

HERE

BE

SIRENS

~ *Suite* ~

HERE BE SIRENS

Suite

*For three sopranos and piano
(three performers)*

- I. Prologue
- II. O Sailor
- III. Across the Turbid Waves/In a Silent Valley
- IV. Here to Me from Krete
- V. Naufragium

HERE BE SIRENS Suite

Performance Notes

The piano part for *Here Be Sirens Suite* is shared among the three sopranos with no additional performers. The suite requires at least one performer to play the keyboard of the piano at a beginner/intermediate level: additionally, all performers play an “inside piano” part, including bowing the strings, striking the instrument, playing the pedals, and other effects. The piano parts may be distributed among the players in any way.

Piano Techniques and Preparation

The piano must be a grand piano with both the lid and the music stand removed. Additional items required include: small rocks (two per performer, six total); glass slides (one per performer; rocks may be substituted); a thin piece of sheet metal; one large timpani mallet; four heavily rosined long pieces of fishing wire.

Mvt. I, *Prologue*: players use various inside piano techniques, including scraping a low coiled string with a coin and scraping a glass slide or rock along the bolts at the top of the piano towards the keyboard. Players strum strings with fingers (in this and other movements in which strings are played by hand, latex gloves may be worn if there is concern about skin oils interacting with the piano strings). The final section of the prologue has an easy piano accompaniment.

Mvt. II, *O Sailor*: no piano.

Mvt. III, *Across the Turbid Waves/In a Silent Valley*: players strike pairs of rocks together over the piano for a percussive sound; players brush rocks or glass slides (do not use metal) against metal piano bolts for a grating, harsh sound; players strum and slap piano strings with hands and fingers. The damper and sostenuto pedals are used throughout. The second half of the movement includes a simple piano part.

Mvt. IV, *Here to Me from Krete*: one player operates the damper pedals, and all three bow individual piano strings with thin fishing wire (one player bows two strings simultaneously). Wire should be set before beginning the suite, as follows: cut four long lengths of wire and heavily coat with string rosin (to facilitate setup and performance, “handles” for these wires may be created by folding a small piece of tape over each end). Thread one length underneath the piano strings for the strings used in the piece (pitches D5, A4, G3, and C3). To bow, grasp one end of the wire in each hand, raise arms so that wire is taut, and gently “floss” the piano string by undulating the wire up and down.

Mvt. V, *Naufragium*: a thin piece of sheet metal should be placed on the strings just before this movement begins, to create a rattling thud. One performer hits this metal with a timpani mallet; all performers scrape the strings or bolts; one performer operates the pedal and plays a short chord progression.

Performance Notes, con't.

Singing into the Strings

For all passages marked “sing into the piano,” performers must bend and lean into the cavity of the instrument so that their mouths are **no more than a few inches (or less!)** from the strings, in order to fully capture the vocal resonance.

Staging and Memorization

Some concert-appropriate optional staging is suggested in occasional movements in boxed text. (Note that quasi-theatrical performance techniques such as bending over to sing in the piano are *not* optional.)

Memorization of this suite for performance is strongly recommended! This is both for musical effectiveness and to avoid the logistical difficulty of incorporating music stands or folders into a piece that requires all performers to frequently play or bend over the piano. If complete memorization is not possible, the following movements *must* be memorized to be performed accurately:

- I. *Prologue* section 2 (Latin section)
- III. *Across the Turbid Waves/In a Silent Valley* (“Across the Turbid Waves” section)
- V. *Nafragium*

HERE BE SIRENS Suite

Texts and translations

I. PROLOGUE

Greek text by Plato, from The Republic (Book 10, lines 616b – 617b); Latin text by Theobaldus of Cambridge, from A Medieval Bestiary; English text by Kate Soper

<u>Original Greek</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Translation</u>
καὶ ἀφικνεῖσθαι τεταρταίους ὅθεν καθορᾶν ἄνωθεν διὰ παντός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς	<i>Kaiaphiknaistai, tetartaous, hoten kathoran, anoten dia pantos tou ouranou kai ges...</i>	On the day, the fourth one, they came, whence they saw above the entire heaven and earth...
τεταμένον φῶς μάλιστα τῇ ἰριδι προσφεροῦ, λαμπρότερον δὲ καὶ καθαρώτερον:	<i>tetamenon phos malista te Iride prophere, lamproteron de kai katoroteron:</i>	stretched light, most of all the rainbow resembling, but brighter and more pure:
ἐκ δὲ τῶν ἄκρων τεταμένον ἀνάγκης ἄτρακτον,	<i>ek de ton akron tetamenon Anakes atrakton,</i>	from the ends was stretched Necessity's spindle,
δι' οὗ πάσας ἐπιστρέφουσαι τὰς περιφοράς:	<i>di hou passas epistrephetai tas periphoras.</i>	through which, passing, were turned all the orbits.
ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν κύκλων αὐτοῦ ἄνωθεν ἐφ' ἑκάστου βεβηκέναι	<i>epi de ton kuklon auto anoten epi kastou bebekenai</i>	upon each orbit itself, above it, on each one stood
Σειρήνα	<i>seirena</i>	a siren,
συμπεριφερομένην φωνὴν μίαν ἰεῖσαν, ἓνα τόνον μίαν ἁρμονίαν συμφωνεῖν	<i>sumperipheromenen phonen mian hiesan, ena tonos mian harmonian symphonein.</i>	bourne around the orbit, each voice one pitch casting out, from all of them, one joined harmony.

I. PROLOGUE, con't.

Original Latin

*Sirenes sunt monstra maris
resonantia magnis vocibus*

Et modulis cantus formantia multis

*Quae faciunt sonitum
nimia dulcedine vocum*

Translation

Sirens are monsters of the sea
resounding with loud voices

And with many modes songs forming many

Which they make sound
With the astounding sweetness of their voices.

With starry opals in her eyes,
And beads of coral in her hair,
A girl upon the sea-rock lies
Becalming Earth and sea and air.

She drifts along the flow'ring reef,
As from the fountain of her throat
And over the gleaming tongue and teeth
She pours out beauty, note by note.

And when all the waves are sounding out
With echoes of her slow refrain,
Then all who drift within them doubt
To ever long for land again:

But sink beneath them to rejoice,
And lay their drowning heads upon
The gleaming silver of her voice,
The golden river of her song.

II. O SAILOR

English text by Kate Soper; Latin text by Theobaldus of Cambridge; Greek text by Homer

O Sailor, come:
Your anchor's line is spun.
O Sailor, hear:
My beacon calls you near.

O Sailor mine,
Leave pitch and yaw behind.
O sailor's soul,
This lee shore's your last goal.

O white meridian,
Bring fire to blind these men.
O tide and wind and wave,
Becalm thee as their grave.

*(Sirenes sunt monstra maris resonantia
magnis vocibus et modo naufragium modo
dant mortale periculum...quae faciunt
sonitum nimia dulcitudine vocum.)*

*[Sirens are sea-monsters resounding with
great voices who by bringing sailors to
wreck bring mortal danger...who make
sounds with the astonishing sweetness of
their voices.]*

[Greek transliteration]: (*Oogar potees
tiedeh parahlasay meli gahrun apo
stomaton*)

*[For never did anyone row past in his
black ship until he heard our melodious
voices]*

O Nereids (*Nesso, Psamathe, Dexamine,
Melita...*), come now:
Lash keel and mast and prow!
O Aecheulous, god:
Receive this sailor's blood!

III. ACROSS THE TURBID WAVES/IN A SILENT VALLEY

Text for Across the Turbid Waves by Dante, from The Inferno (trans/abridged Soper);

Text for In a Silent Valley by John Milton, from Paradise Lost

Across the turbid waves
A clang of sound of fear.

Cries, wails, *pianti, sospiri,*

Resounds through the air without a star.

Voci alti e fioche,
Voices high and harsh,

Parole di dolore,
Words of sorrow,

Accenti dire,
Tongues of wrath,

Forever thrash through the air forever black.

.....

...in a silent valley, sing...

...yonder starry sphere
Of planets...mazes intricate...
...in their motions harmony divine...

Their song was partial; but the harmony
(What could it less when spirits immortal sing?)
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience.

IV. HERE TO ME FROM KRETE

Text by Sappho, trans. Anne Carson

here to me from Krete to this holy temple
where is your graceful grove
of apple trees and altars smoking
with frankincense.

And in it cold water makes a clear sound through
apple branches and with roses the whole place
is shadowed and down from radiant-shaking leaves
sleep comes dropping.

And in it a horse meadow has come into bloom
with spring flowers and breezes
like honey are blowing

In this place you Kypris taking up
in gold cups delicately
nectar mingled with festivities:
pour.

V. NAUFRAGIUM

Text by Erasmus, from Naufragium

Original Latin

Translation

Desii esse dominus navis meae; vicere venti!

I am no longer master of my ship; the winds are victorious!

Reliquum est ut spem nostram collocemus in Deo!

All that remains is to put our hope in God!

Et quisque se paret ad extrema!

And to prepare for the end!

O clementissimum Mare!

O merciful sea!

O generosisimum Mare!

O generous sea!

O fortmosissimum Mare!

O beautiful sea!

I. Prologue

Suggested staging: performers enter from the back of the concert space or from within the audience, converging on the piano by p.5.

Text by Plato, Theobaldus of Cambridge, and Soper

Chantlike and very free: tempo may ebb and flow

$\text{♩} = 66 - 76$

melodic lines/text foregrounded over drone notes *sempre* *gliss.* [to ah→]

Soprano 1 *pp* [Ah] ho - ten ka-to - ran [n] [to oh→] [to ah→]

Soprano 2 *pp* [Ah] Kai a-phik nai- stai [oh] [n] [to oh→] [to n→] [to ah→]

Soprano 3 *pp* [Ah] te-tar-ta - ous [oh] [n] [to n→] [to ah→]



7 *p* [to oo→] *mp* [to oo→]

S1 [ah] ou - ra-nou [eh] [to oo→]

S2 *p* [to oo→] *mp* [to eh→] a-no - ten [oo] [eh] Te

S3 *p* *mp* [ah] di-a pan - tos tou - - - kai - ges [eh]

I. Prologue

2

15

S1 ma - li - sta-te

S2 ta me-non phos *p (echo)* pro - phe-re [to ah→]

S3 I - ri-de [to ah→]

21

S1 Lam - pro-ter-on [n] ek - de ton [n] *p*

S2 *mp* [to n→] [ah] [n] de kai ka-ta-ro te-ran a - kron [n] *p*

S3 [to n→] [ah] [n] *p* Te *p*

26

S1 *p* a - nan - kes [ah] *mp* [to eh→]

S2 [to ah→] [ah] a - trak - ton [ah] *mp* *p* [to eh→]

S3 [to ah→] ta me-non [n] [ah] *mp* *p* di hou pas - sas *mp*

Pages 3 - 4 omitted.

Suggested staging: performers hunch over piano in contorted, witchy postures.

70 *f sempre, non vib., brash*

S1
Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra ma - ris re - son - an - ti - a

Pno. *Scrape high-register metal pins w/glass slide*
f sempre

S2
Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra ma - ris re - son - an - ti - a mag - nis

Pno. *Scrape mid-register metal bolts w/glass slide*
f sempre

S3
Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra ma - ris re - so - nan - ti - a mag - nis vo - ci -

Pno. *Scrape one low coiled string w/coin or pic*
f sempre

74

S1
mag - nis vo - ci - bus! Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra

Pno.

S2
vo - ci - bus! Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra ma - ris re - son - an - ti -

Pno.

S3
bus! Si - ren - es sunt mon - stra ma - ris re - son - an - ti - a mag - nis vo - ci - bus!

Pno.

* Soprano 1 and 2 from mm.70-98 may be easier to perform if imagined in 5/4 and 4/4 respectively, with downbeats articulated by their percussive gestures.

I. Prologue

6

79

S1
ma - ris re - son - an - ti - a mag - nis vo - ci -

Pno.

S2
a mag - nis vo - ci - bus! Et mo - dul - lis can -

Pno.

Meno f, poco espr., poco vib.

(stopped w/finger)

f

Ped. sempre

molto espr., vib.

p

S3
Et mod - u - lis can - tus for - man - ti - a mul - tis Quae fa -

Pno.

Scrape metal bolts with glass slide

f

p sempre

Suggested staging: performers begin to change their bearing and affect from twisted and menacing to soft and graceful.

83

Meno f, poco espr., poco vib.

S1
bus! Et mo - du - lis can - tus for - man ti - a

Pno.

Scrape highest strings with slide

f decresc.

molto espr., vib.

p *mf*

S2
tus for - man - ti - a mul - tis Quae fa - ci - unt so -

Pno.

f

p sempre

mf *p* *p* *mf* *p*

S3
ci - unt so - ni - tum so - ni - tum

Pno.

Pages 7 - 8 omitted.

Suggested staging: as they split from unison into counterpoint, performers peel away from piano to sing in a spatialized formation (one performer remains at the piano to play)

Sensual, relaxed: ♩≈80

100 *Stagger breathing*

All

Pno.

pp sempre
Red.

Red.

sim.

107 *p*

All

— With star - ry o - pals in her eyes, and beads of co - ral

Pno.

114

All

in her hair, a girl up - on the sea - rock lies, be - calm - ing

Pno.

I. Prologue

10

121 *S1/S3 only*
p
 All Earth and sea and air. She drifts - a - long the flow' - ring reef, as
 S2 *p*
 She drifts - a - long the flow' - ring
 Pno.

128
 S1/S3 from the foun - tain of her throat, and o - ver the gleam - ing
 S2 reef, as from the foun - tain of her throat, and o - ver the
 Pno.

134 *Soprano 1 only*
p
 S1/S3 tongue and teeth, she pours out beau - ty, note by note. And
 S2 gleam - ing tongue and teeth, she pours out beau - ty, note by
 Pno.

Pages 11 - 14 omitted.

II. O Sailor

Text by Kate Soper

Intense and seductive ♩ = 56

S1 *p* *fp* *p*
O sail - or, O sail - lor, come

S2 *p* *fp* *fp*
O sail - - or, O sail - - - lor, come, come

S3 *p* *fp* *fp*
O sail - - or, O sail - or, come come

S1 *mp* *fp*
your an - chor's line is spun. [n] O sail - or,

S2 *mp* *fp* *fp*
your an - chor's line is spun. [n] O sail - or,

S3 *mp* *fp* *fp*
your an - - chor's line is spun. [n] O sail - or,

S1 *sub.p* *mp*
O hear, my bea - con (n) calls you near. O

S2 *sub.p* *mp*
sail - or hear, my bea - con (n) calls you near. O

S3 *p* *sub.p* *mp*
O hear my bea - con (n) calls you near. O

Pages 2 - 5 omitted.

III. Across the Turbid Waves/In a Silent Valley

Text by Dante (abridged/trans. Soper) and Milton

Each player has a pair of rocks. Begin by singing m.1 (sustained note) for at least 5 seconds: then, gradually and without coordinating, interrupt this note with the gestures in m.2 and 3 (alternate freely between these or repeat), always immediately returning to the sustained note in m.1. Begin by spacing gestures 3-5" apart, then increase frequency of gestures until texture is very active, with overlapping gestures between performers. Total duration of this system is ca. 25 seconds.

No metered time (*poco cresc. into gestures sempre*)

pp (*cresc. to **f** over total length*) *sfp* *sfp*

All: Ah Ah Ah

Piano: Strike rocks near strings Strike rocks near strings

Ped. (sempre) *f* *f*

Cont. previous material (highest density of gestures) *pp*

S1: Ah

Cont. previous material (highest density of gestures) *pp*

S2: Ah

(*Ped. depressed sempre.: voices will resonate strings*)

ff *pp*

S3: A - - - - cross Ah

As in first system, begin with held note and then introduce gestures *ad lib.*, always returning to held note and increasing frequency/density of gestures. Total duration of these three measures is ca. 20".

pp (*cresc. to **f** over total length*) *sfp* *sfp* *Tutti* *p*

All: A - - - cross cross The

Pno.: Strike rocks near strings Strike rocks near strings

f *f*

Sluggish $\text{♩} \approx 46$

10 *ff lean into piano: voice will resonate*

S1 tur - - - - bid waves _____ a

ff lean into piano: voice will resonate
quasi-gliss. *slow gliss.*

S2 tur - - - - bid waves _____ a

ff lean into piano: voice will resonate
quasi-gliss. *slow gliss.*

S3 tur - - - - bid waves _____ a

Pno. *Slap low strings with palm*

ff
Ped. _____ \wedge Ped. (capture resonance of unison) (Ped. sempre)

ca. 15"

As before, sing gestures *ad lib.*, always returning to held note, increasing density over time.

14 *f* *p* *f* vib.

All clang _____ Ah _____ clang

Pno. *Strike rocks near strings*

Sluggish $\text{♩} \approx 46$

17 *f* *f* *sfz* *f*

S1 *Cont. previous material* of sound _____ (D) sound _____ of

S2 *p* *f* *sfz* *f* clang _____ of sound _____ (D) sound _____ of

S3 *Cont. previous material* *f* *sfz* *f* of sound _____ (D) sound _____ of

Pno. *Slap low strings with palm*

Ped. *f* _____ *

Pages 3 - 7 omitted.

60 (Stagger breathe)

S1

(Stagger breathe)

S2

(Stagger breathe)

S3

With damper pedal down and low strings still resonating, silently depress as many keys as possible in the lowest 2.5 octaves, depress sost. pedal to capture their resonance, and lift damper pedal.

Piano

8th

n (silently depress) (lift damper)

Sost. Ped. sempre

Serenely unfurling, ♩=63

pp Always strive for maximum intelligibility of the text through ensemble balance: when singing a word or syllable, come to the foreground. When sustaining a syllable, recede.

61

S1

In a si - - len [n]

pp Always strive for maximum intelligibility of the text through ensemble balance: when singing a word or syllable, come to the foreground. When sustaining a syllable, recede.

S2

In a [n] t'val - ley

pp Always strive for maximum intelligibility of the text through ensemble balance: when singing a word or syllable, come to the foreground. When sustaining a syllable, recede.

S3

[æ]

In [N] va

Pno.

pp sempre
(sost. Ped. sempre)

63

S1 *p* *pp*

S2 *pp* *pp*

S3 *p* *pp*

Pno. *p*

(keep Sost. *Leg. sempre*)

Damp all ringing low strings quietly with hands:
low strings in sost. will softly resonate throughout.

66

S1 *p* [eɪ]

S2 *p* [eɪ]

S3 *p* [eɪ]

Pno. *ppp sempre*

star _____ Of [v] _____ ma

star - ry _____ nets _____ a - zes

Yon - der _____ sphere _____ pla [n] _____ a _____

Pages 10 - 13 omitted.

IV. Here to Me from Krete

Text by Sappho (trans. Anne Carson)

♩ = 63-72 *Freely, luxuriously; with exquisite delicacy*

P stagger breathing when necessary

All here to me from Krete to this ho - ly tem ple where is your grace - full

Piano bowed by player 1
mp
Red. sempre

8

All grove of a - pple trees and al - tars smo - king with fran kin - cense.

Pno. *new note bowed by player 2*

15 *p* *mp* *sub pp* *p*

All And in it cold wa ter makes a clear sound through a - ppla bran - ches and with

Pno.

21 *mp* *p* *p* *mf*

All ro - ses the whole place is sha dowed and down from ra - diant sha - king leaves

Pno.

Pages 2 - 3 omitted.

V. Naufragium

Text by Erasmus

Brutal and terrifying: ♩ = 108

S1 $\frac{4}{4}$

S2 $\frac{4}{4}$

S3 $\frac{4}{4}$

(Shouting)
Desii esse dominus navis meae; vicere venti!

Player 1: Hit thin metal square on low strings with timpani mallet for a clanging thud (place metal sheet before first downbeat)

Piano $\frac{4}{4}$

ff
Ped. sempre (pedal played by any performer)

4 (Shouting)
Reliquum est, ut spem nostram collocemus in Deo!

Pei.

(Shouting)
Et quisque se paret ad extrema!

Pol.

Pha.

Player 2: play treble chords

Pno. $\frac{4}{4}$

f sempre

V. Naufragium

"tongue trill" (rapidly flutter tongue at front of mouth)

8 *f* *f* *f* *f* *fp* *fp*

Pei. Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah

"tongue trill" (rapidly flutter tongue at front of mouth)

Pol. Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah

"tongue trill" (rapidly flutter tongue at front of mouth)

Pha. Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah Ah

Pno. *f*

f sempre

Player 1: Remove metal square and use to scrape low strings (x noteheads)
Continue to beat low strings with timpani mallet (square noteheads)

15 *fp* *ff*

Pei. Ah O cle-men - ti - si-mum Ma - re, O gen-er-o - si - si-mum Ma - re,

Pol. Ah O cle-men - ti - si-mum Ma - re, O gen-er - o - si - si-mum Ma - re,

Pha. Ah O clem - en - ti - ssi-mum Ma-re, gen er - o - si - si-mum

Pno. *f* sempre

Players 2 & 3: Scrape glass slides or rocks across metal piano bolts

Player 1: Tremolo timp. mallet on low strings
Scrape metal on strings as indicated

20

Pei. *Sing directly into piano, mouth <1 inch away from strings*

O for-mos - si - si-mum Ma - re, O

Pol. *Sing directly into piano, mouth <1 inch away from strings*

O for-mos - si - si-mum Ma - re, O

Pha. *Sing directly into piano, mouth <1 inch away from strings*

Ma-re for - mo - si - si - mum O

Pno. l.v. Ped. \wedge

Pedalling player: clear ped., then immediately redamp to capture vocal resonance in strings