Everyday Arias
for Soprano and Orchestra

by

Carrie Leigh Page

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Rodney Rogers, Chair
Benjamin Levy
James DeMars
Robert Oldani

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ABSTRACT

*Everyday Arias* for soprano and orchestra was composed largely in Arizona and completed in February 2011. The text was taken from a small collection of the composer’s own poetry referencing her memories of life in rural Mississippi. *Everyday Arias* endeavors to elevate these prosaic experiences and settings to art, expressing the everyday as beautiful and worthy of artistic treatment.

The primary compositional model for this work was Samuel Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, but other influences included Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Benjamin Britten, and Dominick Argento. Barber’s and Argento’s musical treatment of prose style seemed particularly appropriate to the goals of *Everyday Arias*. Ives and Copland used hymn tunes both to evoke certain associations of worship and as sources of interesting material. The vocal writing of all five composers was influential, but the orchestration techniques for winds are largely a product of studying Ives and Argento, while many string gestures are more obviously tied to Britten and – more historically – Debussy.

The primary motive that weaves through the work features an ascending major second followed by a descending perfect fourth, in a long-short-long rhythmic pattern. As a melodic fragment, the motive is often inverted to a descending-ascending pattern, or distorted slightly by expanding the second interval to a perfect fifth, or used in retrograde. The motive was derived from the first measure of the melody “Toplady” (1830) by Thomas Hastings, better known as the hymn “Rock of Ages.” In the first movement, the motive is used most frequently in sequences. The second movement treats the motive as a melodic element and as a unit in ostinati. The final movement humorously transforms it into a syncopated gesture to evoke ragtime.
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to my hard-working, faith-filled grandparents and to the people of Mississippi.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Rodney Rogers and Dr. James DeMars, who shared their combined wealth of experience in orchestration and tips for beating composer's block. I also wish to thank Dr. Benjamin Levy, whose direction with my analysis projects infallibly helped me find new resources as a composer, and Dr. Robert Oldani, who immediately understood and appreciated the nostalgic, humorous, and gentle intents of the poetry of *Everyday Arias*. 
“Rock Branch” was the first movement written for *Everyday Arias*. Rock Branch Baptist Church is a small church on the outskirts of the town of Union, Mississippi (itself on the outermost skirts of Meridian, some 30 miles away). This is the small country church where my maternal grandparents worshipped, and it is the setting for some of my earliest memories. The poetry and music is meant to evoke scenes from the small, warm community, and I made deliberate use of tunes I remember from that time. Motives derived from the hymn “Rock of Ages” weave throughout, but one may also hear snippets from “Let Us Break Bread Together” (often a communion hymn) and “The Old Rugged Cross” (often a funeral hymn) at appropriate moments in relation to the text. Though Rock Branch was conceived as one movement within *Everyday Arias*, it may be performed as a standalone work.

“Daylilies,” presented as the first movement of this work, culls its pitch material from the same motive that forms “Rock Branch,” but presents the step followed by a fourth or fifth as a figure from which to build overlapping sequences and ostinati that maintain a fast-paced drive throughout the song. The visual image of a worn house off a dirt road, surrounded by daylilies, is the memory of my grandparents’ farm outside Union. The constant motion in this song reflects two things: the movement of wind that would cause flowers to dance or fine dust to blow in from the road, and the sense of fleeting time.

The final movement, “Old and New,” presents the step-leap motive as a ragtime figure. The ragtime in this song, however, is a bit ungainly and halting, how I imagine an elderly, teetotalling Southern Baptist church lady with bad knees might dance if suddenly possessed by such a devilish urge. The brassy syncopated fanfare from mm. 1-8 serves a ritornello function, returning in mm. 38-48 and again in an interrupted form in mm. 85-106.
I. Daylilies

Summer's freedom
is tinged with the color orange.

A dirt road
A metal roof
A row of daylilies

That surprising delicacy:
Free along the roadside,
Almost a weed, but genteel enough
to plant in a row alongside
the weather-beaten house
and be a small pleasure from May to October.

Happiness rested, waiting on
a stretch of unpaved road
and a house embraced

in the color orange.

II. Rock Branch

Rock Branch was a clapboard church, old and white.
One summer, some enterprising preacher sowed
corn and squash and watermelons behind it
and prayed for a harvest of souls.

Miss Myrtle sang her praises from the front pew.
She made joyful noise unto the Lord,
though the Lord and everyone knew
it was nothing to write home about.

Others marked their seats with hand-crocheted cushions.
If the cushions were empty,
we knew who to pray for,
and if the cushions were gone,
we knew what family would need
a casserole and proper sympathy.

Salvation rang sweeter than any bell could have.
The communion trays passed quietly
over Broadman hymnals and children’s heads,
sticky with grape juice doctrine.

We fanned our faces on the cement stoop.
Everyone spread across the grass,
slowly migrating to duty, sensible cars
rolling onto the dusty road.
III. Old and New

This town is old,
So my granddaughter says.
The streets, the stores,
the churches, the people.
All of them crumbly somehow.

This is just a town
full of OLD people.
But she’s wrong.
At least half of us are half new.

My brother John got a new hearing aid
From the new home health nurse
(A sweet young thing –
lives over by the new Social Security office)

Mr. William got a new hip
just last year.
Miss Mabel got two new knees
just last month.

And as for me –
After my cataract’s
Off next week
My eyes will be good as new
(Good Lord willin’ and the creek don’t rise).
INSTRUMENTATION

Flute 1
Flute 2 (Piccolo)
Oboe 1
Oboe 2
B♭ Clarinet 1
B♭ Clarinet 2
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2
Horn in F 1
Horn in F 2
Trumpet in C 1
Trumpet in C 2
Trombone
Bass Trombone (for Mvt. III only)
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion 1
(glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, bell tree, snare drum, rachet, high hat, woodblocks)

Percussion 2
(chimes, glockenspiel, xylophone, triangle)

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass

PERFORMANCE NOTES

All trills in this work are whole-step trills.

Percussion instruments should be allowed to ring freely.

In “Daylilies,” the strings should use mutes throughout the movement. In subsequent movements, strings should use mutes only where indicated.
Everyday Arias

I. Daylilies

Words and Music by Carrie Leigh Page

Moderately fast, with lightness ($\frac{3}{8}$)
Fls. 1 - 2

Obs. 1 - 2

Bo-Cls. 1 - 2

Bns. 1 - 2

Hns. 1 - 2

C Tpts. 1 - 2

Tbn.

Tuba

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Sop.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
plant in a row     along side     the weather
not - ed_ wait - ing on a stretch of
Fls. 1 - 2
Obs. 1 - 2
Br. Cls. 1 - 2
Bns. 1 - 2
Hns. 1 - 2
C Tpts. 1 - 2
Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Sop.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

braced
in the
in the
color

solo

Ch.
II. Rock Branch

Gently; flowing (\text{\textit{q}®™})

1. Flutes 1 - 2
2. Oboes 1 - 2
3. Bb Clarinets 1 - 2
4. Bassoons 1 - 2
5. F Horns 1 - 2
6. C Trumpets 1 - 2
7. Tuba
8. Timpani
9. Percussion 1
10. Percussion 2
11. Soprano
12. Violin I
13. Violin II
14. Viola
15. Cello
16. Contrabass

Solo

1 player
Rock Branch was a clap-board church, old and white.
One summer, some surprising preacher
sowed corn and squash and watermelons behind it and prayed, prayed,
for a harvest of souls.
Faster (\( \frac{3}{8} \))

'Rock of Ages'

Myrtle sang her

Percussion

Snare drum
She made a joyful joyful noise unto the Lord, though the
Lord and ev'ry one knew
it was no-thin' to write home a-bout.
Others marked their seats with hand-crocheted cushions.

O – thers marked their seats with hand-crocheted cushions.
73

if the cushions were empty,
we knew who to pray.

43
for, and if the cushion were
A bit faster (\( \frac{3}{4} \cdot \infty \))

Let Us Break Bread Together
harmon mute
and children's heads, stick-\textit{y} with grape juice doc-trine.
III. Old and New

Brisk (\( \frac{3}{4} \) 120)

Piccolo

Flute

Oboes 1 - 2

Bassoons 1 - 2

Horns 1 - 2

French Horns

Timpani

Tuba

Hard mallets

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Soft mallets

Violins 1

Violins 2

Viola

Cello

Brisk (\( \frac{3}{4} \) 120)

Racquet
Picc.  
Fl.  
Obs. 1 - 2  
B•Ch. 1 - 2  
Bns. 1 - 2

Hns. 1 - 2  
C Tpts. 1 - 2  
Tbn.  
Timp.  
Perc. 1  
Perc. 2  
Sop.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
Cb.

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stores, the churches,
the people.
All of them
This is just a town full of OLD peo-ple. But

"rit."

This is just a town full of OLD peo-ple. But
she's wrong.
At least half of us are half...
My brother John got a new hearing aid from the new home health nurse.
Picc.
Fl.
Obs. 1 - 2
B♭ Cls. 1 - 2
Bass. 1 - 2
Hns. 1 - 2
C Tpts. 1 - 2
Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Sop.
Szn. I
Szn. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

(A sweet young thing, lives over by the...
a tempo

Master William got a new hip
just last year. Mise Ma - bel got two
Picc.
Fl.
Obs. 1 - 2
B♭ Ch. 1 - 2
Bsn. 1 - 2
Hns. 1 - 2
C Tpts. 1 - 2
Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Sop.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

And as for me, after my cat's rac't
Picc.
Fl.
Obs. 1 - 2
B♭ Cls. 1 - 2
Bns. 1 - 2

Hns. 1 - 2
C Tpts. 1 - 2
Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2

Sop.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

(Good Lord will - in' and the creek don't rise).
Picc.  

Fl.  

Obs. 1 - 2  

B♭ Cls. 1 - 2  

Bns. 1 - 2  

Hns. 1 - 2  

C Tpts. 1 - 2  

Tbn.  

Tuba  

Timp.  

Perc. 1  

Perc. 2  

Sop.  

(Violin 1)  

Vln. II  

Vla.  

Vc.  

Cb.  

104

(Good Lord will in' and the creek don't rise).