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PROGRAM NOTES

These songs were commissioned by the Mohawk Trail Concerts in Charlemont, Massachusetts in honor of Ruth Lloyd Black, their co-founder. The first performance was on August 30, 2015, soon after her death. My recollections of Ruth over some sixty years of friendship were a mixture of laughter and tears. She was a tireless advocate of chamber music, a fine musician, and possessor of a delightfully British sense of humor.

Emily Dickinson has her tongue firmly in her cheek in these poems. There is serious purpose under the lyrics, but the surface is pure word-play. She juggles the terms “forgetting” and “recollecting” in each poem until they almost take each other’s meaning.

The first poem may have accompanied a gift of flowers to a grieving neighbor: she shares the grief, but assuages it with humor. The first statement of “blithe” fingers should be happy, the second drenched in sorrow. I love the way the second poem opens like a puzzle: is she forgetting to remember, or remembering to forget? In either case, it ends with the touching image of a lost child. She continues to confuse us in the third song: is it sunrise or sunset that is “the other one?” The setting sun is her subject in many wonderful poems: here, she would rather “die divinely” in glorious color (echoes of Sarah Bernhardt?) than merely wane away.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Both singer and pianist should know the poems well before beginning to add the music. Read them aloud to capture their idiomatic rhythms and the unfolding of Emily’s images. She uses few words to convey her ideas: much is inferred rather than explicit. In my settings, the piano engages in dialogue with the voice, teasing out these hidden meanings. I have tried to keep a natural flow of the spoken words in the songs, and Emily’s language should always shine through the performance.

—Alice Parker

I. If Recollecting Were Forgetting

If recollecting were forgetting,
Then I remember not.
And if forgetting, recollecting,
How near I had forgot.
And if to miss, were merry,
And to mourn, were gay,
How very blithe the fingers
That gathered this, today!

II. How Happy I Was

How happy I was if I could forget
To remember how sad I am
Would be an easy adversity
But the recollecting of Bloom
Keeps making November difficult
Till I who was almost bold
Lose my way like a little Child
And perish of the Cold.

III. I’d Rather Recollect

I’d rather recollect a Setting
Than own a rising sun
Though one is beautiful forgetting—
And true the other one.
Because in going is a Drama
Staying cannot confer
To die divinely once a Twilight—
Than wane is easier—

—Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

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The text of the poems was researched in the Frost Library of Amherst College, and I am grateful to Margaret R. Dakin for her kind assistance.

—Alice Parker

Alice Parker (b. 1925)

For biographical information visit:
www.melodiousaccord.org/alice_parker

Dedicated to Ruth Lloyd Black and the Mohawk Trail Concerts, Charlemont, Massachusetts, August 30, 2015

On Recollecting

for Soprano and Piano

I. If Recollecting Were Forgetting

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Alice Parker

Ambivalent ♩ = 90 *mf*

If re-col-lect-ing — were for-get-ting, — Then

I re-mem-ber not. — And if for-get-ting, — re-col-

lect-ing, — How near I had for-got.

Ped. *Ped.* * *Ped.* *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

5 *Ped.* * *Ped.*

9 *Ped.* * *Ped.* *

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II. How Happy I Was

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Alice Parker

Dancing ♩ = 80 *f*

How hap - py, _____ how hap - py I was, _____

mf *f*

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *sim.*

33 *mf*

_____ if I could for - get, _____ How

Ped. *

38

hap - py I was if I could for - get to re - mem - ber how sad I am, _____

mf

Ped. *sim.* *

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42 *mf* To re -

espr. *f*

47 mem - ber how sad I am Would be an eas - y ad - ver - si - ty

mf *p*

52 *mp* But the re - col - lect - ing of

mp

57 *mf* Bloom Keeps mak - ing No - vem - ber dif - fi - cult

mf

III. I'd Rather Recollect

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Alice Parker

Cheerfully $\text{♩} = 104$ *mf*

I'd ra-ther re-col-lect a Set-ting ——— Than

mf

Ped. * *Ped.* * *sim.*

104

own ——— a ris - ing sun Though

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *

108

one is beau - ti - ful for - get - ting — And true the oth - er one.

Ped.

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112

mf

Be -

f

*

116

cause in go - ing is a Dra - ma Stay - ing can -

mf

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

119

not con-fer To die di-vine - ly once a Twi - light -

Ped.

Ped.

* Ped.

* Ped.

Ped.

123

mp dim.

mf

Than wane is eas - i - er, To

mp dim.

p espr.

Ped.

Ped.

es.