

Songs of War

by Mason Emmert

Texts from
Emily Dickinson
&
Eleanor Roosevelt

Fall 2017

Songs of War

This pair of pieces was born in the summer of 2017 in Oahu, Hawai'i. Specifically, it was inspired by a plaque that overlooks Pearl Harbor, inscribed with the words that "Eleanor Roosevelt kept in her wallet during World War II." The latter piece, save a few minor changes, was written later that day. I was struck by the way that these words stood apart from the rest of the remembrances at the Pearl Harbor memorial. It emphasizes sacrifice over tragedy as well as the role that we who are otherwise unaffected by war nonetheless play in it.

Hoping to find more words from the poet, I began to research but was unable to find any authors attributed besides Roosevelt herself. Indeed, the poem is often titled "Eleanor Roosevelt's Wartime Poem." She did not have a large volume of other poetry to her name, but this led me to consider what exactly it was that brought her to the perspective offered in the poem. In part, I presume, it must have been her position as First Lady, which required her to hear about tragedy after tragedy while relatively powerless. Moreover, the poem was unique among those with which I was familiar because it was written about war by a woman.

As an artist, I feel compelled to lift up voices that are often not heard, particularly in situations like this, when the perspectives those voices offer are so rare. It did not take long to find the other poem in the set: a Civil War-era piece by Emily Dickinson, again about the pseudo-survival's guilt of a bystander to war. In her typical way, Dickinson describes the emotion much more completely, allowing Roosevelt then to distill it into her simple few words.

In performance, the Roosevelt piece may be omitted; it should serve more as a coda, a meditation on the themes that Dickinson explores.

It feels a shame to be Alive

Emily Dickinson

Mason Emmert
Fall 2017

Not Too Fast ♩=124

mp

SOPRANO
It feels a shame to be a - live When Men so brave are dead One en - vies

ALTO
p
Hoo... *sim*

TENOR
p
Hoo... *sim*

BASS
p
Hoo... *sim*

10

the Dis - tin - guished Dust Per - mit - ted such a Head

mf
When Men so brave are dead, -

mf
When Men so brave are dead, -

Dear Lord, lest I continue

Eleanor Roosevelt

Mason Emmert, 2017

Freely $\text{♩} = 60$

pp *mp*

Soprano
Dear Lord, lest I con - tin - ue my com - pla - cent way

pp *mf* *mp*

Alto
Dear Lord, lest I con - tin - ue my com - pla - cent way

pp *mp*

Tenor
Dear Lord, lest I con - tin - ue my com - pla - cent way

pp *mp*

Bass
Dear Lord, lest I con - tin - ue my com - pla - cent way

7

p *mf*

Soprano
Dear Lord, help me re - mem - ber some - how out there, a man died

p *mf*

Alto
Dear Lord, help me re - mem - ber some - how out there a man

p *mf*

Tenor
Dear Lord, help me re - mem - ber some - how a man

p *mf*

Bass
Dear Lord, help me re - mem - ber some - how out there a man