Riverwords - Riverwards Songs for Mezzo-Soprano and Guitar



Poems - Rob Mackillop Music - Gilbert Isbin

Riverwords-Riverwards

Songs for Mezzo Soprano and Guitar

Poems by Rob MacKillop Music by Gilbert Isbin

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Cover art by Rob MacKillop

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Foreword

Collaboration between musicians is something Gilbert Isbin and I are used to, and indeed we have collaborated with each other on publications before:

24 Pieces for Guitar by Gilbert Isbin (Mel Bay Publications MB30660M)

Classical and Contemporary Studies for Bass Guitar
- which contains Gilbert's **Twelve Studies for Bass Guitar** (Mel Bay Publications MB30676M)

...but this is the first time I have collaborated as a poet. When Gilbert enquired about setting some of my poems to music, I was both flattered and relieved. I knew instantly that I could rely on his sensitivity to nuance to allow the words to be delivered as sonic poetry. The melodic twists and turns of the voice are supported and commented on by the guitar. And he has perfected over years the ability to present a mature and sophisticated musical argument that a guitarist does not require ten fingers on each hand to play. In short, the musicians and the music can breathe naturally.

It is my hope that these songs find a place in the repertoires of mezzo-soprano and guitar duos. If you perform and/or record some of these songs, do let us know.

Rob MacKillop Edinburgh, 2020

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Poems

Autumn

Faint windtide through knotted limbs goldrust fallen in cyclical departure along silent flowing stream through hillside vein to mother sea in winding stroll over wooden plank-loose bridges soft song soft light flowing over all beneath and beyond

Evening

shifting quilting down descends between high high-up lights between yawning office girls and voice songs of daylong day dead done

duckshake!

up the straight-necked back shaking dowdy feathers revealing orange hoofs

rippling forth beneath ice air, beneath hanging willow-hung branch, beneath autumn's sun-tired sky

Harr Song

morning harr and seafresh waking we listen to the horn's distance and continue our sleeping morn

surreptitious silence sinking stolidly o'er gulls perch the sheltered silence in rotting saltwooded boats

sotto voce beneath the falling quietude evening steals forward towards the longdark wintered night

a distant melody cries hupon his hears. listen! and remember. how many times did you hear that song?

lying length waves caressing muscle flow ship slip and sink back seaweed and spawn limpid green the water's hue

she stills she rains she flows

Giacomo Sings

Sheersoft liltsong airlipped layplucked

river runs through stave and clef through quay and Howth (easy now, Jamesy)

sea-scored shells crack beneath ash and leather while salt-pocked waves sound out new shores, and the unwaxed feather sun-scarred falls driftwards

Trieste Ithaca Dalkey Exile

New Guitar Day

the feel of the neck the ease of the bend this guitar talks to me primed and ready, we have tales to tell of fishermen with washed-up bones in salt air drones of night gulls keening into searching winds the blues bends and winds through streets curved against thrawn gales as neon lights keep sleepers awake new guitar new song old soul

On the Edge of Sound

on the edge of sound knotted fingers bleed o'er bent and twisted strings

angled bows scrape in cross-compass motion

yellowed grasses wave under shallowed breath

on the edge of sound mute dogs fear the earth's low growl

womb-torn mountains dream of Spring's awakening

while lovers mourn through lowered lids

on the edge of sound tomorrow sings of life's deep sorrows

Round Within Round

round within round crackled glaze in mesmerising green we sat and talked over peppermint tea

father and daughter

treasured moment round within round

Zen and the Art of Typing

prepare thyself black over red there are no keys no words

a silver arrow piercing a white cloud

Commentary on the Poems

Overall, my poems are concerned with sound, light and rivers: those streams of life, dreams and consciousness. The sound of words is paramount, and they form poems to be read aloud or indeed sung.

Riverwords - Riverwards

Autumn, Evening, Harr Song

These songs can be performed individually or as a triptych. Written when I was 23 years young, in love with the sensuality of being alive, seeing the connectedness of all things, aware of the moment, they form a hymn to a time of awakening. Harr is a Scots word meaning sea mist, which often skirts coastal areas and the minds of the inhabitants.

Giacomo Sings

An Homage to James Joyce, whose writing I have returned to many times over the decades, principally for his humanity and playfulness with language. The first four soundwords came from viewing a picture of Joyce playing a guitar. He is reputed to have had a beautiful tenor voice, which he used for singing Irish airs and English lute songs. There follows a musical interpretation of the opening of *Finnegans Wake*, before walking with Stephen Dedalus along the shore at Sandymount Strand in *Ulysses*, with his ash-plant walking stick. I make a play on the Icarus connection with his surname, and Joyce's thoughts of exile. The poem ends with an outgoing TIDE.

New Guitar Day

Every time I get a new guitar, I remember days sleeping rough and hungry near the banks of the river Tay, in my home town of Dundee. The fisherman line refers to pulling bodies out of the Tay, and to the frets on old guitars being made from bone.

On the Edge of Sound

A song of birth and death, of the creative moment. The second stanza refers to cello playing, which I dabbled in at the time of writing: the bow travelling east-west, while strings stretch north-south. The sound of the cello can sustain for as long as the player stays awake, but by contrast, the sound of the guitar dies as soon as it is born.

Round Within Round

A moment without end, drinking tea with my daughter.

Zen and the Art of Typing

I can only write poetry when beating out the words on an old typewriter. The physicality of it awakens the creative spirit. Red over black refers to the ink ribbon.

Rob Mackillop Edinburgh, 2020

AUTUMN

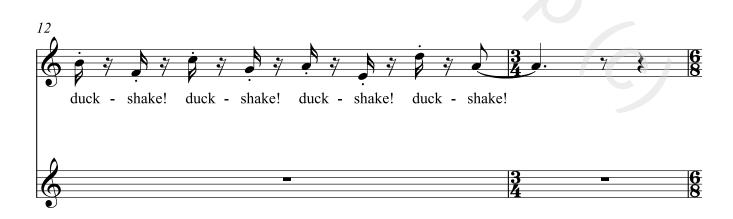
Poem : Rob MacKillop © Music : Gilbert Isbin © 1 Largo faint wind-tide through knot-ted limbs gold-rust - fal-len in cy-cli-cal dej 5 7 through hill - side vein par -ture_ to



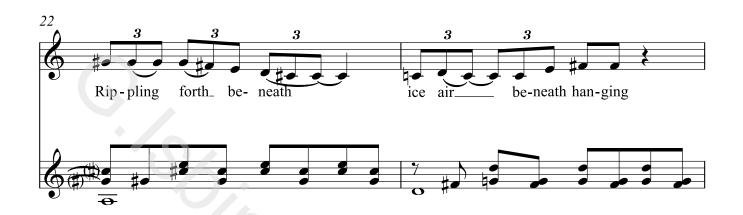
EVENING

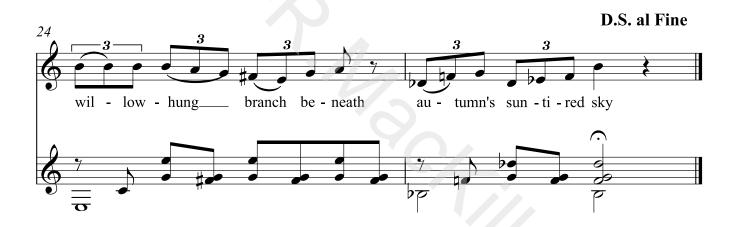












HARR SONG





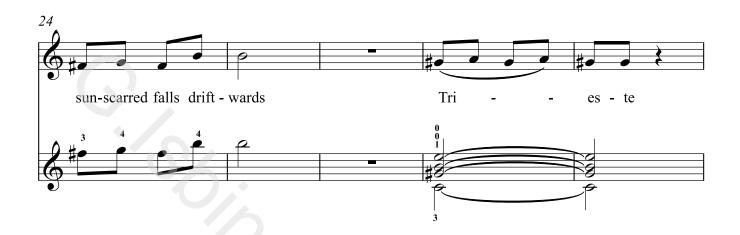


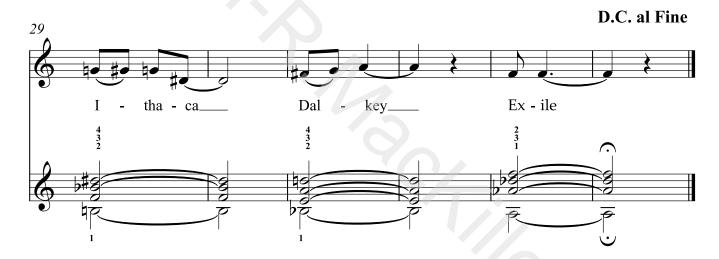


GIACOMO SINGS











NEW GUITAR DAY





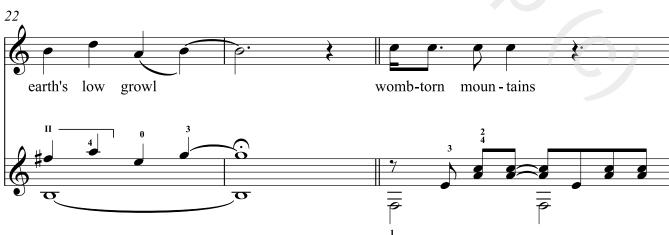




ON THE EDGE OF SOUND





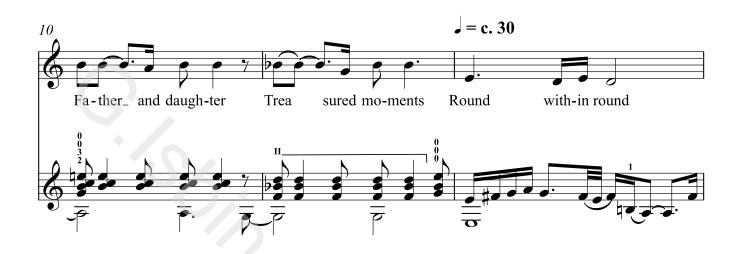


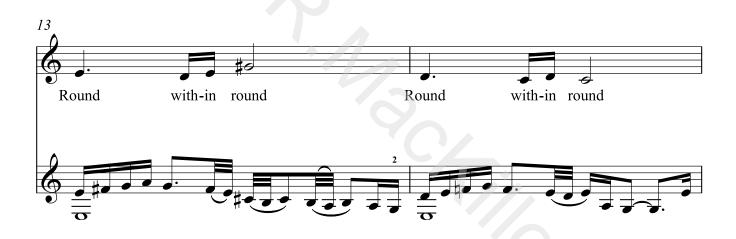


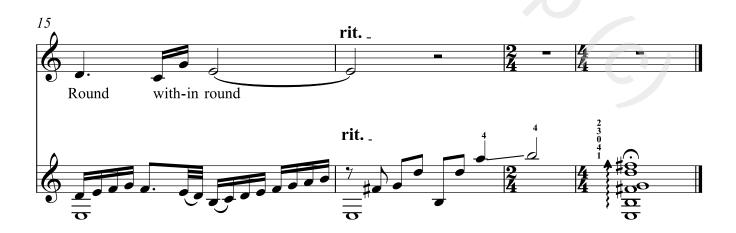


ROUND WITHIN ROUND









ZEN AND THE ART OF TYPING





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