

SALT  
CREEK  
SONG  
FESTIVAL



# SALT CREEK SONG FESTIVAL

## 2024 SEASON

May 19-25

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# A NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDERS

Dear Reader,

How exciting to find ourselves at the third season of Salt Creek Song Festival! In some ways it feels like we've only just begun, and in others like we've been doing this forever. This year has been incredibly meaningful for us as we formed our festival board, secured 501(c)(3) status, and, with support from the Ashland Arts Council, became in-residence at the historic St. Stephen's. For this reason and so many more, the theme of It's about time emerged as a guiding light for our season. The ways in which we relate to time are countless – time of day, seasons of life, days gone by, good things to come. Time is a precious commodity, and we're so glad you chose to spend some of yours with the Salt Creek Song Festival.

We are so proud of the week we have curated for this year's festival. You can look forward to a delightful mix of both new and returning artists, a powerful and important Midwest premiere, as well as the world premiere of two Salt Creek Song Festival commissions. We hope that throughout each event you will find meaningful moments of connection to the music, the artists, and those who also choose to spend a little time with us in Ashland taking in some of the Midwest's best art.

Cheers to a third year!

Gretchen & Jared

## Mission

The Salt Creek Song Festival is dedicated to being a cultural resource in Saunders County and the surrounding Great Plains region. The first song festival of its kind in Nebraska, SCSF finds its inspiration in world class performances and gatherings featuring Midwest oriented artists, composers, and performers of song. SCSF seeks to be in community and to build relationships with those of all walks of life in Nebraska and beyond and to enrich the region by presenting a diverse program of the full range of art song. SCSF looks to foster an environment that amplifies the voices of artists of a broad range of disciplines who find meaning and connection in the Midwest.

## Board of Directors

Gretchen Crane, President

Jared Hiscock, Vice President

Elizabeth Field, Secretary

Aleia Gonzalez, Treasurer

# SUNDAY

**4 PM**

## **That Time of Evening** .....

**St. Stephen's Episcopal**  
202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**Gretchen Crane, soprano**  
**Lauren Cook, mezzo-soprano**  
Aric Vyhmeister, piano

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### **Program**

Knoxville: Summer of 1915, op. 24 (1948)  
Nuvoletta, op. 25 (1952)

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

**5 PM**

## **Ice Cream Social** .....

Hosted by The Roost B&B

**The Roost B&B**  
203 N 15th St, Ashland, NE

# MONDAY

## Dark Day

A day with no performances is known as a Dark Day.

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**10:00 AM**

**Open Rehearsal** ..... St. Stephen's Episcopal  
202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**12:00 PM**

**Open Rehearsal** ..... St. Stephen's Episcopal  
202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**2:00 PM**

**Open Rehearsal** ..... St. Stephen's Episcopal  
202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**3:00 PM**

**Pop-Up** ..... Oxbow Living Center  
1617 Bills Dr, Ashland, NE  
Sponsored by The Beanery  
Featuring Genaro Mendez, tenor, and Aleia González, guitar

**4:00 PM**

**Art & Music Workshop** ..... Ashland Public Library  
1324 Silver St, Ashland, NE  
Featuring Genaro Mendez, Aleia González,  
and Aric Vhymeister

# TUESDAY

12 PM

## Coffee Chat with the Artists

Hosted by The Beanery

The Beanery

604 US-6, Ashland, NE

2 PM

## Open Dress Rehearsal

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

7 PM

## When They Come Back

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**Lauren Cook, mezzo-soprano**

Aric Vyhmeister, piano

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### Program

Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson (1950)

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

1. Nature, the Gentlest Mother
2. There Came a Wind Like a Bugle
3. Why Do They Shut Me Out of Heaven?
4. The World Feels Dusty
5. Heart, We Will Forget Him
6. Dear March, Come In!
7. Sleep is Supposed to Be
8. When They Come Back
9. I Felt a Funeral in My Brain
10. I've Heard an Organ Talk Sometimes
11. Going to Heaven!
12. The Chariot

8 PM

## Art Song After Hours

Hosted by Willow Point Gallery

Willow Point Gallery

1431 Silver St, Ashland, NE

**Gretchen Crane, soprano**

**Genaro Mendez, tenor**

Alejandro Avila, piano

# WEDNESDAY

12 PM

## Coffee Chat with the Artists

Hosted by The Beanery

The Beanery

604 US-6, Ashland, NE

2 PM

## Open Dress Rehearsal

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

7 PM

## Brilliant Sky, Infinite Sky

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**Jared Hiscock, baritone**

Clark Potter, conductor

Hannah Weaver, percussion

Jenna Ferdon, violin

Eva Nikolaidou, piano

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### Program

Brilliant Sky, Infinite Sky (1990)

Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960)

1. Dream Landscape
2. The Sky My Husband
3. A Song on the End of the World
4. Brilliant Sky

8 PM

## After Party

Hosted by Postscript

Postscript

1434 Silver St, Ashland, NE

# THURSDAY

12 PM

## Coffee Chat with the Artists

Hosted by The Beanery

The Beanery

604 US-6, Ashland, NE

2 PM

## Open Dress Rehearsal

Ashland Public Library

1324 Silver St, Ashland, NE

7 PM

## Life in the Woods

Featuring Dance Lab Omaha

Ashland Public Library

1324 Silver St, Ashland, NE

### Brandon Bell, baritone

Philip Daniel, piano

Katrinka Stayton, choreographer

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### Program

Walden (2018)

Gregory Spears (b. 1977)

- I. I went to the woods
- II. Sometime, on Sundays
- III. Time is but the stream
- IV. I left the woods

8 PM

## Art Song After Hours

Hosted by Willow Point Gallery

Willow Point Gallery

1431 Silver St, Ashland, NE

### Alyssa Nance, soprano

Alejandro Avila, piano



# FRIDAY

12 PM

## Coffee Chat with the Artists

Hosted by The Beanery

The Beanery

604 US-6, Ashland, NE

2 PM

## Open Dress Rehearsal

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

4 PM

## Pop-up

Sponsored by The Beanery

Featuring Genaro Mendez, tenor, and Aleia González, guitar

Fariner Bakery

120 N 14<sup>th</sup> St, Ashland, NE

7 PM

## Breath Alone

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**Alyssa Nance, soprano**

Aric Vyhmeister, piano

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### Program

Breath Alone (2023) (ere)t

Cecilia Livingston (b. 1984)

I. *Eva Hesse (1936-1970)*

II. *Nelly Sachs (1891-1970)*

III. *Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907)*

8 PM

## After Party

Hosted by Chris and Alex Nellis-White

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

# SATURDAY

12 PM

## Coffee Chat with the Artists

Hosted by The Beanery

The Beanery

604 US-6, Ashland, NE

2 PM

## Open Dress Rehearsal

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

4 PM

## Pop-up

Sponsored by The Beanery

Featuring Genaro Mendez, tenor, and Aleia González, guitar

Glacial Till

1419 Silver St, Ashland, NE

7 PM

## Song of Myself

Sponsored by i3 Bank

St. Stephen's Episcopal

202 N 16th St, Ashland, NE

**William Shomos, baritone**

**Brandon Bell, baritone**

**Jared Hiscock, baritone**

Philip Daniel, piano

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### Program

Song of Myself (2024) (World Premiere)

Philip Daniel (b. 1991)

8 PM

## After Party

Sponsored by Fariner Bakery

Fariner Bakery

120 N 14th St, Ashland, NE

# That Time of Evening

## **Knoxville: Summer of 1915**

James Agee (1909–1955)

It has become the time of evening  
when people sit on their porches,  
rocking gently and talking gently  
and watching the street  
and the standing up  
into their sphere of possession of the trees,  
of birds' hung havens, hangers.  
People go by; things go by.  
A horse, drawing a buggy,  
breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt;  
a loud auto; a quiet auto;  
people in pairs, not in a hurry,  
scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking  
casually,  
the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry,  
pasteboard and starched milk,  
the image upon them of lovers and horsemen,  
squared with clowns in hueless amber.

A streetcar raising its iron moan:  
stopping, belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and raising  
again its iron increasing moan  
and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and  
past and past,  
the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small  
malignant spirit set to dog its tracks;  
the iron whine rises on rising speed;  
still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell;  
rises again, still fainter, fainter, lifting, lifts, faints forgone:  
forgotten.

Now is the night one blue dew.  
Now is the night one blue dew,  
my father has drained,  
now he has coiled the hose.  
Low on the length of lawns,  
a frailing of fire who breathes ...  
Parents on porches: rock and rock.  
From damp strings morning glories hang  
their ancient faces.  
The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once  
enchants my eardrums.  
On the rough wet grass of the backyard my father and mother  
have spread quilts.  
We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and  
I too am lying there ...  
They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet,  
of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular,  
of nothing at all.  
The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of  
great sweetness, and they seem very near.

All my people are larger bodies than mine, ...  
with voices gentle and meaningless like the voice of sleeping  
birds.

One is an artist, he is living at home.  
One is a musician, she is living at home.  
One is my mother who is good to me.  
One is my father who is good to me.  
By some chance, here they are, all on this earth;  
and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth,

lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the  
sounds of the night.

May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my  
good father,  
oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble;

and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed.  
Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her:  
and those receive me, who quietly treat me,  
as one familiar and well-beloved in that home:  
but will not, no, will not, not now, not ever;  
but will not ever tell me who I am.

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**Nuvoletta** (*from Finnegans Wake*)  
James Joyce (1882–1941)

Nuvoletta in her lightdress,  
spunn of sisteen shimmers,  
was looking down on them,  
leaning over the bannistars  
and listening all she childishly could. . . .

She was alone.  
All her nubied companions  
were asleeping with the squirrels. . . .  
She tried all the winsome wonsome ways  
the four winds had taught her.  
She tossed her sfumastelliacinous hair  
like la princesse de la Petite Bretagne  
and she rounded her mignons arms  
like Mrs. Cornwallis-West  
and she smiled over herself  
like the image of a pose of a daughter  
of the Emerour of Irelande  
and she sighed after herself  
as were she born to bride with Tristus  
Tristior Tristissimus.  
But, sweet madonine, she might fair as well

have carried her daisy's worth to Florida. . . .

Oh, how it was duusk!

From Vallee Maraia to Grasyaplainia,  
dormimust echo!

A dew! Ah dew! It was so duusk  
that the tears of night beagn to fall,  
first by ones and twos,  
then by threes and fours,  
at last by fives and sixes of sevens,  
for the tired ones were wecking,  
as we weep now with them.

*O! O! O! Par la pluie! . . .*

Then Nuvoletta reflected for the last time  
in her little long life

And she made up all her myriads  
of drifting minds in one.

She cancelled all her engauzements.

She climbed over the bannistars;  
she gave a chilyd cloudy cry:

*Nuée! Nuée!*

A lightdress fluttered

She was gone.

# When They Come Back

## **Nature, the gentlest mother**

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Nature, the gentlest mother  
Impatient of no child,  
The feeblest or the waywardest, –  
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill  
By traveller is heard,  
Restraining rampant squirrel  
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,  
A summer afternoon, –  
Her household, her assembly;  
And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles  
Incites the timid prayer

Of the minutest cricket,  
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep  
She turns as long away  
As will suffice to light her lamps;  
Then, bending from the sky,

With infinite affection  
And infiniter care,  
Her golden finger on her lip,  
Wills silence everywhere.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/nature-the-gentlest-mother-1/>

### **There Came a Wind Like a Bugle**

There came a wind like a bugle,  
It quivered through the grass,  
And a green chill upon the heat  
So ominous did pass

We barred the window and the doors  
As from an emerald ghost  
The doom's electric moccasin  
That very instant passed.

On a strange mob of planting trees,  
And fences fled away,  
And rivers where the houses ran  
The living looked that day,

The bell within the steeple wild,  
The flying tidings whirled.  
How much can come and much can go,  
And yet abide the world!

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/there-came-a-wind-like-a-bugle-2/>

### **Why do they shut Me out of Heaven?**

Why do they shut Me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing too loud?  
But I can say a little "Minor"  
Timid as a Bird!

Wouldn't the Angels try me



Just once more  
Just see if I troubled them  
But don't shut the door!

Oh, if I were the Gentleman  
In the "White Robe"  
And they were the little Hand that knocked  
Would I forbid?

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/why-do-they-shut-me-out-of-heaven/>

### **The World feels Dusty**

The World feels Dusty  
When We stop to Die  
We want the Dew then  
Honors taste dry

Flags vex a Dying face  
But the least Fan  
Stirred by a friend's Hand  
Cools like the Rain

Mine be the Ministry  
When they Thirst comes  
Dews of Theyself to fetch  
And Holy Balms

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/world-feels-dusty/>

### **Heart, we will forget him**

Heart, we will forget him  
You and I, tonight.

You may forget the warmth he gave,  
I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me,  
That I my thoughts may dim;  
Haste! lest while you're lagging,  
I may remember him!

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/heart-we-will-forget-him-1/>

### **Dear March – Come in –**

Dear March – Come in –  
How glad I am –  
I hoped for you before –

Put down your Hat –  
You must have walked –  
How out of Breath you are –  
Dear March, Come right up the stairs with me –  
I have so much to tell –

I got your Letter, and the Birds –  
The Maples never knew that you were coming – till I called  
I declare – how Red their Faces grew –  
But March, forgive me – and  
All those Hills you left for me to Hue –  
There was no Purple suitable –  
You took it all with you –

Who knocks? That April.  
Lock the Door –  
I will not be pursued –  
He stayed away a Year to call  
When I am occupied –

But trifles look so trivial  
As soon as you have come

That Blame is just as dear as Praise  
And Praise as mere as Blame –

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/dear-march-come-in/>

### **Sleep is supposed to be**

Sleep is supposed to be,  
By souls of sanity,  
The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand  
Down which on either hand  
The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day.

Morning has not occurred!  
That shall aurora be  
East of Eternity;

One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array, –  
That is the break of day.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/sleep-is-supposed-to-be/>

## **When they come back**

When they come back if Blossoms do  
I always feel a doubt  
If Blossoms can be born again  
When once the Art is out

When they begin, if Robins may,  
I always had a fear  
I did not tell, it was their last Experiment  
Last Year,

When it is May, if May return,  
Had nobody a pang  
Lest in a Face so beautiful  
He might not look again?

If I am there,  
One does not know  
What Party one may be  
Tomorrow, but if I am there  
I take back all I say

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/when-they-come-back/>

## **I felt a funeral in my brain**

I felt a funeral in my brain,  
And mourners to and fro,  
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated  
A service like a drum  
Kept beating, beating, till I thought  
My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them lift a box,  
And creak across my soul  
With those same boot of lead, again.  
Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,  
And Being but an ear,  
And I and silence some strange race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/i-felt-a-funeral-in-my-brain/>

### **I've heard and Organ talk, sometimes**

I've heard an Organ talk, sometimes  
In a Cathedral Aisle,  
And understood no word it said  
Yet held my breath, the while

And risen up and gone away,  
A more Berdardine Girl  
Yet know not what was done to me  
In that old Hallowed Aisle.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/ive-heard-an-organ-talk-sometimes/>

### **Going to Heaven!**

Going to Heaven!  
I don't know when,  
Pray do not ask me how, –  
Indeed I'm too astonished  
To think of answering you!  
Going to Heaven! –

How dim it sounds!  
And yet it will be done  
As sure as flocks go home at night  
Unto the shepherd's arm!

Perhaps you're going too!  
Who knows?  
If you should get there first  
Save just a little place for me  
Close to the two I lost!  
The smallest "robe" will fit me,  
And just a bit of "crown";  
For you know we do not mind our dress  
When we are going home.

Going to Heaven!  
I'm glad I don't believe it  
For it would stop my breath,  
And I'd like to look a little more  
At such a curious earth!  
I am glad they did believe it  
Whom I have never found  
Since the mighty autumn afternoon  
I left them in the ground.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/going-to-heaven/>

### **Because I Could Not Stop for Death**

Because I could not stop for Death –  
He kindly stopped for me –  
The carriage held but just ourselves –  
and Immortality.

We slowly drove – he knew no haste,  
And I had put away

My labour, and my leisure too  
For his Civility –

We passed the school, where children played,  
Their lessons scarcely done.  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed  
a swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.

Source: <https://songofamerica.net/song/chariot/>

# Brilliant Sky, Infinite Sky

## **Dream Landscape** from *'Peter Ibbetson'*

George Du Maurier (1834–1896)

My early childhood was often haunted by a dream, which at first I took for a re-ality. I had to turn my face to the wall, and soon I found myself in company with a lady who had white hair and a young face—a very beautiful young face. Sometimes I walked with her, hand in hand - I being quite a small child - and together we fed innumerable pigeons who lived in a tower by a window stream that ended in a water mill. It was too lovely, and I would wake. Sometimes we went into a dark place, where there was a fiery furnace with many holes, and many people working and moving about - among them a man with white hair and a young face, like the lady, and beautiful red heels to his shoes. And under his guidance I would contrive to make in the furnace a charming little cocked hat of colored glass - a treasure! And the sheer joy thereof would wake me. Sometimes the white haired lady and I would sit together at a square box from which she made lovely music, and she would sing my favorite song - a song that I adored. But I always woke before this song came to an end, on account of the too insupportably intense bliss I felt on hearing it; and all I could remember when awake were the words 'triste-comment-sale! The air, which I knew so well in my dream, I could not recall. It seemed as though some innermost core of my being, some childish holies of holies, secreted a source of supersubtle reminiscence, which, under some stimulus that now and again became active during sleep, exhaled itself in this singular dream—shadowy and slight, but invariably accompanied by a sense of felicity so measureless and so penetrating that I would always wake in a mystic flutter of ecstasy, the bare remembrance of which was enough to bless and make happy many a succeeding hour.



## **The Sky My Husband**

John Ash (1948–2019)

As set by the composer

*The sky The sky The sky my husband The sky my wife The sky my country  
and my grief The sky The sky my courtyard and my fountain The sky my  
hyacinth The sky my flock of birds and my guitar The sky my kitchen and  
my knives The sky my winter coat my summer shirt The sky my balloon my  
acrobat The sky my dancing floor The sky my cafe and my cinema The sky  
my park and my path between the statues The sky my garden of white trees  
The sky my carousel The sky my opera and my madrigal The sky my actors  
and my theatre The sky my windmill The sky my evenings and my books  
The sky my taxi My tabac The sky my attic My hotel The sky my railways  
and my stations The sky my cities and my stones The sky my head my hair  
my limbs The sky my eyes my spectacles The sky my nights my neon The sky  
my balcony my garland and my mask The sky my terrace and my tables The  
sky my avenues and bridges The sky my chandelier my Chinese lantern The  
sky my roots and branches The sky my awnings and my hope The sky my  
gulfs my lakes my canyons The sky my arches and my aque ducts in ruins  
The sky my waning moon my child The sky my rivers and cascades The sky  
my forests and my solitude The sky my castle and my flight of stairs The sky  
my windows and my roofs The sky my aerals and factory chimneys The  
sky my pavilion and my tomb The sky The sky my incense and my hymn  
The sky my journals and my magazines The sky my violin my piano The  
sky my medals and my coins The sky my puddles and my dust Le ciel mes  
feux d'artifice The sky my scarves my hat my gloves The sky my showers my  
snow my sleet The sky my mansions and my mother The sky my diary and  
my photographs The sky my cedars and my roses The sky my face my cake of  
soap The sky my memory my mountains The sky my paperboat my autumns  
and my loss The sky my palms and my Sahara The sky my porches and my  
atriums The sky my galleries my icons The sky my radio my satellite my  
video The sky my drought my famine The sky my street lamps my alleys and  
my crowds The sky my armies and my guns my death The sky my exile and  
my winters The sky my victories and my massacres The sky my ministries my  
lies my parliament my eloquence The sky my labyrinth my irony The sky my  
carnation my buttonhole my bed The sky my rondos and my boredom The sky  
my flotillas and my rafts of flowers The sky my love-affairs My comedies*

*The sky my theories my forgetfulness The sky my Paris my New York my Rome The sky great wheel of lights and colours The sky my Venice My Vienna and my Petersburg The sky my Alexandria The sky my empire my provinces my people The sky my islands and my harbours The sky my lullaby The sky my blood my breath my home The sky my end*

## **Song on the End of the World**

Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2024)

translated by Denise Levertov (1923-1997)

On the day the world ends  
A bee circles a clover,  
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.  
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,  
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing  
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.

One the day the world ends  
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,  
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,  
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street  
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,  
The voice of a violin lasts in the air  
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder  
Are disappointed.  
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps  
Do not believe it is happening now.  
As long as the sun and the moon are above,  
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,  
As long as rosy infants are born  
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet  
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,

Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:  
There will be no other end of the world,  
There will be no other end of the world.

*Warsaw, 1944*

*The Collected Poems: 1931-1987* (The Ecco Press, 1988). Copyright  
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### **Brilliant Sky**

Never between the branches has the sky  
burned with such brilliance, as if  
it were offering all of its light to me,  
as if it were trying to speak to me,  
to say—what? what urgent mystery  
strains at that transparent mouth?  
No leaf, no rustle...It's in winter,  
in cold emptiness and silence, that the air  
suddenly arches itself like this into infinity,  
and glitters.

This evening, far from here,  
a friend is entering his death,  
he knows it, he walks  
under bare trees alone,  
perhaps for the last time. So much love,  
so much struggle, spent and worn thin.  
But when he looks up, suddenly the sky  
is arrayed in this same vertiginous clarity.

*The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov* (New Directions, 2013).  
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# Life in the Woods

## I.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God...

...the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day...

It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before.

I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that.

It is not dream of mine,  
To ornament a line;  
I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven  
Than I live to Walden even.  
I am its stony shore,

And the breeze that passes o'er;  
In the hollow of my hand  
Are its water and its sand,  
And its deepest resort  
Lies high in my thought.

## II.

Sometimes, on Sundays, I heard the bells, the Lincoln, Acton, Bedford, or Concord bell, when the wind was favorable, a faint, sweet, and, as it were, natural melody, worth importing into the wilderness. At a sufficient distance over the woods this sound acquires a certain vibratory hum, as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept. All sound heard at the greatest possible distance produces one and the same effect, a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by the azure tint it imparts to it.

Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds.

## III.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till

noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time.

#### **IV.**

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts – from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the head of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows that beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb – heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board – may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!...The light

which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, 'and lo! creation widens to our view.'

### **CODA**

I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one of two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves.

*WALDEN; or, Life in the Woods* (Schott Helicon Music Corporation: New York, 2018).

# Breath Alone

**Eva Hesse (1936–1970)**

Anne Michaels (b. 1958)

*Italics are Eva Hesse's words, taken from her diaries. Bold, her father's words, from a diary he kept for his daughters during their childhood.*

Even when we were together

I was alone

**Then came the sad farewell... at the train station  
in Altona.**

How could you leave me in that place  
in that language

**Helen and Eva held hands.**

**We were not allowed  
on the platform.**

knowing how I gripped my sister's hand

-

in Kettwig  
on the Ruhr  
*terrible, gruesome  
nightmares*

**Will we be reunited  
Will we be murdered**

I forgave you the drinking and all, all, all  
the women and even the betrayal



of my work. But—  
how could you leave me

there

\*

*December 1966.*

*Alone one year.*

*Took off wedding ring.*

*Did not want to.*

Threading thirty thousand six hundred and seventy  
holes

Binding, winding, knotting

Plaster, fiberglass

Silicon, silastics

Liquid rubber applied by brush

Sets after 24 hours

Sinewy, pendant

Weight weightless

Cilia of tubing, synapse of string

Responsive, disintegrating

Splayed, glistening

Let's go shopping!

Cementex on Canal Street

Aegis Reinforced Plastics

Alexander's Hardware

Alfred Covered Wire Co

Arko Metal Products Inc

Al Di La Exclusive Italian Imported Shoes!

talking latex over the counter with Mr Niccio

everything that latex can become: clear opaque

yellow  
fluid solid  
responsive malleable unstable

A life of its own

\*

Maybe it will be remarkable they said  
Maybe it will mean a whole new head  
Get well get well get well they said

\*

*Light is part of our... anatomy.*

the place of joining is not  
the place of weakness

A line of a page becomes rope  
A knot becomes hope

leading you not to my life,  
but to your own

\*

*Eager to go on  
To start to live again  
To be seen to love*

**Then came the sad farewell**

beautiful mother my own

**Will there be a reunion**

beautiful father my own

I want to keep my eyes open

### **Nelly Sachs (1891-1970)**

they took away silence  
and left  
speechlessness

(they left)

—

they took away safe sunlight  
they took away birdsong and dusk

they ripped the stars from the linden trees  
stitched them onto cloth

they stole summer evenings  
openness  
touch

(they left)

\*

dismantled  
obliterated  
erased  
ambushed  
soiled  
ransacked  
looted  
fouled

\*

they came while I was out  
the details gave them away—

I knew they had been there  
because  
they left everything  
exactly as it was

(they left)

\*

notes hidden  
dolls fished from sewers

the grave is the mother  
her infant inside her

February 7, 1950

*mutter meine mutter*  
who will know me

\*

they took away childhood

they took away the children

\*

(they left)

\*

too old too old

at the Stork Hotel  
across the beer mats on the table  
I longed to take your hand

children took the hands  
of strangers

\*

silence is the perfect poem  
breath alone

### **Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907)**

it did not free me to leave him  
everyone said I was selfish  
fear is selfish

\*

the white bedroom of birches, our faces cold,  
the warmth of us under clothes – sometimes  
chocolate, a blanket – until darkness  
rolled on top of the light, leaving only  
the small breathing spaces of stars

\*

imagining him naked, even as he stood there,  
naked

\*

The studio smells of wood smoke.  
The birds ask their same questions.

My hands are stained with his face.

\*

there's failure in every choice

my eyes went black, I head the brush,  
choking on a thread of song

\*

two white lights:  
snow on the birches

\*

the source of light  
is the painter's body

\*

We pulled the table out to the verandah,  
Set out the blue dishes.  
My dress as round as the billowing cloth.  
I'm looking for something I can't find.  
This make me strangely satisfied.  
It fills me with time.

All my life I've been saying grace  
for hunger: invisible, smelling of earth,  
heavy as cattle down a darkening field,  
their bodies pushing their heads close to the ground,  
their necklaces of bells.

# Song of Myself

## Song of Myself

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Excerpted by William Shomos and Jared Hiscock

Come my children,  
Come my boys and girls, my women, household and intimates,  
Now the performer launches his nerve....

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.  
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,  
Not an inch is vile, and none less familiar than the rest.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,  
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even  
the best,  
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.  
I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,  
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over  
upon me,  
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue  
to my bare-stript heart,  
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.  
Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that  
pass all the argument of the earth,  
And I know that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the  
women my sisters and lovers...

I am the mate and companion of people,  
...resonance of them -- I come and I depart.

I am the caresser of life wherever I move, not a person or object  
missing,  
Absorbing all to myself ...for this song.  
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.  
I am ...old and young, ... foolish as much as ...wise,  
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is  
fine,  
One ...Nation of many nations,  
This the common air that bathes the globe.  
With music strong I come,  
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for  
conquer'd and slain persons.  
Vivas to those who have fail'd!

This is the meal equally set,  
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous,  
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,  
This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair,  
This the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning,  
This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less,  
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.  
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,  
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,  
I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of  
wickedness also.

Walt Whitman, a kosmos...  
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,  
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from  
them,  
No more modest than immodest.  
Unscrew the locks from the doors!



Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!  
I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,  
By God!  
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart,  
Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.  
I believe in the flesh and the appetites,  
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a  
miracle.  
If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my  
own body,  
Translucent mould of me it shall be you!  
Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!  
Firm masculine colter it shall be you!  
My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!  
Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall be you!  
Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you!  
Vapors lighting and shading my face it shall be you!  
You sweaty brooks and dews it shall be you!  
Broad muscular fields, branches of live oak, loving lounge in my  
winding paths, it shall be you!  
Hands I have taken, face I have kiss'd, mortal I have ever touch'd, it  
shall be you.

Now I will do nothing but listen,  
I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames,  
clack of sticks cooking my meals,  
I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice,  
I hear all sounds running together,  
It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and breast.  
Ah this indeed is music -- this suits me.  
To be in any form, what is that?  
If nothing lay more develop'd the clam in its callous shell were  
enough.  
Mine is no callous shell,  
I have instant conductors all over me ...  
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,  
To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand.

Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,  
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,  
I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest  
traitor,  
You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its throat,  
Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me.

All truths wait in all things...

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at,  
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,  
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,  
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning.  
My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,  
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,  
I am afoot with my vision.

Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,  
Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles,  
screams, weeps,  
Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome  
prairie,  
Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,  
Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon...

Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon,  
flattening the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,  
Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds,  
or down a lane or along the beach,  
My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the  
middle...

Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone...

Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,  
I tread day and night such roads.  
I help myself to material and immaterial,  
No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.  
I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,  
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.  
All these I feel.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,  
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,  
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of  
my skin,  
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,  
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-  
stocks.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,  
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,  
Heat and smoke I inspired,

I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,  
The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip,  
The fall of grenades through the rent roof,  
The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron,

... I am possess'd!

Enough! enough! enough!  
Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!  
Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams,  
gaping,  
That I could forget the mockers and insults!  
That I could forget the trickling tears and the blows of the bludgeons  
and hammers!  
That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and  
bloody crowning.

The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any  
graves, Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.  
I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, ...  
Inland and sea-coast we go, and pass all boundary lines...

I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me,  
What is known I strip away,  
I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.  
My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,  
The Lord will be there.  
The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there.

I know I have the best of time and space,  
I tramp a perpetual journey,  
My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the  
woods,  
I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,  
I lead no man to a dinner-table,  
But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,  
My left hand hooking you round the waist,  
My right hand pointing to landscapes and the public road.

Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine,  
If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff of your hand on  
my hip,  
And in due time you shall repay the same service to me,

Sit a while dear son,  
Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk to drink,  
But as soon as you sleep and renew yourself in sweet clothes, I kiss  
you with a good-by kiss and open the gate for your egress hence.

Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,  
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,  
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment  
of your life.

Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,  
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,  
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me,  
shout, and laughingly dash with your hair.

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.  
I hear and behold God in every object,

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?  
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each  
moment then,  
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face  
in the glass,  
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is  
sign'd by God's name...  
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er  
I go,  
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.  
Who wishes to walk with me?

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of  
my gab and my loitering.  
I too am not a bit tamed,  
I too am untranslatable,  
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.  
I depart as air,  
I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,  
I effuse my flesh in eddies,  
I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.  
You will hardly know who I am  
or what I mean,  
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,  
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,  
Missing me one place search another,  
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

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