

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 lilt song
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**

1

faint wind-tide through knot-ted

0 3 4

1

Detailed description: This system contains the first two staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics 'faint wind-tide through knot-ted'. The bottom staff is a guitar accompaniment in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a repeating rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with fingerings 0, 3, and 4. A circled '1' is placed below the first measure of the guitar part.

4

limbs gold-rust - fal-len in cy-cli-cal de-

3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2

⑤ ⑤ ⑤

Detailed description: This system contains the third and fourth staves of music. The top staff continues the vocal line with lyrics 'limbs gold-rust - fal-len in cy-cli-cal de-'. The bottom staff continues the guitar accompaniment with the same rhythmic pattern and fingerings (3, 4, 2). Circled '5' symbols are placed below the first measure of each of the three measures in the guitar part.

7

par-ture_ through hill - side vein to

4 0 3 I 2 4 I

2

Detailed description: This system contains the fifth and sixth staves of music. The top staff continues the vocal line with lyrics 'par-ture_ through hill - side vein to'. The bottom staff continues the guitar accompaniment. It includes a key signature change to one flat (F) and a time signature change to 3/4. Fingerings 4, 0, 3, I, 2, 4, and I are indicated above the notes. A circled '2' is placed below the first measure of the guitar part.

10

mo - ther sea in win - ding stroll o - ver

12

woo - den plank - loose brid - ges soft song soft light.

15

flo - wing o - ver all be - neath and be - yond Au - tumn

EVENING

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

1 ♩ = 50

Shif-ting quil-ting down de-scends

be-tween high_ high up lights be - tween yaw - ning of - fice girls

and voice songs of day_ long day dead done day dead done

9

day dead done day dead done

1 4 2 2 3

h12 h7

③ ② ④ ② ③

11

♩ = 80

duck - shake! duck - shake! duck - shake! duck - shake!

12

duck - shake! duck - shake! duck - shake! duck - shake!

♩. = 33

14

Up the straight-necked back sha - king dow-dy fea - thers re -

16

1. | 2.

vea - ling o - range hoofs vea - ling o - range hoofs

Fine

19

♩. = 50

22

Rip-pling forth_ be- neath ice air_ be-neath han-ging

D.S. al Fine

24

wil - low - hung_ branch be - neath au - tumn's sun - ti - red sky

HARR SONG

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music: Gilbert Isbin ©

1 **Largo**

Mor-ning harr and

The first system of the musical score for 'HARR SONG' consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a 7-measure rest followed by the lyrics 'Mor-ning harr and'. The bottom staff is a guitar accompaniment in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a 7-measure rest followed by a series of chords and eighth-note patterns. Fingering numbers (0, 4, 2, 3, 0, 3, 4, 4, 3, 0) are indicated above the notes. A large, faint watermark 'GuitarPop' is visible across the page.

sea-fresh wa-king we lis-ten to the horn's dis-tance and con-ti-nue our

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal line and guitar accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 7 with the lyrics 'sea-fresh wa-king we lis-ten to the horn's dis-tance and con-ti-nue our'. The guitar accompaniment continues with similar chordal and rhythmic patterns. The watermark 'GuitarPop' is still present.

slee-ping morn sur-rep-ti-tious si-lence

The third system of the musical score continues the vocal line and guitar accompaniment. The vocal line starts at measure 11 with the lyrics 'slee-ping morn sur-rep-ti-tious si-lence'. The guitar accompaniment continues with similar chordal and rhythmic patterns, ending with a final chord and a 1-measure rest. The watermark 'GuitarPop' is still present.

15

sin-king sto-lid-ly o - er gulls perch the shel- te-red si-lence in

18

rot-ting salt-woo-ded boats

23

so - to vo - ce be-neath the fal - ling qui-e - tude e-ve-ning steals for - ward to-

26

wards the long dark win-tered night a

31

dis-tant me-lo-dy cries hu-pun his hears lis-ten and re-mem-ber how

33

ma-ny times did you hear that song? that song? ly-ing length waves ca-

37

res - sing mus - cle flow ship slip and sink back sea - weed and spawn

The musical score for measures 37-38 consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef with chords and moving lines.

39

lim-pid green the wa - ter's hue she stills she rains she

The musical score for measures 39-42 consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef with chords and moving lines.

43

flows

The musical score for measures 43-46 consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in treble clef with chords and moving lines.

GIACOMO SINGS

♩ = 80

Poem : Rob MacKillop
Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

1

Sheer-soft lilt-song

4

air-lipped lay-plucked sheer-soft lilt-song air-lipped lay-plucked

Fine

7

air-lipped lay-plucked ri-ver runs through stave and

3

11

clef through quay and Howth (ea - sy

15

now Jame-sy) sea-scored shells crack be-neath ash and lea - ther

20

while salt pocked waves sound out new shores and the un-waxed fea-ther

24

sun-scarred falls drift - wards Tri - - es - te

3 4 4 0 0 1 3

D.C. al Fine

29

I - tha - ca Dal - key Ex - ile

4 3 2 4 3 2 2 3 1

G. Isbin-R. MacKillop (c)

NEW GUITAR DAY

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

1 ♩ = 60

New gui-tar New song

Old soul o - old soul New gui-tar New song

Old soul o - old soul The feel of the neck

13

The ease of the bend

Musical notation for measures 13-15. Measure 13: Treble clef, quarter rest, eighth rest, quarter note G4, eighth note A4, quarter note B4, eighth note A4, quarter note G4. Measure 14: Treble clef, quarter note G4, eighth note A4, quarter note B4, eighth note A4, quarter note G4, eighth note F#4, quarter note E4. Measure 15: Treble clef, quarter note D4, eighth note C#4, quarter note B3, eighth note A3, quarter note G3, eighth note F#3, quarter note E3. Bass clef: Measure 13: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2. Measure 14: Quarter note D2, quarter note C#2, quarter note B1. Measure 15: Quarter note A1, quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1. Fingering: Measure 13: 3, 3. Measure 14: 0, 3. Measure 15: 3, 4, 1. Bass clef: 2.

16

This gui-tar talks to me

Primed and rea-dy

Musical notation for measures 16-18. Measure 16: Treble clef, quarter note G4, eighth note A4, quarter note B4, eighth note A4, quarter note G4, eighth note F#4, quarter note E4. Measure 17: Treble clef, quarter note D4, eighth note C#4, quarter note B3, eighth note A3, quarter note G3, eighth note F#3, quarter note E3. Measure 18: Treble clef, quarter note D4, eighth note C#4, quarter note B3, eighth note A3, quarter note G3, eighth note F#3, quarter note E3. Bass clef: Measure 16: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2. Measure 17: Quarter note D2, quarter note C#2, quarter note B1. Measure 18: Quarter note A1, quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1. Fingering: Measure 16: 3, 3. Measure 17: 3, 3. Measure 18: 4, 0, 0, 2. Bass clef: 1.

19

rit. A tempo

We have tales to tell Of fish-er - men with

Musical notation for measures 19-21. Measure 19: Treble clef, quarter note G4, eighth note A4, quarter note B4, eighth note A4, quarter note G4, eighth note F#4, quarter note E4. Measure 20: Treble clef, quarter note D4, eighth note C#4, quarter note B3, eighth note A3, quarter note G3, eighth note F#3, quarter note E3. Measure 21: Treble clef, quarter note D4, eighth note C#4, quarter note B3, eighth note A3, quarter note G3, eighth note F#3, quarter note E3. Bass clef: Measure 19: Quarter note G2, quarter note F#2, quarter note E2. Measure 20: Quarter note D2, quarter note C#2, quarter note B1. Measure 21: Quarter note A1, quarter note G1, quarter note F#1, quarter note E1. Fingering: Measure 19: 4. Measure 20: 1, 3, 2. Measure 21: 0. Bass clef: 2, 3.

21

washed up bones in salt air drones Of

23

night gulls kee-ning in - to search - ing winds

26

The Blues bends and wynds Through

30

streets curved a-against thrawn gales As ne-on lights keep slee-pers a-wake

33

New gui-tar New song Old soul o - old soul

38

rit.

New gui-tar New song Old soul o - old soul

ON THE EDGE OF SOUND

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

1 ♩ = 54

Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-6. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature and a repeat sign. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with fingerings: 2 0 0 3, 0, 3, 2.

7

Musical notation for the second system, measures 7-12. The top staff is a treble clef with lyrics: "On the edge of sound knot-ted fin-gers bleed o' - er bent and". The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with fingerings: 0 4 3 1, 0 0 1 4.

13

Musical notation for the third system, measures 13-18. The top staff is a treble clef with lyrics: "twis - ted strings an-gled bows scrape in". The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with fingerings: 0, 1, 4.

16

cross-com-pass mo - tion yel-lowed gras - ses wave

18

un-der shal-lowed breath On the edge of sound mute dogs fear the

22

earth's low growl womb-torn moun - tains

25

dream of Spring's a wa - ke - ning while lo - vers mourn through

1 0 2 4 3 0 1

♩ = 62

27

lo-wered lids On the edge of sound

1 4 3 2 4 3 2 1 4 4 2

30

to - mor - row sings of life's deep sor - rows

VII 2 4

G. Isbin-R. MacKillop (c)

ROUND WITHIN ROUND

♩ = c. 30

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

1 Slowly and freely

4 $\text{♩} = 42$

Round with-in round Crack-led glaze in mes-me-ri-sing

rit.

7

green_____ We sat and talked o-ver pep-per-mint tea

10 $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 30$

Fa-ther_ and daugh-ter Trea_sured mo-ments Round with-in round

13

Round with-in round Round with-in round

15

Round with-in round

rit. .

rit. .

2 3 0 4 1

ZEN AND THE ART OF TYPING

Poem : Rob MacKillop ©

Music : Gilbert Isbin ©

$\text{♩} = 30$ *1*

Pre - pare thy - self black o - ver red there are no keys

4

no words a sil - ver ar - row pier - cing

7

a white cloud

The musical score is written for guitar in 4/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 30. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a guitar line on a bass clef staff. The guitar line includes fret numbers and fingering instructions. The lyrics are: 'Pre - pare thy - self black o - ver red there are no keys', 'no words a sil - ver ar - row pier - cing', and 'a white cloud'. The score includes a large, faint watermark reading 'Rob MacKillop' diagonally across the page.

G. Isbin-R. MacKillop (c)

OTHER GILBERT ISBIN PUBLICATIONS

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