenient breathing moments. Mm. 19-28 contain only one phrase, but it is unrealistic to expect the singer to get through this section without a breath. Indeed, one is indicated by Walker in m. 24; however, there are no rests, and the singer must “sneak” a quick breath to get one. Mm. 28-33 contain a similar challenge at a slower tempo.

5 *mf* tenderly

O Mrs. Carr, _____ that you could be here to

min - gle in this night moon glo - - ry!

f

Figure 39: “Tricky Breathing Moments” mm. 5-10

19 *Red.* *a tempo* (♩ = 108)
mf with excitement and anticipation

In the af - ter - noon, I came up to the moun - tain,

a tempo (♩ = 108)
mf gentle tremolo, with excitement and anticipation

() _____

— with a blan - ket and a piece of bread, to spend the

Figure 40: “Long Phrase” mm. 19-24

37 *ecstatic*

Sil - ver from the moon lights this

glo - rious cre - a - tion which we name the Falls,

Figure 41: "Moon Lights" mm. 37-42

28 *poco rit.* **Slower**

I can on-ly wish a - gain that you would ex - pose your soul _____ to the

poco rit. **Slower**

f *a tempo* (♩ = 108)

rays, _____ of this heaven. _____

a tempo (♩ = 108)

Figure 42: “Breathing” mm. 28-35

In mm. 5-10 the singer should breathe after the word “mingle,” if a breath is needed, to avoid interrupting the phrase’s more lyrical second half (see Figure 39). In mm. 19-23 the singer should breathe following the word “afternoon.” In m. 24 they should coordinate with the pianist to allow sufficient time to breathe. The singer can slow the tempo slightly during the accompaniment’s rests in the second half of the measure. This will allow the singer to perform mm. 24-28 without needing another breath. M. 29 is another unaccompanied measure, and the singer should take advantage of this to breathe after the word “again”, allowing the phrase to reach m. 33 before taking another breath.

Mm. 37-42, in addition to containing a long phrase, also contain the words “moon lights” which could be mistaken for “moonlight.” To make “moon lights” clear in m. 39, the singer should either breathe after the word “moon,” or use diction and text stress to put a clear separation between the two words.

Mm. 43-45 follow a decrescendo from forte, but care must be taken to not sing this passage too softly as Walker has indicated a robust mezzo-forte. At the same time, this passage wants to have a different timbre than the “ecstatic” passage (marked forte) before it. This author recommends taking the higher option if possible; however, this option requires the singer to execute this phrase in a challenging tessitura.

43

Slightly slower
mf

Ossia
and has laid a dou - ble rain - bow at its base.

Slightly slower
p in the distance

8^{va}

Figure 43: “Challenging Tessitura” mm. 43-45

Singing this phrase is possible at a mezzo forte while accessing a timbre that conveys the tender awe evident in the text. When the vocal line descends in mm. 40-42 the singer must not allow a decrescendo to happen but must remain at a strong forte. The singer should then transition to head voice or use a lighter, airier timbre without

becoming too soft. Greg Gallagher provides a wonderful example in his recording of this song which is available on Walker's website.⁶⁴

This song's key is difficult to establish aurally. It is especially true in the frequent and thin textured arpeggios in the accompaniment. For example, in m. 13 the key shifts to D major and continues through m. 16. Hearing this section in D major is difficult when the arpeggios' starting note shifts between G and E. The best solution is bringing out the tonic in the accompaniment. Executing this is simple enough in mm. 5-10 with A occurring on beats two and four in each measure. Highlighting the tonic in mm. 13-15 is more challenging because the D never occurs on the beat; however, the singer can highlight the D on the words "Yosemite" and "calm."

⁶⁴ Gwyneth Walker, *Songs from the High Sierra* mvt. 3, with Greg Gallagher (tenor) and Kristin Eliason (piano), Gwyneth Walker's website, <https://www.gwynethwalker.com/songsfromthehighsierra.html>.

5 *mf* tenderly

O Mrs. Carr, _____ that you could be here to

min - gle in this night moon glo - - ry! _____

f

Figure 45: “Highlighting A Major” mm. 5-10

13

Up - per Yo - sem - i - te Falls, and can hard - ly calm my - self to

poco *poco* *poco*

Figure 46: “Highlighting D Major” mm.13-15

Chapter Six: Song Four: “Ice!”

The text of this piece is written from a letter dated “Yosemite, December 11, 1871.” Walker notes under the title that it is a letter from Muir “in which the author has a disagreement with Mrs. Carr!” The letter expresses Mrs. Carr’s dislike of ice, and her frustration at his obsession with the “Sierran wildernesses.”⁶⁵ Her pleadings provoke a friendly, but firm rebuke from Muir in his responding letter. In lighthearted fashion, Muir teases Mrs. Carr and he questions how she could love glaciers yet have disdain for ice.

Walker’s setting meticulously honors the tone of Muir’s words. The vocal line mimics Muir’s alternation between conversation and description. Walker responds to the text using a variety of figures in the vocal line and accompaniment. Finally, the interactions between the vocal line and the accompaniment mimic those between Muir and Carr.

Song Text

Ice! So, you dislike ice!!!

But glaciers, dear friend--ice is only another form of terrestrial love. I am astonished to hear you speak so unbelievably of God’s glorious crystal glaciers. “They are only pests,” you say, and you think them “wrong in temperature,” and they lived in “horrible times,” and you don’t care to hear about them.

You confuse me. You have taught me here and encouraged me to read the mountains. Now you will not listen. Next summer you will be converted--you will be iced then.

I have been up Nevada to the top of Lyell and found a living glacier; (but you don’t want to hear that) and I have been in the canyon above, and I was going to tell you the beauty there; (but it is all ice-born beauty, and too cold for you) and I was going to tell about the making of the South Dome; (but ice did that too) and about the hundred lakes that I found; (but

⁶⁵ Bade, 265.

ice made them, every one) and I had some groves to speak about--groves of surpassing loveliness in new pathless Yosemite; (but they all grew upon glacial drift--and I have nothing to send but what is frozen or freezable).

Glaciers came down from heaven, they were angels with folded wings, white wings of snowy bloom. Locked hand in hand, the little spirits did nobly; they were willing messengers to whom God spoke "well done" from heaven, calling them back to their homes in the sky.

Next summer you will be converted--you will be iced then!

Analysis

Throughout "Ice!" Walker simplifies the process of syllabification and word stress, and by doing so she honors the conversational nature of the text. One way she accomplishes this is by writing lyric recitative and by placing important syllables on strong beats, particularly on beat one. For example, in mm. 28-30 she places the important syllables of the words "taught," "encouraged," and "mountains" on first beats. In m. 22 she uses triplet rhythms, high tessitura, and accents on the word "horrible" which gives it weight. In lyric melody sections she changes pitch on words or syllables to emphasize them. This occurs in mm. 11 and 12 where the vocal line leaps up a fifth and emphasizes the strong second syllable of the word "astonished."

28 *mf*
 taught me here and en - cour - aged me to read the moun - tains.
cresc.
mf
 Rec. Rec. Rec.

Figure 47: "Strong Syllabic Emphasis" mm. 28-30

Figure 48: “Use of Triplets to Place Emphasis” m. 22

Figure 49: “Leap of a Fifth to Place Emphasis” mm. 11-12

Because this song contains an argument, Walker writes recitative and lyric recitative sections which make the song more conversational. One recitative section is mm. 34-56 which frequently requires singing a phrase on a single pitch with no indicated meter or rhythm. This allows the singer to perform the text in a natural, speech-like manner.

The singer dismissively cuts off the piano chord

41 (as an aside) *mf* (curtly, with disdain)

(but you don't want to hear that)

Figure 50: “Sample of static melody” m. 41

When the text changes tone, Walker responds musically. In mm. 34-56 there a series of phrases where Muir seemingly attempts to lure Mrs. Carr to his side, and then cuts off suddenly with a snide remark. Walker responds by initially writing a lyric melody section and then switching to a recitative section. The contrast is further supported by the accompaniment’s sudden stopping. For example, in mm. 46-49 Walker writes a lyric melody on the text, “and I was going to tell about the making of the South Dome.” She then stops the accompaniment and switches to a recitative melody on the words, “but ice did that too.”

48 *f*

and I was going to tell a - bout the ma-king of the South Dome; _____ (but ice did that too)

mf

cut-off

Rec.

Figure 51: “Shift from Lyric to Recitative” mm. 46-49

There are noticeable patterns in the rhythms of “Ice!” The vocal line uses quarter and eighth notes in the first half of phrases and longer note durations in the second half. For example, in mm. 10-11 the word “love” is set to tied half notes when quarter notes and eighth notes were being used earlier. This pattern punctuates the pauses in Muir’s argument giving it an air of confidence.

8

ice is on - ly an - oth - er form of ter - res - trial love. _____

mf

p

Rec.

11

Figure 52: “Short to Long Rhythms” mm. 8-11

Walker also responds to the text using changing rhythms in the accompaniment. Beginning in m. 2 there are straight eighth note rhythms in the accompaniment introducing the text’s argumentative tone. This continues until mm. 34-56 where the previously mentioned change in the text occurs. The accompaniment mirrors this change by playing triplet eighth note rhythms. These triplets endow Muir’s descriptions with passion and energy, and they provide a forward moving contrast to the sudden stop that occurs each time the pianist is cut off by the singer.

2

Quickly ♩ = 120, *ice crystals*

p

slight pedal

Figure 53: “Argumentative Rhythms” mm. 2-4

34 *a tempo* (♩ = 120)

a tempo (♩ = 120)

mf

ped. ped.

Figure 54: “Energetic Triplets” mm. 34-35

Walker also uses interesting harmonic figures to evoke both the topic and tone of Muir’s letter. M. 1 portrays the ice in the accompaniment with a series of chord clusters and a following glissando. The icy sound from these chords compliments the expressive tempo marking, “as brittle ice” from the composer. Though Walker evokes ice in earlier songs, this example also captures the icy tone employed in Muir’s text.

Quickly, as brittle ice

a black-note cluster followed by a white-note (upward) glissando

1

(ascending)

f

higher

Red.

black-note cluster to white-note cluster tremoli

very high

p *ff*

p *ff*

Singer (may wish to step forward to the audience)
spoken loudly, with disgust and disbelief
(tempered with affection), directed at Mrs. Carr.

"Ice! So you dislike ice!!!"

Red.

Figure 55: “Brittle Ice” m. 1

The accompaniment sometimes portrays a response from Mrs. Carr. In m. 32 the accompaniment answers the text, “now you will not listen” echoing a childlike taunt that alternates between pitches a minor third apart. This copycatting from Mrs. Carr is a playful response to Muir’s frustration.

30

Slower
f *in frustration*

Now you will not lis - ten.

Slower

f (*answering the voice*)

Figure 56: “Taunting Echo in the Accompaniment” mm. 30-32

Sometimes the portrayed response from Mrs. Carr is more agreeable. In mm. 64-69 the accompaniment doubles the vocal line’s melody. Walker does not double the melody anywhere else in this song, but it is significant that she does so. Here it portrays Mrs. Carr finally finding some common ground with Muir.

64 *lightly*

Locked hand in hand, the lit - tle spir - its did no - bly, ___

___ they were will - ing mes - sen - gers, ___ to whom

rit.

(*Ped.*) *Ped.* *Ped.*

Figure 57: “Doubling of Melody” mm. 64-69

Performance Considerations

“Ice!” is filled with markings for the singer. Of her markings Walker said, “I do want everything that I put in there done. When somebody does exactly what’s there it works.”⁶⁶ She also gives specific stage directions for the singer to follow. All these

⁶⁶ Gwyneth Walker, in an interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

specific instructions could obscure the performers' creative interpretation of the song and may feel limiting.

When learning the song, the singer should first follow Walker's directions exactly. If there are physical gestures that feel wrong, or if the singer wishes to add gestures, then they should do so. For example, in m. 1 Walker states that the singer "may wish to step forward to the audience." Walker gives autonomy to the singer here, and they should practice with and without a step forward before deciding which way they prefer. The stage directions can be flexible; however, the expressive markings such as "with disgust" in m. 18 should be followed because Walker is always very attentive to the tone of Muir's text.

18 *Slower* *f with disgust*

“They are on - ly pests,” you say,

Slower *f*

Figure 58: “Expression Marking” mm. 18-19

There are also many markings for the accompanist. Some of Walker's markings are very specific. For example, Walker is very detailed about how the song's first glissando should be played. Other directions are less specific and deserve clarification:

In m. 25 the pianist is instructed to play a gentle tremolo “to portray confusion.” Walker notes that, “Sometimes some pianists aren't comfortable with making a gentle

tremolo. They want to force it. But I just want it to be [gentle].”⁶⁷ M. 73 has dashed lines in front of the sixteenth notes reiterating that the left hand plays the first three notes, and the right hand plays the next four. In m. 76 the triplets are marked “ethereal” which can be realized by not accenting any one note. In m. 79 the last tremolo of the piece is marked “playfully,” and the pianist is instructed to play it “very high.” The tremolo will sound playful if played fast and with a slight crescendo.

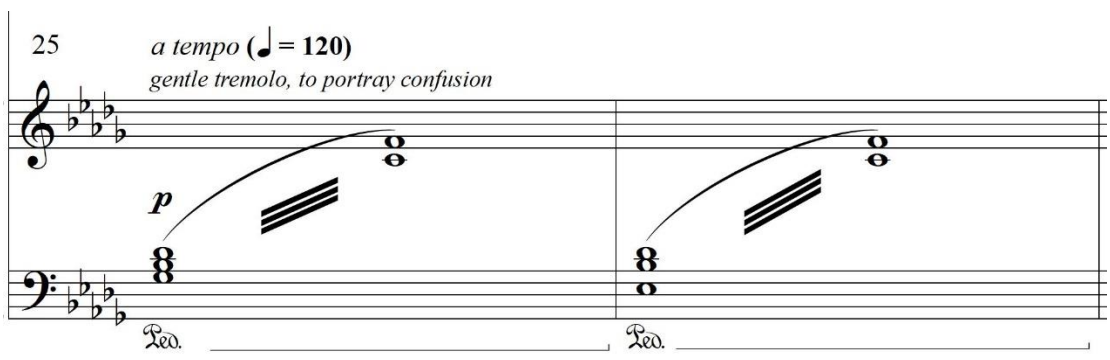


Figure 59: “Gentle Tremolo” m. 25-26

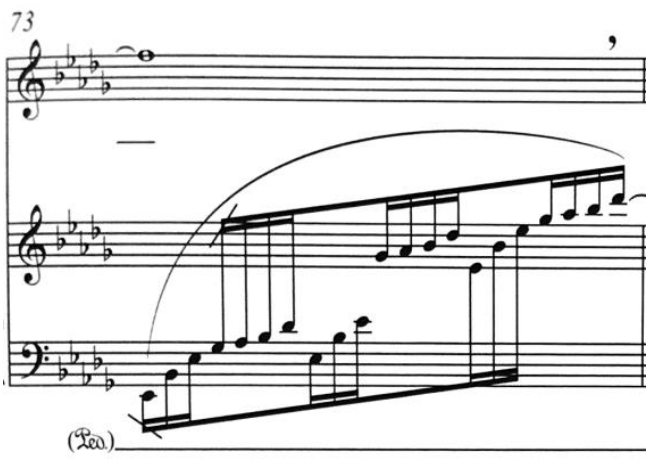


Figure 60: “Dash Markings” m. 73

⁶⁷ Ibid.

76 *a tempo* (♩ = 120)
p
sky. _____

a tempo (♩ = 120)
ethereal
p

Figure 61: “Ethereal Triplets” mm. 76-77

79 (steps forward again, to tease Mrs. Carr)
mf recitative
Next summer you will be con - vert - ed - you will be iced then!
with much delight
playfully *very high*
short black-note cluster to white-note cluster tremolo
pp

Figure 62: “Playful Tremolo” m. 79

In this song there exists a conversation between the vocal line and the accompaniment. If the singer and pianist only pay attention to their half of the music, then the piece’s full potential will go unrealized. When the singer and pianist collaborate, the result will be humorous and fun for the performers and audience alike.

As with any good collaboration, the singer and pianist must be aware of the other’s notes and markings. An example can be found in m. 32 where the accompanist

has the marking “answering the voice”. The singer should provide a visual reaction of some kind to this mocking response in the accompaniment. Another example is in m. 41 when the singer is asked to cut off the accompaniment chord “dismissively”. This “cut off” is an actual physical gesture by the singer signaling the pianist to stop playing whenever it is given. Because of the more theatrical elements, the pianist and singer should spend extra time coordinating mm. 34-56.

30

Slower
f in frustration

Now you will not lis - ten.

Slower
(*f*)

f (answering the voice)

Figure 63: “Answering the Voice” mm. 30-32

The singer dismissively cuts off the piano chord

41

(as an aside)
mf (curtly, with disdain)

(but you don't want to hear that)

Figure 64: “Singer Cuts Off Piano Chord” m. 41

The singer faces challenges in conveying the text's emotion to the audience's understanding. There are sections where a significant amount of text is sung freely on a single pitch. This means there are fewer aids helping the singer make decisions regarding syllabic stress.

Careful planning and preparation will ensure that the text is intelligible to the audience. This author recommends that the singer decide ahead of time which words will be emphasized in these measures. Extra time should also be spent ensuring that the diction of text heavy sections is polished and easily understood. Additionally, the recitative sections in mm. 34-56 should not be rushed.

In mm. 36-38 the text reads "I have been up Nevada to the top of Lyell." This line is referring to Mount Lyell which is the highest peak in Yosemite, and which is named after Sir Charles Lyell.

36 *f* *ecstatic*

I have been up Ne - va - da to the top of Ly - ell

Rec. Rec. Rec.

Figure 65: "Mount Lyell Reference" mm. 36-38

According to Charles Withers Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Edinburgh, the pronunciation of Sir Charles Lyell's name is ['lai əl].⁶⁸ Professor Richard Fortey agrees with this pronunciation.⁶⁹ This does not consider any local pronunciation of "Mount Lyell"; but Muir, who had Scottish heritage and was familiar with the writings of Charles Lyell, would have likely pronounced the name this way. Regardless, Walker sets the first syllable on a strong beat making either ['lai əl] or ['lai əl] the preferred pronunciation.

⁶⁸ Charles Withers, "The Travels of His Own Mind," Digital Imaging Unit, University of Edinburgh, February 19, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__HgKyrxTQk.

⁶⁹ Richard Fortey, "Richard Fortey on Charles Lyell," People of Science with Brian Cox, The Royal Society, January 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPFpaGFqHo&t=30s>.

Chapter Seven: Song Five: “Descent: ‘Sequoia’”

The letter Walker sets in song five “Descent: ‘Sequoia’” is actually the earliest letter chronologically of the five. The letter is undated, but scholars have estimated that it was written in 1870 during Muir’s early explorations of Yosemite.⁷⁰ Muir’s wit and sense of humor are responsible for necessitating this guesswork because instead of writing the date and location on the letter (as he typically would) Muir writes “Squirrelville, Sequoia County Nut Time.” In a fitting gesture, Muir wrote the entire letter in red sequoia sap.⁷¹

The letter begins with the text, “Behold the King in his glory, King Sequoia!” Muir is of course speaking of the *Sequoiadendron Giganteum*, or Giant Sequoia. This tree found in California is known for its tendency to grow to an overwhelming height. Walker chooses to evoke and paint these trees in the opening and closing of “Descent: ‘Sequoia.’”

This piece, as its title would indicate, serves as the end of the mountain trek. Walker depicts the trees Muir may have seen upon returning to a lower elevation. While the mountain climbing is over, Walker still manages to transport the listener to the very scenes being described in the text. All the while Walker strives to express the text with intelligibility and emotion.

Regarding its role in the cycle, Walker leaves no doubt that this is the final song. At its conclusion, she incorporates familiar musical material from song one. This provides closure to the listener as if the mountain trek has come full circle. Additionally,

⁷⁰ Bade, 270.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Walker provides a satisfactory ending with high climactic notes in the final phrases of the song.

Song Text

Behold the King in his glory, King Sequoia! Behold! Behold! Behold!

Some time ago I left for Sequoia, and have been at his feet; fasting and praying for light. For is he not the greatest light in the woods? And is he not the greatest light in the world? Where are such columns of sunshine brought to earth?

See Sequoia reaching for the skies, every summit modeled in curves, as if pressed into unseen moulds, warm in the amber sun. How truly Godful in stature! Today, King Sequoia bowed down to me down in the grove as I stood gazing. Behold the King in his glory, King Sequoia!

The sun is set and the star candles are lit to show me the way--little Douglas squirrel and I off to bed. Therefore, my Carr, goodnight. You ask, "When are you coming down?" Ask the Lord--Lord Sequoia! Behold!

Analysis

The song opens with a grand prelude in mm. 1-6 of the accompaniment. Each beat contains large, stacked chords composed of wide intervals. Each chord, marked with accents, contributes to an astounding backdrop of Giant Sequoia trees. The overall effect instills in the listener the same awe Muir must have felt at the majestic sight.

1 **Grandly** ♩ = 92
the majestic Sequoia trees

The musical score shows four measures of music. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords with accents, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a steady bass line. The chords are composed of wide intervals, creating a majestic and awe-inspiring atmosphere.

Figure 66: "Sequoia Figures" mm. 1-4

In mm. 29-30 Walker evokes those feelings of awe and wonderment with progressively stacking chords in the accompaniment. These chords are like the sequoia trees which have more foliage at the top than at the base. This effect places the listener at the base of the tree looking up into the sunlight shimmering through the branches.

28 , *a tempo* (♩ = 100)

earth?

p with excitement and wonderment

Figure 67: “Stacking Chords” mm. 28-30

Walker evokes vivid imagery throughout this section by other means as well. In mm. 32-33 there is an ascending counter melody in the bottom staff. In mm. 37-39 the vocal line, doubled in the accompaniment, contains an ascending line on the text “warm in the amber sun.” These compositional strategies make it easy to imagine looking skyward while surrounded by towering sequoias.

31 *p*
See Se - quo - ia reach - ing for the skies, ev - ery

Ped. *8va*

Figure 68: “Counter Melody” mm. 31-33

mf *rit.*
moulds, warm in the am - ber sun.

mf *rit.*

Ped. *3*

Figure 69: “Ascending Line” mm. 37-39

The vocal line begins on the anacrusis to m. 7 with the opening word, “Behold!” Here Walker sets the text to large octave leaps which hint again, not so subtly, at the Sequoias. The range of the voice line contributes to this as well with the highest notes being in the upper range of the tenor voice.

6 *f*
Be - hold the King in his glo - ry, King Se - quo - ia!
Be - hold! Be - hold! Be - hold!

Figure 70: “Octave Leaps” mm. 6-14

It is interesting to note here that Walker carefully adjusts the accompaniment without losing its boisterous effect. As the vocal line starts, the accompaniment still contains wide accented chords; however, Walker uses only two chords in each measure instead of the four chords used in the prelude. This simple change allows the text to be clearly understood without losing the Sequoia-evoking effect in the accompaniment.

Walker uses triplets in the vocal line to add emphasis and emotion to the text. In m. 26 she sets the first part of the text, “Where are such columns of sunshine brought to

earth” to triplets. In mm. 39-42 uses a similar strategy on the text “how truly Godful in stature.” In each case Walker not only makes the text stand out but also brings out its inherent emotion of admiration.

26

Where are such col - umns of

Figure 71: “Triplets Expressing Amazement” m. 26

39

Slowly, triumphantly

f

How tru - ly God - ful in stat - ure, — how tru - ly God - ful in stat - ure! —

f

Ped.

Figure 72: “Triplets Expressing Awe” mm. 39-42

A major change occurs in mm. 54-56 that is used to unify the song cycle. First, the quintuplet pattern heard at the beginning of the cycle returns. In the left hand of m. 55 Walker reminds us of the birds from song one. The reappearance of these figures evokes a sense of returning home after a journey. We hear familiar themes here at the end of the cycle just as Muir would have seen familiar sights at the end of his mountain trek.

Figure 73: “Familiar Themes” mm. 54-56

This section also captures the ending of the day. In this section the text reads, “The sun is set and the star candles are lit to show me the way.” In mm. 57-60 Walker paints the setting sun through descending motions in the vocal line and in the accompaniment. Mm. 61-65 contain staccato articulation in the vocal line on the text “little Douglas squirrel and I off to bed.” This articulation is used by Walker to evoke the image of tiptoeing.

57 *p* gently, as night approaches

The sun is set and the star can - dles are lit to show me the

way - lit - tle Doug - las *squirrel and I off to bed.

(Red.)

Red. Red.

Figure 74: “Staccato Articulation” mm. 57-65

Instead of finishing the song here, Walker ends in mm. 71-83 with climactic and triumphant fanfare. Mm. 71-75 are very similar to the grand sequoia section at the beginning of the song. The accompaniment in mm. 75-83 avoids a cadence as it builds steadily toward the final two measures. This build resolves with an extended cadence consisting of ascending tertian chords. These final chords sound as though Muir and Walker are both inviting us to take one last look at the grand scenery of Yosemite before the sun sets.

71 **Tempo I** (♩ = 92) *triumphantly*

f

Ask the Lord, _____ Lord Se - quo - ia! _____

Tempo I (♩ = 92) *triumphantly*

f

Be - hold! _____ Be - hold! _____

ritard. to end

Be - hold! Be - hold! Be -

ritard. to end

Sub

The musical score for Figure 75, titled "Delayed Cadence" (measures 71-83), is written in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a long note on G4, followed by a "hold!" instruction. The piano accompaniment includes a "cresc." marking and a "ff" dynamic. A "Sub" (Subito) marking is present at the bottom left, and a "loco" marking is below the piano part. The score ends with a double bar line.

Figure 75: “Delayed Cadence” mm. 71-83

Performance Considerations

The tessitura of this song could be a challenge for many singers. Most of the pitches in the beginning section and ending section are between a D4 and G4. Many of these pitches are either accented or sustained. Finally, there is a ritardando and crescendo in the last three measures of the piece. All these factors can cause this piece to be very taxing on the voice.

Some simple strategizing will allow the singer to get through the piece without straining the voice. In sections with high tessitura like m. 23, Walker generally sets weak syllables on lower pitches and strong syllables on higher pitches. This means that the requested accents will naturally be present, and the singer should not use vocal stamina to make these pitches stand out more. In the final section, the singer should plan and

practice singing mm. 71-80 without overexertion (see Figure 75). If the singer paces well, there will be sufficient vocal stamina for the crescendo in mm. 81-83 (see Figure 75).

21

light in the woods? _____ And is he not the great - est light in the world? _____

p *pff* *pff* *pff*

Figure 76: “High Tessitura” mm. 21-24

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Songs from the High Sierra is a joyful work for both the performers and the audience. Walker largely uses the same compositional strategies that have garnered success in her other compositions; but, while the songs do not break much new ground stylistically, Walker uses some exciting strategies relating to the prose text. This cycle is also useful both in voice studios, and on recital programs.

It is important to note that this is in fact a song cycle. Walker herself refers to it as such.⁷² More importantly these songs are more than just vaguely thematically related to mountains. The song titles show that Walker composed these songs with a mountain journey in mind with an “Ascent” and “Descent”. Of this journey she states, “I tried to put them in the order of going up the mountain and coming down.”⁷³

Walker makes *Songs from the High Sierra* easy to perform expressively. She uses specific expression markings intuitively to match the tone of the text. Other basic markings such as articulation and dynamic markings are equally sensitive to the text. If the performers follow what is written, they will find performing expressively to be a simple task.

The way the text is set makes it easily understood with minimal effort from the performers. Walker frequently sets important syllables on strong beats making the text sound natural. She avoids putting important text on extended high range passages, and she repeats the text when such passages do occur to add intelligibility. Walker also uses a thinner harmonic texture in the accompaniment allowing the singer to be heard easily. All of this allows the text to be clearly communicated.

⁷² In an interview with the author, September 25, 2020.

⁷³ Ibid

Expressive markings and clear text are characteristics of all Walker's vocal works. There are also many other features of *Songs from the High Sierra* used in Walker's other vocal works. This includes her use of energetic rhythmic figures in the accompaniment which sets the mood and propels the song's energy forward. It also includes her use of motivic material, extended tertian harmonies, and text painting.

Walker's text setting strategies are what set this cycle apart from her other solo voice works. While she uses different types of recitative in her other vocal works, Walker uses it far more in *Songs from the High Sierra*. Specifically, she pairs conversational text with recitative and lyric recitative melodies and pairs descriptive text with lyric melodies. A perfect example of this strategy being used is song four "Ice!" The change back and forth between recitative and lyricism perfectly sets a text that contains both the mundane text typical of a letter and Muir's captivating description of his surroundings. Because she typically sets poems (not letters) to music, her divergence from her usual strategies makes sense.

Voice teachers will benefit from adding *Songs from the High Sierra* to their library. The melodies are tuneful and are easily learned, and each song is tonal except for "Ice!". The high notes allow the singer to display their range, but generally the tessitura is written in a comfortable range meaning the singer will not fatigue easily. The only exception to this is song five which could be too difficult a challenge for an underdeveloped voice. This cycle is certainly not for beginner voices, but tenors and sopranos who have sufficient range and stamina will find great success singing them. Also, each song can be performed alone meaning that programming individual songs for a recital will be a simple task; however, these songs are not only for students.

Songs from the High Sierra is an excellent addition to the recital repertoire, and programming them creatively is a simple task. Because the cycle is about Yosemite Valley and John Muir, these songs can be used when there is a national park celebration. Protecting the environment is currently a prevalent societal focus, and *Songs from the High Sierra* could easily be programmed to support this concern. These songs could also be used with other songs containing prose texts, or even songs containing text from letters. Finally, *Songs from the High Sierra* would be an appropriate choice when programming music by female composers.

Gwyneth Walker's *Songs from the High Sierra* is a work deserving of attention. Its accessibility for performers and audiences makes it a great addition to the repertoire. Walker's strategies employed in setting a prose text are interesting and effective. The subject matter makes the songs easy to incorporate on a recital. This author's hope is that the insights shared here will grant performer and researcher alike a desire to explore these songs and be transported to the grand ranges of the High Sierra.

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Appendix A: Interview with Gwyneth Walker

The following interview with Gwyneth Walker took place on September 25, 2020 through Zoom. The participants were Matthew Clegg, Kevin Hanrahan, and Gwyneth Walker.

Matthew Clegg: Great. Awesome. Alright so, I really appreciate you being willing to do this. This is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for me and I'm sure Dr Hanrahan is excited as well. So, we've emailed a lot and I greatly appreciated those emails. You mentioned wanting to discuss a few things, including the, some of the harmonic structure of the pieces which I would, I would very much appreciate and then we can kind of chat about some of the other the other questions that I have had. And...if that's okay with you?

Gwyneth Walker: Yes, yes. And I have my score. I assume you have your score.

Matthew Clegg: I do.

Gwyneth Walker: So, there were some things I wanted to point out, and is Kevin on board? Does he have his score too? A plus!

All right. Firstly, we were talking about what key or mode, things are in. And as I was looking at this, this is one of the more complicated works to try to explain. So, I threw you into something that when I'm looking at it now, I'd say, "Oh, I can see how difficult this would be".

Now the reason it's difficult is because sometimes the music is in the Lydian mode, which as we know is in the mix of the major scale and the only change to it is that the fourth step is raised. And that's very appropriate for mountain climbing music, but sometimes I use the key signature that reflects that mode and sometimes I don't depending on where I am.

So that would be a source of confusion; but if you are going to write anything about this, you can just say that the composer often puts the Lydian mode in this particular piece because of the mountain climbing and, on some occasions, the key signature already incorporates that and other times it doesn't. And we can talk about that, but because I mentioned the mode to you, then you went overboard putting all sorts of modes.

A composer will use either the tonal music or non-tonal or a mode for a particular result that often has to do with the text or the meaning. So, writing music about going up a mountain is fine to put in the Lydian mode, you probably don't want to put that in the Phrygian which has the lower second step, it would kind of imply you've never even got off on your trip. So, I probably misguided you in that direction. Just a mode every so often is fine. And it's usually only one because of the mood of the piece.

Much of this song cycle is tonal. Occasionally, it's not tonal, because I'm dealing with ice clusters. So, I just use the black notes on the piano, and it really doesn't matter what key it's in so long as you're hitting black notes. So that would be non-tonal and then on occasion. It's tonal, I mean it's modal.

So, let's review this opening. Okay, I'm on page eight of the music and it's got the black note clusters there, but it has a key signature of A major and then on the second system we've got our quintuplets, we've got our five blurred notes. Okay? From A going down to

D, and that's where it reflects the fact that I was really thinking that D would be the root of all this, but I didn't want to put this in the key of D and then start out with a G sharp in there.

On the first page. The five note group indicates that D would be the root of it. And here we're singing, "Dear Mrs. Carr" on the G sharp, the famous G sharp Mrs. Carr is almost always addressed, G sharp, A. And the reason she is is because it's kind of a bland range down there and that will happen in the sort of more recitative sections. Why have a recitative on your highest note, we'll save that for later.

Matthew Clegg: That makes sense.

Gwyneth Walker: So that was this. The opening is really in D Lydian but I put A because why start the whole piece with an accidental instead of just letting it be, then we go soon enough to D on the next page near the end. The next page second system. Then it goes to D for the bottom.

Next page. This is important, page 10. Whatever key we're in, we're maybe in a G Lydian, then we get to grandly. And the reason that I always use the key of C is that this is the mountain, and I don't, I'm not going to be confusing about it. I just want to stay boldly like blocks of sound that this is the mountain. These are the mountains. So grandly is really in the key of C. That F sharp and the key signature saying that this is C with the raised fourth step Lydian, why not.

If you play the piano...by the way Matthew, do you play the piano?

Matthew Clegg: Well enough but not not as well as some.

Gwyneth Walker: If you ever wanted to play that measure grandly, and then play it with an F natural and hear how it no longer sounds like a mountain. Okay, so that would be just a good example of that, and we have...it comes back on the next page also with the same chords. Now it's got an F in the bass. But basically, what I wanted to say was the composer will choose a key or an arrangement of keys to express a text, not to try to give a harmonic analysis to the singer so much as to say, what is the meaning here? What is the feeling? Well, this is about grandeur so I'm going to have grandeur in C major, so I wanted to say most of that.

If you think about the keys that go in this first piece, we have the key of A at the start and then D and then there's a G with just the one sharp and then C. Now that's the circle of fifths going up. One is the dominant of the next, the next. I didn't think of that when I was writing a piece, but it makes sense. And oftentimes, one finds little things in there so as the harmonies change, they're always going up through the circle of fifths. One key is the dominant of the next key is the dominant of the next. All right?

I think that's all I have to say about...Let me see. I'm on the end of this song on page 13. This has finally the key signature of D. I guess I must have gotten wind of what I really wanted. And so at the end, "No miles of any measure a measurement can separate your soul from mine." And again, the, the G sharp is in there in the key of D to show the raised fourth. And then we have the birds again. And those are black note clusters. And I just left the key signature D obviously those clusters are not in the key of D. They're just

black note clusters. I could have put all flats in the key signature, but just saying black notes will do it.

Okay. Now next one. Glory in the Mountains and I wrote some stuff down. Yes, I said, "Does C major mean anything to you?" and you were, that was good "simplicity and purity".

You know, the opera Salome? Strauss? Is Kevin there?

Matthew Clegg: I know of it. I've never sung anything from it but...

Gwyneth Walker: Is Kevin?

Kevin Hanrahan: I'm familiar with it, yes.

Gwyneth Walker: Okay, my teacher Arnold Franchetti had studied with Strauss. So we got a lot of Strauss, and I remember in Salome whenever John the Baptist was introduced, he was always in the key of C. He was pure he was holy so I, you know, we talked about this so often that of course I would always put something pure in the key of C, so it could be holy and Strauss's and this is what Strauss did and other composers have done that too. So I didn't come up with that. Okay. Yeah okay now. Yes, yes. Look up Salome sometime and John the Baptist whenever he...I mean, I'm afraid he was brought in his head was on a platter or something.

Now, this is so pure because, "The spirit..." I mean starts with the only holy reference really "The spirit has led me into the wilderness" in the mountain spires and that that's great.

Oh, okay. I'm on the end of page 15. He's talking to her again to Mrs. Carr. So, notice he's on a G. He's down in that wishy washy range that's good for recitative, or maybe to talking very quietly intimately. "I wish you could see the...I wish you could see this." He's not going to really sing it, and he's not going to have it in his low range. He just going to sing, "I wish that you could see..." the words are more important. He does the same at the end of the next page: "I wish that you could see this."

Now he's going to climb up the mountain. And this starts on page 17. So, all of a sudden, instead of being in C major. We go into A flat. No. E flat. Sorry. "In a few hours," etc. And he climbs up the mountain.

And now this is important page 18. He's...he gets himself into a storm. There's a snowstorm, and that's when the harmony gets very confusing. Just the way you would feel if you were attempting to go on a path. And then you could no longer find your way on the path. "We could not see before us in the storm." As if blinded in the storm, the harmony becomes blurry blinded to us too. And then I think you pointed this out at measure 56. Well, it clears up. It's so glorious "I went out to watch the coming of the dark" we're back in C, and I'm at the end of page 18 at the bottom. It wouldn't be so glorious if we hadn't gotten so lost with all those flats. So he clears from the flats. So, that is what was in mind for writing in that key.

Let's see if I covered everything. Yeah, you talked about that. You said to return to, you know, so that that was the logic. I remember even writing that with all those 16ths and everything and then it could clear up.

Matthew Clegg: I like that.

Gwyneth Walker: Now, the Yosemite Falls one. Again, this goes through different keys and trying always to get to C major for the grand "bah duh!" C Lydian really, I would call measure 46 on page 23 an obvious return to the key of C, but it's C Lydian always and you're going to go home and play on the piano those chords with an F sharp and an F natural and then you say, I hear exactly what she had in mind.

Matthew Clegg: I will send you an email and let you know when I do.

Gwyneth Walker: I remember giving a talk on this these songs, when I was down in at Ellis, and one of the people asked about modes, but I think he thought he was being very erudite you know, and I tried to explain that of course I would use the Lydian mode while climbing a mountain and people just looked at me and then kind of a light bulb went off, you know, and it was an explanation and I sang, you know, *sung with major scale* "I am going to climb a mountain today" *sung with lydian scale* "I am going to climb a mountain today". "Oh, oh!" they said.

All right. Okay. For your questions.

Matthew Clegg: Yes, so you are absolutely right by the way. I really enjoyed hearing you speak in Kiya's interview last week and I thought, I thought Michael Cotton asked some very, very good questions and I really appreciate that he had asked those. So, some of these questions have been have been answered. But some of them I feel like maybe that I might ask again. Is there anything about this piece that is an exception or that you did differently?

For example, you're you. You went through and decided which pieces of texts to include and which pieces to not include. You've mentioned that a lot of that is deciding okay what sticks out to you. What can evoke emotions that you feel are important and that you could set to music in a way that would get the audience to feel those. But was there anything about this being a prose text that made that more of a challenge than to, for example, if I were to set up a prose text, I would, I would be very concerned about the meter and how do I get it to flow in a way that is good and that sort of thing. Of course, I'm not a composer. And so that might be a bad way of going about it, but was there anything about that that you took into consideration.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, and I'm just looking for the letters. Yes. Firstly, I think I told you that I selected the letters because his journal entries had no personal touch to them at all. You know, he would just talk about the mountain or something and I needed to have some things, some feelings interspersed with them to have songs, but these were just letters, and I believe I worked very hard to just find sentences that were lyrical that were singable because the letters, if I used every word in the letters... I'm sure I excerpted like crazy. They were not in the public domain. I mean, they were in the public domain. So I

was allowed to change things, I'm sure I don't have the original letters in front of me but I'm sure that I worked hard to try to make something singable.

In general, and people write letters, they're not singable and there can be plenty of words that are just really awkward. Of course, there are recitative passages here sometimes just to note with the whole recitative and other times, singing on a note. So, it's not bel canto necessarily. Anytime I could find a couple of words a sentence that would be particularly expressive of bel canto, I would make the most of it. So, it was a struggle. It would be different than taking existing poetry.

I think that for Kiya's pieces. For the prairie songs those were poems all of them were poems. I may have extracted from the Carl Sandburg, but I used every word from the Willa Cather poems, just as they were.

Kevin Hanrahan: Yeah. And if I if I can ask a question about this. Um, and forgive me if you've already answered it. But so you chose excerpts...did you rewrite any of the passages or change any of the words to make them fit a little bit better. So, in other words, did you only use his words.

Gwyneth Walker: I think I only use his words. Hmm. And I, I don't have the originals in front of me right now. You could probably find them easily see

Matthew Clegg: So, I did actually. I actually did a look and. And you're absolutely right. You. I think there are maybe one or two articles that you added or took away. And that's, that's really all that was changed.

Gwyneth Walker: Well, I think I eliminated.

Matthew Clegg: Well right. Yes, yes.

Matthew Clegg: You cut out a lot.

Gwyneth Walker: Probably entire paragraphs from letters I thought well this group of sentences would work to express this part that I think the titles...aren't the titles the titles of the letters?

Matthew Clegg: Yes.

Gwyneth Walker: So, I think I use the actual letter and the actual title, but the letters were longer than when in here. Yeah, I think so. And I think it took a lot of work to tell you the truth, because the person who commissioned them thought of this idea, you know, of using some John Muir but didn't necessarily suggest. And then I looked and found that there were these letters, and they were indeed old enough so that they weren't under any copyright restrictions and I tried to put them in the order of going up the mountain and coming down. All that I had to structure myself. And then I had to delete from the originals. Unsingable. I mean there was too much. Well, anybody's letter. I mean, imagine setting music anybody's letters. These days, people ramble. You know, you've got to excerpt. Yeah.

Matthew Clegg: Absolutely.

Gwyneth Walker: Okay.

Matthew Clegg: Let's see. So, okay. So here's another one. So, I've noticed and others who have written about your works they have also noted your sensitivity and skill in setting the text, which is of great interest to you know to my document. And it seems that you kind of do that fairly instinctively. But is there is there anything for those composers who feel like they have a good grasp of music but not necessarily of literature. You know what somebody who writes well for instruments, but not as well with with writing words for singers. Is there anything that you could suggest that they can do to cultivate that skill.

Gwyneth Walker: Hmm. Hmm, OK. Well, firstly, if there's a composer who writes well for instruments, but maybe doesn't write as well for the voice even forgetting about text setting. Then they should just listen to and look at a lot of music. Some composers write beautifully for the orchestra and cannot for the life of them write a melody that's singable and they can study, and struggle and it just never comes naturally. And you almost want to say but you're so good at the other you know at writing these instrumental pieces that's your thing, you know, so trying to be the other person or somebody else doesn't always work.

There were some composers here in Connecticut, years and years ago. I was in a Connecticut composers group and one or two were quite famous in their genres. I won't

mention their names, and somebody said, you know, he would give a million dollars if he could write a melody like you, and I was just a struggle. I was just a young student and I realized later listening to this person's work that he was so terribly talented at adapting things for instruments and there was no melody and if he could have written a melody, he would have been much further much better known, you know, so you have certain gifts and in terms of text setting and all this and that.

Personally, the one thing I never really studied at school was literature. My father was an inventor and I'm good at sciences. I was always a science person. I went to college as a science major at first, so I was not very well read. I certainly never sat and read novels or anything. As a child, I, I just, as you know, I just got off the tennis court. I'm an athlete. I run around the tennis court, and then I come back, and I sit at the piano.

So, reading a poem is good. I can do that. But I don't sit and read and literature was not my thing. But when it came to writing songs, I would find poems and I just by instinct tried to put some words and music together. And it turned out later that I was good at that. But I know sometimes somebody will say, well, have you really studied the history of this poem or this poetry and I think. No, I didn't, I just read the poem, and I thought, to me, this means such and such. And here we go.

So, it's more, it's instinctive and it's maybe reflecting a lack of scholarly approach to literature is just what I what I envision and I say envision because I'm not visual either, so not visual not scholarly poetry, but it's what I feel. Or I can imagine I can imagine being up in the mountains and so I try to put that in the music and I have a good ear so that helps, but for a composer who doesn't write well for the voice and doesn't do text setting,

I would almost say, “Well, maybe that's not your thing. Maybe your writing for instruments is superior and you should not even worry about the other.”

We're all given a certain gifts and certain lacks, you know, and certainly one of my friends could write for orchestra that it would sound like Shostakovich when it came off her desk and I thought, you know, I would be struggling for the same thing.

Matthew Clegg: Well, that makes sense. And I think that's that's smart play to your strengths. But then if you are working with poetry, rather than trying to look at the background write what the poetry does for you and for your imagination. That makes sense.

Gwyneth Walker: Know if it's your style. But, definitely, if you are not comfortable writing, just look at a lot of literature and talk to singers because surely you know I was I've learned a lot of talking to singers, especially when they pointed out to me that they were going to have to breathe somewhere near the end. Or they couldn't sing a high G# for two pages you know I mean they were demonstrating, they would tell me. And so, you know, I would learn

Matthew Clegg: Great, great. That's, wonderful.

Alright, so, so here, here's the original question that I asked, or rather I asked about what your processes for conveying the mood of what you want to get in a piece. And we talked a little bit about that with modes.

Maybe I actually...so, when you had started talking about modes, I will admit, I went down the rabbit hole just a little bit with trying to look and search what what moods do these other modes create, you know, and I came up with a couple of people who gave their opinions and I think there's value in that. But what are some other modes that you have used to create certain moods that you found useful.

Gwyneth Walker: Um, no. I tend to stick that raise fourth step in there. Oftentimes for glory for whatever. The Phrygian mode is a very depressed one and I don't use that. I think that many of us who like folk music will use the mixolydian mode, that's the major scale with the lowered seventh, you know, or the Dorian mode or Greensleeves mode I use those when I have melodies that are more folk-like. Other than that, I don't even remember the Locrian mode. I mean, I know that begins on B but I don't use that one.

So, let me see. So the one on C is the major scale, the one on D is the Dorian, the one on E is the Phrygian that I don't use, the one on F would be the Lydian because it has the raised fourth the G is the mixolydian. I have covered them all. The a is the Aeolian and that's just the natural minor.

Matthew Clegg: Yeah.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, I would say Lydian and then Mixolydian and Dorian for folk music.

Matthew Clegg: Great. And then the second part of that question is: are there other aspects of the piece such as, you know, the accompaniment the piano, the harmony other things in the melody, other devices you use to try and evoke that new mood?

Gwyneth Walker: Well, let's be more general just say express the text. Okay, evoking a mood sounds wishy washy there.

I would say everything. Everything I am doing. The piano in particular tries to evoke the text, text tries with the text well just take the opening clusters of the birds going up and down on the keys, which later is more evident with the ice, the ice, you know, not many composers would write blocks of sound. You know, like ice chunks. I put that there.

Then there's what we're talking about when it goes into the flats and it's those many 16th to be the snowstorm. You know that yeah accompaniment, in particular, almost everything about it. I mean, you know, hold on a sec.

Well, in the first song we got the the birds going up and down my Birds are flying everywhere there's a tremolo there they go.

I tend to do put more stuff in there than most composers would. The birds are flying everywhere, of all climbs and times and some are ducks in the sea. There's this you know that's the wave.

Yeah, oh yes, everything, then we get the mountain. Everything I put into the piano is related to the text. The singer conveys the words. Sometimes what the singer is singing also is more text painting, but other times, the singer is just trying to get the words out.

But when you sing "rising up to heaven", and you go on to the high A obviously that's a text painting, but you can't have the voice trying to text paint every word.

Matthew Clegg: Right

Gwyneth Walker: Otherwise, you would never get the song out there. Okay.

Matthew Clegg: That was very helpful. Thank you. Let's see.

Alright, so the theatrical elements, which I think are so fun, I think a lot of times singers would find those types of things very helpful. So, when you imagine these... a lot of times... I've done a lot of operas. I'm kind of going about this in a long-winded way. So, I've done a lot of operas and often in the score there will be stage directions written. And of course, the director has their own concept of what they want to do and so they do something completely different, and you don't follow what's in the score. But do you intend for every performance of this to have those stage directions?

Gwyneth Walker: Okay, what stage directions, do I have in here that I was just trying to remember what...you mean mostly the ice one.

Matthew Clegg: Especially in the ice one. Yeah.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, yeah. I do want everything that I put in there done. When somebody does exactly what's there it works. When they ad lib...but of course I don't have...this is not an opera with the

Okay, yeah. For the ice. When I have all these things, the singer and then the pianist is kind of the foil right? And the way the pianist will say in the living glacier and the singer will cut off the chord, meaning the pianist is like the offering the opposite opinion, "I don't want to hear that" towards...you know cuts off the piano chord and again cut off... I'm trying to see how much I put in there. When somebody does exactly what I put into score. It's usually priceless. When they monkey around and say, well, I'll ad lib. It can be okay but, mine was usually better. Okay, but I'm not a theater director. I'm not even a theatrical person, but when I put things in. I do. Yes, yes I do want them observed and they often relate directly to the music. It's not even that you've got to cut off that chord. If you say, "Well, I'm not going to do that." The pianist is looking at the score saying, "Well, wait, I'm waiting for the cutoff." So, there are other people involved. I would stick with what's in there.

Matthew Clegg: That makes sense. So, I will, I will admit that when I when I sing through this and I hear that last little that last little cluster at the end of number four, I almost envision a smug little nod from the singer on that cluster. What, what do you think about that?

Gwyneth Walker: "Next summer you will be converted, you will be iced then"

Yes, you could say, See, I told you so. Yes, this is, this is what yes that would be good.

Kevin Hanrahan: Now I always think of it as a smirk.

Matthew Clegg: Yes, I like that.

Gwyneth Walker: You. We have a video of Greg Gallagher singing this as a solo or I know there's a video of with the chorus.

Kevin Hanrahan: I believe there is on your website a video I was I was trying to play it earlier today and it's something I'd have to download and play on my machine.

Gwyneth Walker: I don't need it now. I just wondered whether you had seen. I think that...of course...let me put it this way.

Gwyneth Walker: I, I had no idea that he was singing these songs down at LSU until later. And somebody said, "Oh, he sang the songs on his recital" and then they gave me I guess was just an MP3. And I thought, oh, this is pretty good, and the audience was laughing and everything. And I guess he must have been doing the right thing. So, I later met him, and I know he sang with the chorus, then, so he's quite theatrical and whatever he did was good. Yeah.

Kevin Hanrahan: Can I ask a question about ice?

Something that something that I noticed is that at the beginning of ice. When you have the...when he's, you know, sort of, going off, if you will. You put a lot of melodic material in the left hand and in the lower part of the voice. That bit there.

Yeah, but there and then later in the piece when we're talking really about the glaciers and, you know, and the heavens and things like that, that material when you come back with the I'll call it the Mrs. Carr motives in the, in the right hand, as opposed to having melodic material in the left hand. It was, was that an intentional thing or...?

Gwyneth Walker: I know where you were. I knew where you were at the beginning on page 25 but, where is the right hand?

Kevin Hanrahan: 32

Gwyneth Walker: Page 32?

Kevin Hanrahan: Second system measure 65 it starts.

Gwyneth Walker: I think that, firstly back on page 25 what was important to me was to have the ice crystals in the right hand if you know. Are you with me there? Yeah, and that they came from the...up above the clusters and a tremolo between the sound...or all the sound that was up above on the first two systems.

Now we have them as crystals as a little clusters and the right hand. So that leaves your left hand, I needed those to be in a moderate range. Those crystals couldn't have been in a low range. So this is why it starts there. Now you're pointing out later I get...I'm glad I use the same melody. I had no idea. Um, are you talking about...we're on page 32

Kevin Hanrahan: Yeah measure 65

Gwyneth Walker: Now it becomes the melody before it was yep before it was mostly the crystals and then the left hand was introducing some thematic material. But now what it was introducing becomes actually the real melody to double with the voice a little bit. Does that answer your question?

Kevin Hanrahan: Yeah, I was just wondering if it was signifying some sort of sort of a common ground, if you will, since this an argument, right? Yes.

Gwyneth Walker: I don't know, I think that sometimes the theme is in the right hand and sometimes it's in the left hand, but in this case I needed those crystals in the right hand.

Kevin Hanrahan: Right, right, right. Yeah. Okay.

Matthew Clegg: That makes sense. So that actually leads to another question that I that I came up with as I was looking for all of the different motives or the recurrences of the Mrs. Carr motive. But then in my response in my email, I mentioned that I had noticed that other motive that occurs all over the place. The one we were just talking about the...so in measure 65 "locked hand in hand" and you know goes up a half step and then down a minor third and that that happens throughout the entire you know all of the songs. Is that significant?

Gwyneth Walker: Well, in a way, because that's the raised fourth step. The C is the raised fourth step to the G flat harmony underneath it. So whenever however it can go, you know, half, half step up up like that, it would be idiomatic, but other than that, I, I don't know.

Matthew Clegg: So, so the most significant spot that I noticed that, which I thought was interesting and I you know I could probably find an explanation for any little thing, regardless of whether it's coincidental or not, but I did find it really fun and interesting in the fifth...in song five at the end and so on. In measure 60 of song five we've got, you know, kind of this Mrs. Carr motive kind of happening there. And then in measures 66 we still start on that G sharp, but instead of going: *singing*, we go: *singing* And we do that instead and is that significant?

Gwyneth Walker: Is that the same as "locked hand in hand", that you were singing?
Yeah.

Matthew Clegg: Yeah.

Gwyneth Walker: It was like...you know when you're working when I'm working on a song cycle motives, come back. That's why it's good to try to write it in a similar time span, you know, not to write one song and then put it away for a while because things do come back.

Matthew Clegg: Yeah, so it's kind of thematically tying in all the pieces together this recurring...

Gwyneth Walker: Yes.

Matthew Clegg: That makes sense. That's great.

Good. Um, alright, so along with that, are there any other motives that are intended to be to be symbolic or more than just word painting, so, so for example those the triplets that happen. The triplet patterns that happen often...I can see those, those being just, you know, serving to create the mood that that kind of ties in to communicate the text that ties in these these pieces. But, are any of those motives of significance?

Gwyneth Walker: Okay. Um, well, let's just take page 38, for example, because we're we're near there. Okay, and when we have those top measures that have very forceful low octaves in the left hand of the piano and the quarter notes with kind of open chords or harmonies. That would be the texture I would use for the mountain. So, he's still singing "Sequoia" well the great trees. So, we'll call that kind of accompaniment texture.

"Grandeur" okay it's either the mountains or the trees and it even looks grand on the page as those quarters with their stems going up. It looks like they are quite regal

Then we have what we have in measure 54 which is the quintuplets and remember those came at the very beginning of the piece.

Matthew Clegg: Yeah

Gwyneth Walker: And that's why I said I thought it was in the key of D. And notice, I even put it in the D, but I keep the A key signature. Just because I was thinking Lydian and I didn't want to confuse anybody, but of course it confuses you when you are looking for modes but right. Those quintuplets. I put in my music often because for the pianist. We have five fingers. So, this is a great way of generating a lot of note activity easily without crossing your fingers or any hands or anything. Okay.

And I have the right hand up there. So, this is he's talking about. He's going to be coming down the mountain and the sun has set, but we first want to have the flickering perhaps of the sunlight whatever up there. So, I like those quintuplets. And once your hand gets stuck doing those quintuplets, then the left hand's gotta crossover for any other activities or do what else is happening. So, it's got the descending scale. So those are two kinds of textural things rhythmic things that I do with the piano, then you were talking about triplets and that would be measure 61. Let me see. So I would use triplets like that for a flowing. To show me the way just to move forward.

That's just in general, and then we get this is my favorite. The Douglas squirrel. And we get the sunlight again fading and the left hand descending as they're going back down the mountain and the little squirrel is going to bed so that's three different kinds of things: the block chords, the quintuplets, and the flowing triplets which you can spread between the two hands, and it lies pretty well like that.

And then we have the tremolo and I use tremoli a lot and sometimes some pianists don't...aren't comfortable with making a gentle, gentle tremoli. They want to force it. But

I just want it to be...if I had this with strings, I would have them doing a gentle tremolo on one note, since it's piano, you just have it back and forth.

So, it's supposed to be soothing, I guess. And then at the bottom, "ask the Lord" and we're back to the quarter notes with the accents. Of course, we haven't even talked about articulation yet but for writing for piano: There's the pedaling. There's the slurs. You will see all of those on the two pages there. And then for the bold...for the "Ask the Lord" I put accents in there. So, I really do want people I want people to observe those accents, because it's the only way I have of telling the pianist, or telling you, you've got them coming up "Behold", that that's how I want it to go.

And of course, I can always just put notes on that page, but since I'm usually not there when the music is performed. I spend a lot of time putting accents, peddling, slurs, and writing words, you know, descriptive adverbs anything to say how to perform music. So I, you know, as I say, I'm not there so I hope people are reading all these things.

Matthew Clegg: Great, thank you. Yes.

All right, I think that those were the questions that I had. I know we also wanted to discuss the adaptation...

Gwyneth Walker: Yes, but does Kevin have any questions more about the songs. First, Kevin, are you there.

Kevin Hanrahan: I just want to talk a little bit more about the triplet...I was trying to...yeah, because I noticed that you use the triplets, particularly the wavy triplet thing

sort of in between to, you know, to like interrupt the texture. Usually when the singer is ending their phrase the triplet comes in and then it goes back to whatever it is. So, for example, in 22 you have that, on page 23 you have it in that particular piece. It also shows up in page eighteen.

Gwyneth Walker: Oh, you mean the one in the heaven one. I just thought, it's almost sounded like a waterfall. I don't know. Oh, that is a waterfall. Isn't there a waterfall.

Kevin Hanrahan: Well, no, I'm talking about...I'm actually at the top of the page. The words at measure...

Gwyneth Walker: Watery. Don't you think it's kind of watery?

Kevin Hanrahan: Well yeah, but you see what I guess what I'm saying is that you seem to use it at the end of the phrases if to sort of push the singer along in some ways.

Gwyneth Walker: I wasn't thinking about that. There's only so many rhythms, you can give to the pianist you know?

Kevin Hanrahan: That's right. That's right. Yeah. I just know that one has a tendency to come in, near the ends of a phrase to sort of sort of push it to the next.

Gwyneth Walker: Maybe so

Kevin Hanrahan: Throughout all the pieces.

Gwyneth Walker: I see. You're pointing out to me something I didn't know myself.

Kevin Hanrahan: Okay. All right. Well, good. All right, well then I don't have any questions. I really like these songs. I think they're really fun. And well, I had one question. Well, I just want to make is a maybe a clarifying question. So, um, with about the stage direction. So, these are these are your visions of how this should be acted. It's not like somebody performed it, you saw them doing..."ooo, I gotta write that down."

Gwyneth Walker: No.

Kevin Hanrahan: So how did you, how did you come up with these...these stage directions? Did you like map it out in your room there. Just close your eyes and envision or...?

Gwyneth Walker: I think I was...I just, I was sitting at the piano and I just said, You know, I just thought of it.

Kevin Hanrahan: Oh, okay. All right. That's fine.

Gwyneth Walker: Sometimes you just have to go out on a limb and say, this may be stupid, and people may laugh at me. But this is how I think it should go.

Kevin Hanrahan: No, no, no, no. That's, that's, that's good, that's good. Yeah, I don't think I had any other questions.

Gwyneth Walker: Well, while you're thinking, I don't know if I explained this in the other session, but I'll do it for this. I was working on these in Vermont. Did I explain? I was in this little room upstairs, and I was there and I guess the weather was bad. And I spent the whole day in the room, and there were some visitors downstairs, who didn't know me, didn't know much about music. And they were so concerned that I was having a terrible day. I mean, I must be very depressed not leaving the room. So when I finally came down, they said, "Gwyneth we've been so concerned about you, you know, cooped up." and I said, "Cooped up?" I said, "I've been on top of the mountains! I've been on the glaciers with the birds!" And they looked at me, so I was crazier yet than they had feared. I was in this isolated room, but the last thing in the world. And, you know, now it's pandemic I'm cooped up here in my room, quite a bit of the time and you know, after about 10 minutes of me working on the music I'm off on the prairie or I'm somewhere other than there and it's not at all confining.

So, these sisters have a friend who owned the house. Okay. And they really didn't know much about music, but they wanted to be polite. So they said, Well, tell us about your music. So, I went upstairs and I grabbed the sketches of the poems that I had all taped together kind of in accordion style and then I had some of the music written down, you

know, so I came down to the coffee table and I spread the poems out and the people who are kind of...their eyes are kind of crossing. I said, here's the trip up and down the mountain and I spread the thing out. Then I said, here's the music. And I said, it's going to go like this and that.

I'm sure they haven't forgotten that day, because I was trying to explain that you don't just start at the first note and go to the last note, but you have the whole trip planned out as best you can, from the beginning to the end of the text and then you start putting in some of the notes and the whole thing went right across the table and you know it's quite a good example of how a piece of music unfolds over time and you have the plan, the sketch.

And that's similar to what I did with Kiya's music too. I was working on that and I had the sketch finished when I was visiting with friends at Seton Hall University, and one of the friends was always very interested in how you shape a piece of music. He wrote music and he said he often got stuck after a short amount of time. And I said, well, you must plan the whole thing. So I had now planned Kiya's piece. And it was about 25 pages of paper just with sketches. So I said, "Here it is." And I spread it out in the hallway and the music building and my friends jaw dropped. But he really liked seeing the beginning in the end ahead but just as we had it filling the whole hallway. The Dean unknowing all this opened the door to this office to walk out, and I go "Aaaa! Don't step on my manuscript! And he went, "Aaaa!"

And I was just laughing because it was just a pencil copy but it did fill the whole music hallway and my friend was dutifully looking how the ideas that are unfolding and the Dean was wondering what was going on, you know, but it went spread out. And so if I

had had a way of doing that, if that's why I was hoping we could combine this with Kiya's presentation only because it was the exact same thing that it started with a sketch that went you know sideways quite a ways and you fill in the notes as you progress. So I had both of these projects in line.

Oh, I was so amused because I was thinking about them and I said the same thing happened with each of the songs. I planned it out and much to the amusement of people next me if they innocently said, "Oh, how is it going?"

They didn't get an innocent little answer. I just spread out the whole thing in front of them and explained how it was the beginning, the middle, and the end, even though most of the notes weren't there, but I could tell them what it was.

Kevin Hanrahan: Right. You know, I work with Diana Blom in Australia, the composer. Right. You know, we send you the CD? Yeah, she does the same thing. She'll plan it out or and she actually tells it...she has a bit of a commute from her house to her university so she keeps...she tells me she keeps a little notepad and a pencil in our car and when she's driving if a tune comes into her head, she pulls over and scribbles it down. But in the the writing of that "Portrait of America", she would send me some drafts, if you will, of the songs. And I remember one of the songs. It had mainly just sort of the melody and then there were some sort of chord things that were thrown here and then a few textural things, but it was very much sort of it was all planned out, but it was just sort of like little notes underneath of what the accompaniment was going to be, and so it's sort of fascinating to see the layering process that goes into how this works and it's very much like you would write a dissertation right? You sort of map out the whole thing and you

start writing things and then you get it all on paper and then you make it, make it work at that point. So do you do you find at the end of your process like, so you've planned everything out, you think you got it all sort of figured out, Is there a point where you go back and you go, "Oh, my God. What was I thinking when I wrote that?" and rewrite a lot?

Gwyneth Walker: Hopefully not. Hopefully no.

Kevin Hanrahan: So, I mean, like before it's finished. Right. You know, like, do you ever do large edits or once you've got it planned out you just go through and it's good.

Gwyneth Walker: Oh, well that's sounds a little easier than it is. But I pretty much finished each section. Really finished. But I debate, you know, but while while I'm still writing it, I think, well, is this the very best I can do. And finally I say, "This is the best I can do with this song, and now I'm doing the next one." Then I don't go back other than maybe a tempo adjustment later I decide if it's going to really be similar to the opening...the opening should go slightly faster or something like that. But generally no.

Kevin Hanrahan: Alright, cool.

Gwyneth Walker: Thank you.

Kevin Hanrahan: All right. Yeah, I don't think I have any more questions. I'll let Matthew continue and if something again pops up, I'll, I'll interject.

Gwyneth Walker: Okay. All right. Matthew back to you.

Matthew Clegg: Perfect. Well, I think the only...the last thing that I would like to talk about is you...you offered to talk about the adaptation that you did the "Touching the Infinite Sky", and I would love to hear about the process for that. You had also asked for our response to your, your question of what we, I assume that you're asking us what we would do if we had to adapt something...

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, yeah.

Matthew Clegg: So not being a composer, but having seen examples of that. I would say that I would want...I would want to take the gift of having additional colors and timbres to work with to expand, not necessarily to change, but to expand and augment and enhance the existing the already existing material. And in this case you mentioned in a very helpful "about the song" section at the beginning of the score that your, your specific strategy was to use the voices to augment that feeling of being in the wilderness and that vastness and that expanse which I, as I have listened, I feel works very well.

Gwyneth Walker: I'm glad I said that I was wondering if I explain that in the program notes. What happened here was that I wrote these for a singer in Duluth. It was actually a

soprano Duluth and then my publisher decided to put these in print the solo songs, you know, and at that time EC Schirmer wasn't doing all that much with songs, but Mark Lawson, the president, sort of gambled on this and he really liked these songs *Songs from the High Sierra*. I think it was the centennial of the national parks. There was something that tied in with this. So, he got these in print right away with the very nice cover. And I thought, that's great. And I said, I wonder if anybody else is ever going to perform them because I thought they were so unique. So that was that I was off doing other things.

And then I got an email from a conductor at LSE in Baton Rouge. So, his name is Trey Davis. And he said that one of the graduate students down there had performed this work on his recital. That was Greg Gallagher. And that he liked them so much, he wanted me to write a choral adaptation.

Well, I had never even heard of Greg Gallagher. So I said, "Could I hear?" And when I heard this MP3 of him singing. I said, no wonder he wants to do that because Greg was so good. He brought everything to life, including the final movement, you know, but everything was just perfect. Just perfect and I thought, wow, who wouldn't want to, you know, use this, but I thought. Yikes. How do I add a chorus. I mean, I don't want to ruin the songs and we were good. They were fine the way they were. And it's just the one person going up the mountain. You know, so I really couldn't think of what to do at all, but Trey was so enthusiastic, and my first thing question was can I keep solo voice with chorus. And he said, "Oh, okay." And I said, "Could Greg come back?" He had already gone off into the world to a teaching job and they said, "Oh yeah well I have Greg." So, I thought okay now soloist and chorus. And then I thought, "What do I do with the chorus? What do I do?"

So, I wrote an introduction. You know, there are a couple measures of introduction, where they're nice and I think isn't there some introduction before... Yeah, there's a little introduction before the last song too. And in those cases, the chorus is singing with grandeur it's about the mountains or about the trees. They weren't singing so much personally about heaven in the mountains, they were singing with strength. So, I thought, "We'll add these two sections here, and then what?" And I said, "Well, occasionally they could sing with Greg, they could join in the melody like Puccini you know everybody's singing the melody." But other times I just had them creating some choral sounds.

So, then I went down to Baton Rouge and of course I'd never met, Greg. I never met Trey and I had a friend I was staying with who took me to the rehearsal and she's a singer and we sat in this church and they started singing and then Greg started singing in the chorus and my friend looks at me and we said, "This sounds really good!" I mean, I was afraid that it was going to be a mess and that I had ruined my songs, but when they started singing it added this vastness so you could sense the valleys between the mountains, because of the choral sound.

And when I was thinking of discussing this with you. I thought, well, what role does the chorus play because we got John Muir. We know what role he plays. He's going up the mountain. The chorus is the mountain, isn't it? The chorus is the world of the wilderness and so having just those "Ahs" and those chords behind may seem trivial when you're writing it, but it's not trivial when you're in the hall in the concert hall and all the sound. And of course, it's from behind the singer. It just makes it in like 3D. Yes, it just adds a whole dimension.

So, I guess the question is, what would you do if you had to set this and at first, I just had great apprehension, because I liked the songs the way they were. I couldn't imagine adding a chorus. So, it was horror and fear. I didn't want to ruin it and then I thought, "How could I keep the chorus out of the way and then bring them in and maybe add something." So, it was a great experiment, but I, I liked that. So, I like both. But now I will often hear the chorus in the background.

Then at another time I went out to Spokane, Washington at Whitworth college and they were singing, they were doing an orchestra piece and I got off the plane on...because of time lag the day wasn't done out there and they said, oh, one of our students would like to sing for you and I went into this room and he started singing these songs and he loved the wilderness as people do out there. And I thought, Oh my goodness, you know, maybe a few people other than the person in Duluth or Greg Gallagher, like these songs.

So, I was so pleased when Kevin contacted me that he was singing them too. So, you never know. All you can do is write the music and then hope it touches a similar court.

Kevin Hanrahan: You're, you're right about the adding the chorus as like a color. I remember I worked with Gunther Schuller...it was a wind ensemble piece, and he wanted six singers to sing these notes and he was very adamant that if those six singers weren't singing those notes the piece was a complete mess.

And we were like, "But nobody can hear" and he's like, "I can hear it, there's a there's a color!"

So, I know exactly what you're talking about with the with the chorus and those and those chords and things like that we should see if we get Pete to do it. That's our choral director. He's the one who directs the men's chorus.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah. Well, now that you have Matt here to sing them or you to sing them...

Kevin Hanrahan: We do, we do, we do. We could work something out.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, and I have the recordings...I mean, there are recordings on my website in the...those are on YouTube with Greg, you know.

Kevin Hanrahan: Right, right. Yes, yes,

Gwyneth Walker: He'd get a sense of how it goes.

Kevin Hanrahan: So, I'll talk with him. Next time I see him.

Gwyneth Walker: Actually, I've written a fair amount for men's chorus now in recent years, so...

Kevin Hanrahan: Oh, okay.

And just a question about that, the commission for that when...Trey right? It was Trey right? Yeah.

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah yeah

Kevin Hanrahan: When Trey made the commission, did he say he wanted it specifically for male chorus or

Gwyneth Walker: Yeah, he conducts the Tiger Glee Club.

Kevin Hanrahan: Oh yeah. Okay. Okay.

Gwyneth Walker: LSU The Tiger Glee Club.

Kevin Hanrahan: We're the Cornhuskers we take the...you know...we don't pay attention to anybody else. Right. I mean, we forced the Big 10 back into football.

Gwyneth Walker: No comment.

Kevin Hanrahan: No comment from me either!

Okay Matthew, I'll let you...

Matthew Clegg: No, you're good. So, I think that's all the that I had on my list of things I wanted to ask about and I really appreciate those responses I've gotten a lot of wonderful, wonderful helpful material. Is there anything else that you would add or along the topic of a text setting or with this piece specifically?

Gwyneth Walker: Mm hmm. Yeah, didn't I talk about text setting in Kiya's thing too? And it wasn't the pianist. It was the, the other faculty person who was...what was his name?

Matthew Clegg: Dr. McMullen.

Gwyneth Walker: Yes, he and he was asking about the difference between word painting, and text setting and whatever. And I had said that word painting is usually just a specific...like the little bird. Well, whereas you know expressing an entire text, what you would hope would be a larger...just the whole mood or the texture or whatever would be a bigger thing and one can go overboard with these things definitely. You want to write a piece of music that holds together the structure holds together. It's a nice piece and obviously the harmonies the texture, the melodic shapes have to do with text, but it should be a piece that even if nobody was singing would still be...even if you couldn't understand the words if you were just listening to the notes it would still hold together well. So, let's not get carried away.

Also, many times are things in there, the composer didn't realize were in there until...you know some of the things you were pointing out...the melodic similarities or derivations.

You don't always know you just...that's why I tried to write something in a similar time period. So that ideas kind of germinate. You know, ruminate in the mind and pop up at different times, but I don't always know them. So don't think of me, or most composers as scheming to get every little thing in there, you know, it's not like that. You do your best using your instincts and experience to create the music, but then later on, you look at it, you say, "Oh, I see why I chose that motive. Oh, I see why Mrs. Carr was always done the G sharp." I didn't think of it so much at the time, and then I realize later. And I thought that, "I'll call that a leit motif" you know, so analysis follows the creation and often it's an interesting...hopefully there's some logic to it all, but it's not always planned. So, will you be performing the pieces yourself? The songs yourself?

Matthew Clegg: Yes. Yes.

Kevin Hanrahan: Can I ask a question about the Mrs. Carr mode that goes back to the, the idea of the text? So, I get the G sharp thing, right?

Gwyneth Walker: *singing* Dear Mrs. Carr

Kevin Hanrahan: Yeah, yeah. How did you come up with the motive? Did you just say it several times? And it's like, "Oh, that's sort of how it goes."

Gwyneth Walker: I probably said it once. I mean, I was probably noodling around with that Lydian mode, the D. *singing Dear Mrs. Carr. I mean, you don't want to have a very

high or very low. And that was just the right spot to bring out the raised fourth step, I suppose. But I didn't do much.

Kevin Hanrahan: So, when you're setting the text, do you try to really sort of reflect some of the inflection and rhythm of the of the language?

Gwyneth Walker: I sing it.

Kevin Hanrahan: You sing it. That's good to know.

Gwyneth Walker: I sing it at the piano. Sure.

Kevin Hanrahan: Okay, good.

Gwyneth Walker: Yes, in whatever range is comfortable. Yes.

Kevin Hanrahan: Right. Right. High or low.

Gwyneth Walker: I can play the piano and I can sing, neither of which professionally, you know, but I could hear these.

Matthew Clegg: That's a great question. Yes, thank you.

Gwyneth Walker: No, I sing them. I was singing them this morning. I always hope that I mean, fortunately, my neighbors can't hear me when I'm singing in the soprano range, you know, I mean, I'm trying to play the accompaniment, so my mouth is free. Might as well. It's just when it goes up to a high A as many times and I'm actually an alto. It wouldn't be very pleasant to hear. The only person that ever hears me is the mail delivery person when they open the door to leave the mail.

Kevin Hanrahan: All right, well, Matthew. Is there anything else?

Matthew Clegg: That's all I have...you know, there was one kind of personal thing. So, one of the few...I really like a lot of music that's that was from before my time, of course I'm a, you know, classical musician, but meaning like, I know that you had mentioned in an interview that you really liked James Taylor and the Beatles and those sorts of artists and I had wondered, you know, if you have ever seen James Taylor live in concert before, just out of curiosity.

Gwyneth Walker: Oh no, I love all...American folk music is my background, I don't think I said, The Beatles, but I think when I was at Brown University Judy Collins came to sing, and I, and another member of my singing group, we were the two guitars in the group...our seats were in the front of the balcony and I just remember leaning over and thinking, you know, "I wish...I want to see every chord that she plays." I mean, that was...Judy Collins was probably it. And I think I saw Peter, Paul and Mary when I was on one of the marches to Washington for, you know, in 1968 so protests...hate to be

political. But yes, I went on protest marches and Peter, Paul and Mary sang once, but I don't remember anybody else. I don't know.

Matthew Clegg: That's okay, cool. I was just curious. Thank you.

Kevin Hanrahan: Alright, well thank you for making the time to talk with Matthew and with me and thank you for writing this beautiful music.

Appendix B: List of Musical Figures

Figure 1	“Glacier Birds” mm. 1-3.....	21
Figure 2	“Mountain Chords” mm. 17-18	22
Figure 3	“Syllabic Emphasis” highlight of m. 1	24
Figure 4	“Sparse, Unaccented Accompaniment” mm. 44-48.....	26
Figure 5	“Pattern of Lyric and Speech-like Melody” mm. 24-30.....	27
Figure 6	“Fading Accompaniment” m. 43	28
Figure 7	“Slow Descent” mm. 47-53	29
Figure 8	“Evoking the Mountains” mm. 5-15.....	31
Figure 9	“Song 1 Key Sequence”	32
Figure 10	“Unclear Tonal Center” m. 1	33
Figure 11	“Fourth and Fifth Leaps” mm. 13-19.....	37
Figure 12	“Leap of a Fifth” mm. 34-35.....	38
Figure 13	“Emphasis of Important Syllables” mm. 17 and 27	39
Figure 14	“Minimalistic Accompaniment” mm. 4-9.....	40
Figure 15	“CM7 Tremolos” mm. 23-24	40
Figure 16	“Sparse Harmonic Texture” mm. 63-69	41
Figure 17	“Leaps to C4” mm. 13-19.....	42
Figure 18	“Storm Section” mm. 39-44	43
Figure 19	“Blurred Tremolos” mm. 49-53	44
Figure 20	“Mountain in the Melody” mm. 13-19.....	45
Figure 21	“Blessings Bestowed” mm. 34-35	46
Figure 22	“Mountain Top Figure” m. 3	46
Figure 23	“Reaching and Heaven” mm.16-18	47
Figure 24	“High Tessitura” mm. 61-64.....	48
Figure 25	“Early Cutoff” mm. 20-21	49
Figure 26	“Similar Phrases” mm. 13-14 and mm. 33-35	50
Figure 27	“Suggested Emphasis” mm. 36-38.....	50
Figure 28	“Range Used to Express Text” mm. 5-10.....	53
Figure 29	“Static to Lyric Melody” mm. 28-35	54
Figure 30	“Progressively Larger Intervals” m. 54	55
Figure 31	“Night Moon Glory” mm. 5-10	56
Figure 32	“Quarter Note Triplets” m. 52	56
Figure 33	“Gentle Tremolo” mm.20-21	57
Figure 34	“Celebratory Chords” m. 48.....	57
Figure 35	“Mountains in Lydian Mode” mm. 46-47.....	58
Figure 36	“Waterfall Figures” mm. 1-3	59
Figure 37	“Anthem Bells” mm. 49-51	59
Figure 38	“Moonlight Figures” mm. 55-57.....	60
Figure 39	“Tricky Breathing Moments” mm. 5-10.....	61

Figure 40	“Long Phrase” mm. 19-24	62
Figure 41	“Moon Lights” mm. 37-42	63
Figure 42	“Breathing” mm. 28-35	64
Figure 43	“Challenging Tessitura” mm. 43-45	65
Figure 45	“Highlighting A Major” mm. 5-10	67
Figure 46	“Highlighting D Major” mm. 13-15	67
Figure 47	“Strong Syllabic Emphasis” mm.28-30	69
Figure 48	“Use of Triplets to Place Emphasis” m. 22	70
Figure 49	“Leap of a Fifth to Place Emphasis” mm. 11-12	70
Figure 50	“Sample of Static Melody” m. 41	71
Figure 51	“Shift from Lyric to Recitative” mm. 46-49	72
Figure 52	“Short to Long Rhythms” mm. 8-11	73
Figure 53	“Argumentative Rhythms” mm. 2-4	73
Figure 54	“Energetic Triplets” mm. 34-35	74
Figure 55	“Brittle Ice” m. 1	75
Figure 56	“Taunting Echo in the Piano” mm. 30-32	76
Figure 57	“Doubling of Melody” mm. 64-69	77
Figure 58	“Expression Marking” mm.18-19	78
Figure 59	“Gentle Tremolo” mm. 25-26	79
Figure 60	“Dash Markings” m. 73	79
Figure 61	“Ethereal Triplets mm. 76-77	80
Figure 62	“Playful Tremolo” m. 79	80
Figure 63	“Answering the Voice” mm. 30-32	81
Figure 64	“Singer Cuts Off Piano Chord” m. 41	81
Figure 65	“Mount Lyell Reference” mm. 36-38	82
Figure 66	“Sequoia Figures” mm. 1-4	85
Figure 67	“Stacking Chords” mm. 28-30	86
Figure 68	“Counter Melody” mm. 31-33	87
Figure 69	“Ascending Line” mm. 37-39	87
Figure 70	“Octave Leaps” mm. 6-14	88
Figure 71	“Triplets Expressing Amazement” m. 26	89
Figure 72	“Triplets Expressing Awe” mm. 39-43	89
Figure 73	“Familiar Themes” mm. 54-56	90
Figure 74	“Staccato Articulation” mm. 57-65	91
Figure 75	“Delayed Cadence” mm. 71-83	93
Figure 76	“High Tessitura” mm. 21-24	94