

# Songs of Libby Larsen

Tracey Engleman, soprano Lara Bolton, piano

#### **Cowboy Songs**

- 1 Bucking Bronco 2:36
- 2 Lift Me into Heaven Slowly 2:37
- 3 Billy the Kid 1:10

### Songs from Letters: Calamity Jane to her daughter Janey

- 4 So Like your Father's 1:44
- 5 He Never Misses 1:44
- 6 A Man Can Love Two Women 2:44
- 7 A Working Woman 4:18
- 8 All I Have 3:56

#### My Antonia

- 9 Landscape I: From the Train 2:29
- 10 Antonia 2:27
- 11 Landscape II: Winter 4:14
- 12 Hired Girls 1:38
- 13 Landscape III: Prairie Spring 0:51
- 14 Antonia in the Field 3:03
- 15 Landscape IV: Sunset 2:01

## Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII

- 16 Katherine of Aragon 2:59
- 17 Anne Boleyn 4:36
- 18 Jane Seymour 2:41
- 19 Anne of Cleves 1:26
- 20 Katherine Howard 4:15

-53:29-





Cowboy Songs, composed in 1979, are some of Larsen's earliest and most often performed art songs. Attempting to avoid "contrapuntal artifice and excess melisma" while capturing the elegance and simplicity of American English in what she considers an "early study in text setting," Larsen sought American texts from West of the Hudson. Drawing from two texts from American cowboy/cowgirl poetry (anonymous author of "Billy the Kid" and female outlaw, Belle Starr) and a third from Blue Mountain poet, Robert Creeley, Larsen creates three musically unique but thematically related vignettes. From the bucking horse brought to life through the piano in "Bucking Bronco," to the slow, spacious texture and utilization of the blues scale in "Lift Me into Heaven Slowly," to the interweaving of the American cowboy song "Goodbye, Old Paint" in "Billy the Kid," Larsen's writing creates vivid characters and images of the Old West.

When Songs from Letters was commissioned by Mary Elizabeth Poore in 1989, Larsen was traveling extensively and, as the mother of a young daughter, trying to balance her own career and motherhood. At the suggestion of a friend, Larsen began to explore the life of Calamity Jane as told through the book "Calamity Jane's Letters to her Daughter," published in 1976. Despite the debate about the authenticity of these letters, the Calamity Jane letters resonated with Larsen on many levels: the challenges faced by working women, the honesty of the mother-daughter relationship, and the directness and pride of the language. The cycle reveals the various facets of Calamity Jane's character; despite the pride, bravado, and unapologetic conviction regarding her life choices, we sense sorrow tinged with regret for missing so much of her daughter's life. Calamity Jane is the protagonist, while circumstance is the antagonist.

In sharp contrast to the spacious opening of *Songs from Letters, My Antonia* begins with the pianist playing in the belly of piano with a rolling rhythmic motive that clearly depicts a train. The cycle begins and ends with the main character, Jim, traveling by train back to the Nebraska countryside. Between these musical bookends, we learn of the story of Jim and a young immigrant girl, Antonia, the harsh realities of early life on the Midwestern plains, and of lives on different trajectories. While the train becomes the character of "change," the landscape of the countryside becomes a central figure acting as the backdrop for the story. Larsen uses tempo, texture, and rhythm in the piano to depict elements of the natural landscape—from biting winter winds and sunsets over the horizon, to the rustling of spring on the prairie, the seasonal changes correlate to the various seasons of Jim and Antonia's relationship.

A life-long fascination with the Tudors and a commission by the Marilyn Horne Foundation led to the composition of Try Me, Good King in 2001. The texts are drawn from the final letters and gallows speeches of five of Henry VIII's six wives. Interwoven throughout each song are lute songs by Elizabethan composers Dowland, Campion, and Praetorius, which establish the tradition and atmosphere of the interior of the court. Other unifying gestures are repeated notes reminiscent of the plucking of a lute string, tolling bells, and rhythmic/melodic repetition marking the passage of time and the inevitability of death. A pervasive minor second marks the contrast between the Human and the Divine, and the emotions of anguish, anger, and fear. "In these songs, I chose to focus on the intimate crises of the heart" Larsen writes. "This group of songs is a monodrama of anguish and power."





With a voice the Boston Globe called "extraordinary in range, tonal quality, musicianship and dramatic effect," soprano **Tracey Engleman** has gained a reputation for excellence in opera, recital, and concert. Ms. Engleman was most recently awarded the prestigious 2016 McKnight Artist Fellowship for Musicians. Ms. Engleman has performed operatic roles with the Minnesota Opera, Minnesota Concert Opera, Skylark Opera, Music by the Lake, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. A particularly gifted performer of 20th century and contemporary music, Ms. Engleman has performed chamber music with Zeitgeist, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, the Tanglewood Music Center and the Boston Symphony and frequently premieres works by living composers. Oratorio and concert engagements include solo performances with the Minnesota Orchestra, the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Bel Canto Chorus, the Valley Chamber Chorale, Minnesota Choral Union, the Cannon Valley Orchestra, and the Rochester Choral Arts. As a proponent of art song and as a frequent recitalist, she has performed in recital at Orchestra Hall, Hope College, at the National Association of Teachers of Singing National Convention, Source Song Festival, and as part of the Schubert Club Courtroom Concert Series. An alumna of the Tanglewood Music Center and the Art Song Festival of Cleveland, Ms. Engleman's awards include Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Competition, 1st Place and "Audience Choice" winner in the Austin Lyric Opera Young Artist Competition, Finalist in the Sun Valley Opera Competition, recipient of the Minnesota NATS Artist Award, and winner of the Milwaukee Bel Canto Chorus Regional Artist Competition. Ms. Engleman earned B.M. Performance and Music Education degrees from St. Olaf College and M.M. and D.M.A. degrees from the University of Minnesota. In addition to a busy performing career, Dr. Engleman holds a tenure-track position at St. Olaf College where she teaches Applied Voice, Vocal Pedagogy and Vocal Solo Literature.



Pianist Lara Bolton has been engaged as a coach-pianist at Minnesota Opera, San Francisco Opera, Washington National Opera, San Diego Opera, Seattle Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, Opera Santa Barbara, West Bay Opera, Opera Colorado, Amarillo Opera, and Mill City Summer Opera where she currently acts as chorus master and principal pianist. Ms. Bolton is a former San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow and a Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist for the Washington National Opera. In addition to helping develop a Young Artist Program for Opera Santa Barbara, she has been a pianist for the Merola Opera Program, Music Academy of the West, Brevard Music Festival, and Interlochen Arts Camp. After attending Interlochen Arts Academy for high school, she received a B. M. Theory degree from the University of Michigan and a M.M. in Collaborative Piano from the University of Maryland-College Park. Ms. Bolton is on faculty at the University of Minnesota as a vocal coach, maintains a private coaching studio, and an active recital and recording career in both instrumental chamber music and vocal repertoire.







