

Dutton Epoch

CDLX 7213

**Trevor Hold (1939-2004)**

**The Image Stays: Song Cycles by Trevor Hold  
(words by Trevor Hold)**

David Owen Norris piano  
David Wilson-Johnson baritone  
Amanda Pitt soprano

**The Image Stays: a cycle of seven love-poems for baritone & piano (1974)**

**i. *His Portrait***

What is it like, to be loved by a man like me?  
To be confronted by a red-nosed yokel  
With scrubby two-day beard and grinning eye,  
A mouth that's quickly triggered to a chuckle  
And a flash of bumpkin teeth; for whom no rigour  
Of dress could quite conceal the well-built figure?

And what could you love in such a man?  
Sun-blooded, with no law except the sun,  
Whose thoughts the trees and flowers have stolen, whose  
Attention flies off at a cuckoo's call?  
I fear my coarseness will estrange you, till  
I see the way you hold me in your eyes.

**ii. *Indifference***

And yet, and yet,  
    The robin still will sing  
    And all the buds shall swell their hoops and burst,  
    And hazel-tails will dangle in the hedge  
    And meadow-grasses bend with beads of dew;  
    The earth will turn, forgetful, never caring  
        Whatever I shall be, shall ever do.

And so, and so,  
    When Autumn blows the leaves  
    To reds and browns, and nuts are clustering  
    Upon the hazel, perhaps then even you  
    Will grow indifferent, and with the earth  
    Revolve, forgetting me, nor ever caring  
        Whatever I shall be, shall ever do.

**iii. *A Warning***

Don't crow your hopes out to the morning  
Or, as with Chanticleer, a fox may come  
And snatch you from your perch. Your throat  
Will break with a half-uttered note.  
Far better to keep mum  
    And remember this warning:

The happiest man sings sadly, or not at all;

Boasts neither to beat of a drummer  
Nor quietly on his own. He knows  
Despair to his hope is a fox, whose  
Ears never miss a disclosure. Summer  
Comes before a Fall.

**iv. At Fawsley Church**

Quietly, no sound at all –  
No motion, not a rise of breath  
Would indicate that they were there –  
The lord and lady lie asleep  
Upon their marble pillows, side by side,  
Whilst gathered round the bed  
Their children kneel postured in prayer,  
And silently call succour for their souls.

Four hundred years, not one embrace,  
Four centuries and not one word  
Has passed between them; lying there,  
Frozen on a loveless bed,  
Oblivious of all future worlds, they sleep,  
And, though their sons stand dutifully round,  
Their mutual secret keep,  
Knowing no child will be conceived in stone.

**v. Music Plays**

Music plays.  
The player's fingers  
Scuttle like a busy spider.  
Another's thoughts in another place  
Are gathered here, spun out to us,  
And we, like feeble flies,  
Lie snared upon its web.

Thoughts which numbly groped for contact,  
Buffeting in their aimless drift,  
Are drawn together. Here, without our knowing,  
Tiny threads have caught us by the ear.  
Within this grain of time  
There is no darkness,  
Whilst music plays.

**vi. Her Portrait**

Look into my eyes:  
And you will see  
Your own self pictured,  
Better than any oil or photograph.  
Your portrait's there whenever you care to look.

Steps in an adjoining room,  
Or in the afternoon  
A voice from the garden  
Talking to neighbours,  
Or in the evening  
As the children chatter to sleep,  
The other half of a quiet conversation –

If at times I may seem  
To take for granted your gentle routine;

If at times I may seem not to care,  
Preoccupied with chord or melody,

Then look into my eyes:  
And you will see  
Your own self pictured.  
The portrait's there whenever you care to look.

**vii. *The Image Stays***

This oak has stood four hundred years and more,  
Far longer than any house around,  
And each year its sap throws up  
Leaves to the spring, acorns in the fall.  
And the squirrels that climb  
Among the branches  
Were here before Armada sailed:  
Not these squirrels nor these acorns,  
But a squirrel, an acorn and this tree.

Fixed as a photograph the image stays,  
Caught like a face on the surface of a stream.

You see that hare: it runs across  
A thousand years of meadow-grass  
That rises in the spring and dies each fall.  
And it carries in its bones and blood  
All generations of its kind.  
It leapt the furrow when man  
First drove a plough across. It ran  
Between the fighting troops at Naseby field:  
Not this hare, nor this meadow,  
But a hare running through the meadow-grass.

Though grass and leaf must wither away,  
In everything the stamp remains intact.

And each age since the world began  
We humans, too, have acted out our parts,  
Our joys, our loves, disappointments, griefs,  
All the bitter-sweets of human life.  
And so it will continue after us,  
The actors neither you, my love, nor I,  
But a man, a woman and a life.

Fixed as a photograph the image stays,  
Caught like a face on the surface of a stream.  
Though you and I, like oak and grass, must wither away,  
In everything the stamp remains intact.

**River Songs: song-cycle for soprano, baritone & piano (1978)**

**i. Prologue** (with David Wilson-Johnson & Amanda Pitt)

I am the blood-stream of the land.

Through veins and arteries

I feed and drain the soil.

I am the life-blood of the earth.

I am the heart-beat of the shire.

**ii. Boys Fishing for Sue**

(with Amanda Pitt)

World and time have flown away.

These boys inhabit a magic world

Of waving waterweed and stones,

Of diving beetle and darting fish.

To them, the loach and stickleback

Are worth more than all the Pharaohs' treasure.

Home and school are a world away.

Armed with bandy-net and jar

They've trekked through many a field and copse

To reach this secret haven.

Now they pan its magic water

And grin with pride as they show their hard-earned spoil.

Time and the world hang, for this previous moment,

Suspended in a grimy jar.

**iii. Reflections for Malcolm**

(with David Wilson-Johnson)

The mirror of the pool presents

A rimpled version of the world above.

Sky and cloud and passing bird,

Though photographed the wrong way round,

Are accurately pictured there.

Swallows dip to meet themselves;

Two anglers fish at each end of a line;

Leaf drops to leaf, and a demoiselle

Alights upon approaching feet.

But then, with a sudden splash,

A chubb springs up to catch a fly!

The mirror's smashed,

Revealing in the depths a darker world.

**iv. Interlude** (with David Wilson-Johnson & Amanda Pitt)

I am the blood-stream of the land.

I am the life-blood of the earth.

I am the heart-beat of the shire.

**v. The Mill for Kate**

(with Amanda Pitt)

The miller and his sons left long ago

And inch by inch the mill falls to decay.

The roof has gone,

The mill-wheel rotted,

And the grinding-stone lies broken by the door.

Today the only occupants

Are pigeons that nest on beam and ledge

And ferns and liverwort growing upon the floor.

Overhead you may imagine

The sounds of yesterday:

The bustle of a busy house,  
Feet moving with leafy patter  
Through vanished corridors,  
Voices of children,  
Music and laughter,  
Echoing from a long-forgotten age.

But it is only the wind blowing through the bare windows,  
The flutter of pigeons in an empty shell.

The miller and his sons left long ago

And the millstream rushes past impatiently.

Diverted on a fool's errand,  
Thwarted in its designated task,

It slaps up foam against the broken walls,  
Urgent to join its river and the sea.

**vi. *Along the River* for David Wilson-Johnson**

(with David Wilson-Johnson)

A heron stands at the river's edge,  
Grey wings folded behind its back,  
Waiting and listening.

Like a grave old cleric reading a sermon

It watches the water

Silently.

Across the field by the churchyard wall,

Dapper as a gentleman, a fox sits

Waiting and listening.

Ears pricked back and eyes alert

It watches the hedgebank

Silently.

Above them both a kestrel hovers,

Pinned like a brooch against the sky.

It watches the ground

For faintest stir of mouse or beetle,

Wings winnowing the air-stream

Silently.

But neither heron nor fox nor falcon

Sees the other, each intent

On its own particular quarry.

Nor to they observe the lovers

In the river meadow, lost

To all the world as they lie

Clasped together

Silently.

**vii. *The Song of the Nen* (with David Wilson-Johnson & Amanda Pitt)**

On Studborough Hill I have my source,

No more than a trickle from a spring,

But yet I seem to know  
My end and final destiny,  
And strike toward the morning sun  
On my long journey to an unknown sea.

A narrow, winding brook  
Which any child could jump across,  
I babble below Badby Wood.  
Here I am the favourite summer haunt  
Of village boys with net and jar,  
The secret haven of the kingfisher.  
And as I amble down  
The western uplands of the shire,  
Villages spring along my banks,  
Bridges arch across my girth,  
Until, at Northampton's southern bridge,  
I join the Naseby Stream in a broad flow.

Embanked and weired, sluiced and locked,  
A power to be respected now,  
I glide with reedy confidence  
Through rich and fertile meadowland.  
Sun-drowsed cattle come to me to drink  
And the grave heron studies my depths  
Lost in contemplation.  
And so, like an honoured pilgrim  
Visiting an ancient shrine,  
I enter the cathedral city of Peterborough.  
Who now would recognise  
The brook that trickled down from Studborough Hill?

And so I begin the last stage of my journey,  
Slow and sluggish, as though  
Reluctant to say farewell to the land.  
I flow across the eastern levels,  
Under the deep skies of the fens,  
Until at last I reach my final goal  
And spill into the great mouth of the Wash  
And lose myself in the vast, salt sea...

**viii. Envoy** (with David Wilson-Johnson & Amanda Pitt)

Dear Nen, most unassuming of all rivers,  
    Ambling gently to the sea,  
You are the blood-stream of the land;  
You are the life-blood of the earth;  
You are the heart-beat of the shire.

**Voices from the Orchard: song-cycle for baritone & piano (1982-3)**

**i. Prologue 'Ancient Sunlight'**

Through the glass of Time,  
discoloured with the dust of passing years, the sun still shines.  
Its fire has gone: it is no longer bright  
but parchment-ochre, cracked with age,  
yet it illuminates, like specks in its shaft,  
fields as beautiful with their flowers and grasses

thrusting upwards to the ancient sunlight,  
as those in which I walk today.

The sights and sounds of a summer day  
settle like pollen onto my mind.  
A chaffinch lazily bowls its song across the garden,  
swifts scream overhead  
and in the meadow a cuckoo calls.  
The sights and sounds of a summer day  
settle like pollen onto my mind  
seeking a birth,  
and I seem to hear,  
calling from a distant orchard,  
the voices of children...

### **ii. *Dandelion Days***

Here the cuckoo calls all day  
and the grass-snake sleeps in the sun,  
bees buzz in the catmint  
and never a raincloud comes to upset  
our cumulus-dreaming sky.

The garden is a colourful forest  
full of exotic insects and flowers,  
where marigolds spread bright disks to the sun  
and the purple foxglove towers,

Where the grasshopper hid in the border  
scrapes his fiddle all day  
and the proud, bejewelled bantam-cock  
struts past officiously.

Then for a moment Time seems to stop:  
from the sky comes a menacing drone.  
The earth cowers like a frightened bird  
as a dark dragon crosses the sun.

But war belongs to the grown-up world:  
it has no meaning here.  
The bees in the catmint  
continue their honey-hunt  
and the snake stays asleep in its coil.

### **iii. *Grandfather Asleep***

Grandfather takes his afternoon nap –  
“Forty winks,” he says, as he always does –  
shuts his eyes and lays back in his chair,  
hands folded neatly across his lap.  
And as he nods to sleep with gentle snores  
I try to measure out the forty winks  
but soon lose count, as I always do.

The world of the dark little parlour  
seems to sleep with him.  
Even the clock above the dresser  
is mesmerised by its own ‘tick-tock’.

From the wall two portraits stare:  
grandpa when young, dapper and moustached,  
grandma, regal as queen,  
with high-starched collar and frizzy hair.  
And I drowse contentedly,  
as happy as a tadpole,  
secure in the womb of this quiet hour.

Soon he will wake with a grunt,  
look round at me and say:  
“Don’t get old, boy!”

as he always does.

#### **iv. *The Weekly Visitors***

Our week was a constant calendar  
of visiting cousins and aunts.  
They came with such regularity  
we knew the day at a glance.

On Monday night came Auntie May  
to perm my mother’s hair.  
She was quiet and slightly vague  
as deal people often are.  
She’d bring the weekly catalogue  
of gossip, illness and death,  
annoying us at the juicy parts  
by whispering under her breath.

On Tuesday night came old Aunt Emm,  
arriving unheralded  
just as tea was being served –  
“On purpose,” mother said.

On Wednesday night came Cousin Di,  
husband abroad in the R.A.F.,  
who sat by the door with tears in her eyes  
blowing into a handkerchief.  
But she could draw – my, could she draw! –  
anything under the sun.  
Cats sprang out of her pencil  
like bullets out of a gun.

On Thursday night came Auntie Hetty,  
rouged and powdered like a doll,  
who wore a silky dress and large  
blue hat and carried a parasol.  
She brought our weekly comics,  
sweets or a lollipop,  
and drank her tea most daintily  
and left lipstick-marks on her cup.

But Friday was the day of the week  
that we treasured most of all,  
for on that night, smelling of lavender  
soap, came Aunt Muriel,

who read our favourite stories,  
of which we'd never tire,  
and combed our hair as we dried ourselves  
in front of the blazing fire.

**v. Sunday**

Of all the days of the week  
it was Sunday we hated most;  
our weekly ordeal: twelve hours hard labour,  
tight shoes, uncomfortable clothes and best behaviour.

Yawning with boredom and Sunday lunch  
reluctantly to church we crawl  
to face our solemn warder  
in the corner of a dusty aisle:  
remote events in a far-off land  
and not a hymn to relieve the gloom!

We fidget on our wooden chairs,  
read for the umpteenth time  
the words on the memorial brass,  
pray for the clock to chime.  
We fiddle straw from a hole in the hassock,  
watch a spider crawl up the vicar's cassock.

And when with loud, provoking voice  
the teasing cuckoo calls,  
our spirits rise and with it fly  
outside our prison walls.  
We dream of games on Thornton's Hill,  
the fish to be caught at Kingsthorpe Mill,  
hunt for nests in Harlestone Firs,  
play cricket in the park ...  
But a solemn voice breaks into our dreams:  
"Wake up there, you at the back!"  
We're back again in the dismal aisle  
with the joyless face of authority.  
(And the clock says only ten-to-three!)

Why it was I cannot say,  
but Time, so very quick to steal  
our holidays away,  
on Sunday seems to dawdle... like... a... snail...

**vi. Illness**

Playing with friends on a building-site  
amongst the bricks and rubble,  
the hot sun beating down on the dust  
and the sweet smell of the pineapple-weed,  
playing with friends on a building-site  
a nausea fills my eyes and throat:  
I crave for meadows and blue skies.

The sounds that rise from the street  
no more than ripple the surface of his mind.  
Puzzled why he is here in bed

instead of playing with friends outside,  
puzzled why he is here in bed ...  
But the thought vanishes like a rabbit  
down its burrow, and he falls asleep.

Alone in the hospital ward, deserted by those you love.  
"Has he no friend, no loving mother near?"  
No-one comes but the vicar, dressed  
in his long, black cloak, like a sinister Mercury.  
"Has he no friend, no loving mother near?"  
Here – if you but know it –  
Solitude became your life companion.

### **vii. *Death***

He came stealthily, like a thief into an orchard,  
and left a mantle of silence on the house.  
    Hushed voices,  
    awkward pauses,  
    unfamiliar visitors  
who would squeeze a smile from their faces and say:  
    "Don't you remember me?"

He rests upon the bed,  
hands folded across his lap  
as though for all the world  
he was taking a nap...

forty winks into eternity.

We play distractedly with our toys,  
read books and comics beneath the table  
but soon lose interest.  
A strange gloom mantles the house.

### **viii. *Awakening***

We walked for miles that afternoon  
through woods and copses of the ancient Chase,  
but though the impatient clock sped on  
and the heavy clay pulled down,  
our hearts were light and our feet  
had wings.

I'd never seen this land before,  
but it was home to you,  
a map you knew like the palm of your hand.  
You taught my unfledged ears  
to recognise the songs of the birds,  
the subtle calls of the summer warblers,  
to disentangle each strand  
of the intricate web of sound.

And before I cycled the long road home,  
we walked across to the orchard  
to listen to the nightingales  
jousting like tiny knights-at-arms  
by the edge of the wood.

Here, far from the dusty streets and noisy town,  
was the magic land of which I had dreamt.

And even then I think I realised  
that heaven for me would be an English spring,  
my angel-choir, a choir of singing birds,  
my anthem, the dawn chorus in May,  
my God, the sun who rides across the sky  
each day and every day  
until Time stops and the earth grows still.