Natalie Mann  Soprano

Jeffrey Panko  Piano

SONGS BY
Lori Laitman &
Richard Pearson Thomas
Although it was a great thrill and honor to sing a concert at Carnegie Hall, it was even more rewarding to meet and work with composer Lori Laitman. Her cycle *Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs* was my first encounter with her work and the reason I appreciate her composing skills for the voice. I am pleased to present this cycle on the CD, along with her works *Sunflowers* and *In This Short Life*. Her willingness to work with me during the preparation process to ensure I could perform these works as close to her ideal as possible was extremely generous and greatly appreciated. Many thanks also go to composer Richard Pearson Thomas, who provided wonderful input and insight on his works *Twilight* and *At Last, to be Identified!* His compositions for piano and voice are beautiful, and they offer a wonderful contrast to Lori’s songs. I believe that artists have an amazing opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to sing the works of today’s composers. It is in that spirit of sharing the beautiful art of contemporary composers that we bring *Experience* to you.

—Natalie Mann

**The Composers**

**Lori Laitman** is one of America’s most prolific and widely performed composers of vocal music. She has composed two operas, an oratorio, choral works and close to 250 songs, setting the words of classical and contemporary poets, among them the lost voices of poets who perished in the Holocaust. The *Journal of Singing* has written: “It is difficult to think of anyone before the public today who equals her exceptional gifts for embracing a poetic text and giving it new and deeper life through music.”

*Vedem*, a Holocaust oratorio, was commissioned by Music of Remembrance and premiered in Seattle in May 2010. Of Naxos’ release of the CD in 2011, *Fanfare* Magazine wrote: “A most touching experience, and one that further confirms Laitman’s status as one of the most talented and intriguing of living composers.” Laitman’s music has steadily gained recognition, both in the U.S. and abroad. In 2012, she was one of the composers commissioned by Opera America to compose a song for the *Opera America Songbook* in celebration of the opening of the National Opera Center in New York City. Austrian baritone Wolfgang Holzmair commissioned and premiered *Todesfuge Songs* with cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton in New York, Washington, DC and at Wigmore Hall in London. Thomas Hampson featured Laitman’s music on his *Song of America* radio series and website, and *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* includes an entry on Laitman. Her discography continues to grow, with releases on Albany, Naxos and other labels.

Laitman graduated magna cum laude from Yale College and received her Master of Music degree from The Yale School of Music. For more information, please visit artsongs.com and scarletletteropera.com.

Composer and pianist, **Richard Pearson Thomas** has had works performed by the Boston Pops, Covent Garden Festival, Houston Grand Opera, Manhattan Chamber Orchestra, Chautauqua Opera, Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Banff Centre, Portland Opera, Sylkight Opera Theatre, and Riverside Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir. He is a recipient of an American Composers’ Forum *Continental Harmony* commission for the Alabama Tri-State Orchestra as well as commissions from the Great Falls Symphony Orchestra, the Empire State Youth Orchestra, and the Riverside Philharmonic Orchestra. Mr. Thomas’s commissioned opera, *A Wake or a Wedding*, was premiered by the California State University at Fullerton Opera Theatre. His musical *Parallel Lives* was produced Off-Off Broadway by the Riverside Opera Ensemble, as was *Ladies in a Maze*, produced by Encompass Music Theatre. His musical *Golden Gate*, winner of the Michael Stewart Foundation Award, was presented in concert version by the Monmouth Civic Chorus. His original music for *In Thinking of America: Songs of the Civil War* has been heard in more than 140 cities.

Mr. Thomas is currently on faculty at Teachers College/Columbia University. He has taught at Yale and the University of Central Florida. As composer-in-residence of the Gold Opera Project, he composed more than 90 operas with students in New York City public schools. His work with children was featured on CBS’s “The Early Show,” and singled out for praise by President Clinton.

He is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the University of Southern California, and is a native of Montana.
The Performers

Natalie Mann is an active recitalist and champion of contemporary music, which led to a critically acclaimed debut at Carnegie Hall. As a concert soloist, she has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the South Shore Orchestra during a New Year’s tour of China, and the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus as the soprano soloist in Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis. Her operatic roles include Lady Macbeth in Verdi’s Macbeth and Amelia in Verdi’s Un Ballo in Maschera, Mozart’s Donna Anna in Don Giovanni and the Countess in Le Nozze di Figaro, Micaela in Bizet’s Carmen and Marguerite in Gounod’s Faust. Critics praised of her portrayal of the title role in Suor Angelica. According to Peter Jacob of the Herald-Times, “Her soprano soared with fullness of tone through the climaxes; no high note seemed to tax her.”

Ms. Mann’s concert appearances have been equally well received. Of her Carnegie Hall recital, Abigail Wright of The Opera Insider observed: “Ms. Mann does an excellent job of continuing her brilliantly sustained legato, undeniably stunning high notes, and impressive quality of pitch and tone center across the board.”

Ms. Mann has received a Metropolitan Opera Encouragement Award and was a finalist in both the Gerda Lissner Competition and the American Prize for Art Song.

She holds advanced degrees from Indiana University and the University of Wollongong in Australia, as well as a Bachelor of Music from Butler University. She currently teaches voice as an Adjunct Professor at Moreno Valley College. For more information please visit www.nataliemann.com.

Pianist Jeffrey Panko has received critical acclaim as solo artist and collaborative pianist throughout the United States and Europe. The recipient of numerous awards and honors, Mr. Panko began his formal musical education at the age of six with his grandmother, Lorraine Jagodzinski and received degrees in Piano Performance from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the DePaul University School of Music. Currently working with his mentor, Chicago Symphony Orchestra pianist Mary Sauer as well as Dr. Robert Holst, Panko has earned top prize awards in competitions including the Society of American Musicians’ Piano Competition (Chicago) and the Frinna Awerbuch International Piano Competition (New York). Following a concert tour of Poland where Panko was honored by the United States with the title of Cultural Ambassador, Panko was asked by the City of Chicago to present a Chopin recital for the visiting Lech Walesa and other Polish dignitaries, culminating with two Command Performances for Polish Prime Ministers visiting the United States. Panko has also been featured in performances at Carnegie Hall, Weill Hall, Lincoln Center Library, WQXR Radio (New York), is a frequent performer on WFMT Radio (Chicago), and has appeared in Symphony Center playing the music of Steven Sondheim for Mr. Sondheim.

Panko serves as Minister of Music and as Artistic Director of the Music at Bethel Concert Series for Bethel United Church of Christ in Elmhurst, Illinois, is a member of the contemporary music group MAVerick Ensemble, and is a member of New Music School piano faculty in Chicago.
The Texts

Lori Laitman
The Metropolitan Tower and Other Songs
Poems by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933).
Text to The Hour and To a Loose Woman
used by permission of The Teasdale Estate,
Wellesley College, MA.

The Metropolitan Tower
(from Helen of Troy and Other Poems, 1911)
We walked together in the dusk
To watch the tower grow dimly white,
And saw it lift against the sky
Its flower of amber light.

The Hour
Was it foreknown, was it foredoomed
Before I drew my first small breath?
Will it be with me to the end,
Will it go down with me to death?

To a Loose Woman
My dear, your face is lovely,
And you have lovely eyes,
I do not cavil at your life,
But only at your lies.

You did not know the time had come,
You did not see the sudden flower,
Nor know that in my heart Love’s birth
Was reckoned from that hour.

A Winter Night
(from Helen of Troy and Other Poems, 1911)
My window-pane is starred with frost,
The world is bitter cold to-night,
The moon is cruel, and the wind
Is like a two-edged sword to smite.

God pity all the homeless ones,
The beggars pacing to and fro.
God pity all the poor to-night
Who walk the lamp-lit streets of snow.

My room is like a bit of June,
Warm and close-curtained fold on fold,
But somewhere, like a homeless child,
My heart is crying in the cold.

Old Tunes (from Flame and Shadow, 1920)
As the waves of perfume, heliotrope, rose,
Float in the garden when no wind blows,
Come to us, go from us, whence no one knows;

So the old tunes float in my mind,
And go from me leaving no trace behind,
Like fragrance borne on the hush of the wind.

But in the instant the airs remain
I know the laughter and the pain
Of times that will not come again.

I try to catch at many a tune
Like petals of light fallen from the moon,
But they float away — for who can hold
Youth, or perfume or the moon’s gold?

The Strong House
(first published in Pictorial Review, 1919)
Our love is like a strong house
Well roofed against the wind and rain
Who passes darkly in the sun again and again?
The doors are fast, the lamps are lit,
We sit together talking low
Who is it in the ghostly dusk goes to and fro?

Surely ours is a strong house,
I will not trouble any more
But who comes stealing at midnight
To try the locked door?

The Hour
Was it foreknown, was it foredoomed
Before I drew my first small breath?
Will it be with me to the end,
Will it go down with me to death?

Or was it chance,
would it have been
Another if it was not you?
Could any other voice or hands
have done for me what yours can do?

Now without sorrow and without elation
I say the day I found you was foreknown,
Let the years blow like sand around that hour,
Changeless and fixed as Memnon carved in stone.

To a Loose Woman
My dear, your face is lovely,
And you have lovely eyes,
I do not cavil at your life,
But only at your lies.

You are not brave,
You are not wild,
You merely ride the crest of fashion;
Ambition is your special ware
And you have dared to call it passion.
In the center
of every petal
is a letter,
and you imagine
if you could only remember
and string them all together
they would spell the answer.
It is a long night,
and not an easy one —
you have so many branches,
and there are diversions —
birds that come and go,
the black fox that lies down
to sleep beneath you,
the moon staring
with her bone-white eye.
Finally you have spent
all the energy you can
and you drag from the ground
the muddy skirt of your roots
and leap awake
with two or three syllables
like water in your mouth
and a sense
of loss — a memory
not yet of a word,
certainly not yet the answer —
only how it feels
when deep in the tree
all the locks click open,
and the fire surges through the wood,
and the blossoms blossom.
Sunrise
You can
die for it—
an idea,
or the world. People
have done so,
brilliantly,
lettin their small bodies be bound
to the stake,
creating
an unforgettable
fury of light. But
this morning,
climbing the familiar hills
in the familiar
fabric of dawn, I thought

Lori Laitman
Sunflowers
Poetry copyright 1986 by Mary Oliver.
From DREAM WORK (Atlantic Monthly Press.)
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Sunflowers
Come with me
into the field of sunflowers.
Their faces are burnished disks,
their dry spines
creak like ship masts,
their green leaves,
so heavy and many,
fill all day with the sticky
sugars of the sun.
Come with me
to visit the sunflowers,
you are shy
but want to be friends;
they have wonderful stories
of when they were young —
the important weather,
the wandering crows.
Don’t be afraid
to ask them questions!
Their bright faces,
which follow the sun,
will listen, and all
those rows of seeds —
each one a new life! —

hope for a deeper acquaintance;
each of them, though it stands
in a crowd of many,
like a separate universe,
is lonely, the long work
of turning their lives
into a celebration
is not easy. Come

and let us talk with those modest faces,
the simple garments of leaves,
the coarse roots in the earth
so uprightly burning.
Dreams
All night
the dark buds of dreams
open richly.

In the center
of every petal
is a letter,
and you imagine
if you could only remember
and string them all together
they would spell the answer.
It is a long night,
and not an easy one —
you have so many branches,
and there are diversions —
birds that come and go,
the black fox that lies down
to sleep beneath you,
the moon staring
with her bone-white eye.
Finally you have spent
all the energy you can
and you drag from the ground
the muddy skirt of your roots
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of loss — a memory
not yet of a word,
certainly not yet the answer —
only how it feels
when deep in the tree
all the locks click open,
and the fire surges through the wood,
and the blossoms blossom.
of China, 
and India and Europe, and I thought 
how the sun 
blazes 
for everyone just 
so joyfully 
as it rises 
under the lashes
of my own eyes, and I thought 
I am so many!
What is my name?
What is the name
of the deep breath I would take 
over and over 
for all of us? Call it 
whatever you want, it is 
happiness, it is another one 
of the ways to enter 
fire.

Lori Laitman
In This Short Life
Poems by Emily Dickinson

Some keep the Sabbath
Some keep the Sabbath going to Church — 
I keep it, staying at Home — 
With a Bobolink for a Chorister — 
And an Orchard, for a Dome —

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice —
I, just wear my Wings —
And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
Our little Sexton — sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman —
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at last —
I’m going, all along,

I stepped from plank to plank
I stepped from Plank to Plank
A slow and cautious way
The Stars about my Head I felt,
About my Feet the Sea.

I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch —
This gave me that precarious Gait
Some call Experience.

In this short life
In this short life
That only lasts an hour
How much — how little — is
Within our power

Richard Pearson Thomas
Twilight
Poetry by Christina Rossetti

A Birthday
My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water’d shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

Mirage
The hope I dreamed of was a dream,
Was but a dream; and now I wake
Exceeding comfortless, and worn, and old,
For a dream’s sake.

I hang my harp upon a tree,
A weeping willow in a lake;
I hang my silenced harp there, wrung and snapped
For a dream’s sake.

Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart;
My silent heart, lie still and break:
Life, and the world, and mine own self are
changed
For a dream’s sake.

Song
When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.
I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

Richard Pearson Thomas
At Last, to be Identified!
Poems by Emily Dickinson

Doubt me! My Dim Companion
Doubt Me! My Dim Companion!
Why, God, would be content
With but a fraction of the Life—
Poured thee, without a stint—
The whole of me—forever—
What more the Woman can,
Say quick, that I may dower thee
With last Delight I own!

It cannot be my Spirit—
For that was thine, before—
I ceded all of Dust I knew—
What Opulence the more
Had I—a humble Maiden,
Whose farthest of Degree,
Was—that she might—
Some distant Heaven,
Dwell timidly, with thee!

What if I say I shall not wait!
What if I say I shall not wait?
What if I burst the fleshly gate
And pass, escaped, to thee?
What if I file this mortal off,
See where it hurt me, — that’s enough, —
And wade in liberty;
They cannot take us any more,—
Dungeons can call, and guns implore;
Unmeaning now, to me,
As laughter was an hour ago,
Or laces, or a travelling show,
Or who died yesterday!

Wild Nights — Wild Nights!
Wild nights — Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile — the winds —
To a Heart in port —
Done with the Compass —
Done with the Chart!
Rowing in Eden —
Ah — the Sea!
Might I but moor — tonight —
In thee!

I never saw a Moor
I never saw a Moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

There’s a certain slant of light
There’s a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons —
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes —

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us —
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are —

None may teach it — Any —
‘Tis the Seal Despair —
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air —

When it comes, the Landscape listens —
Shadows — hold their breath —
When it goes, ’tis like the Distance
On the look of Death —

At last, to be identified!
At last to be identified!
At last, the lamps upon thy side,
The rest of life to see!
Past midnight, past the morning star!
Past sunrise! Ah! what leagues there are
Between our feet and day!
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Lori Laitman (poems by Sara Teasdale)
Metropolitan Tower & Other Songs
1. The Metropolitan Tower [2:20]
2. A Winter Night [3:02]
3. Old Tunes [2:42]
4. The Strong House [1:48]
5. The Hour [2:07]
6. To a Loose Woman [1:27]

Lori Laitman (poems by Mary Oliver)
Sunflowers
7. Sunflowers [5:36]
8. Dreams [4:17]
9. Sunrise [4:30]

Lori Laitman (poems by Emily Dickinson)
In This Short Life*
10. Some keep the Sabbath [1:54]
11. I stepped from plank to plank [1:43]
12. In this short life [1:48]

Richard Pearson Thomas (poems by Christina Rossetti)
Twilight*
13. A Birthday [1:50]
15. Song [4:04]

Richard Pearson Thomas (poems by Emily Dickinson)
At last, to be identified!
17. What if I say I shall not wait! [2:03]
19. I never saw a Moor [2:20]
20. There's a certain slant of light [2:11]
21. At last, to be identified! [4:42]

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