

THE
**BRENTANO
STRING QUARTET**
AND
DAWN UPSHAW
DIDO REIMAGINED



Photo: Brooke Irish



Tuesday, October 25, 2022
7:30 pm

*A collaboration with the University of Iowa
String Quartet Residency Program*

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THE BRENTANO STRING QUARTET & DAWN UPSHAW

MARK STEINBERG, violin
MISHA AMORY, viola

SERENA CANIN, violin
NINA LEE, cello

DAWN UPSHAW, soprano

Tuesday, October 25, 2022, at 7:30 pm
Hancher Auditorium, the University of Iowa

PROGRAM

"O let me weep," from <i>The Fairy Queen</i> , Z629	Henry Purcell (1659–1695) arr. Mark Steinberg
Fantasia No. 5 for four viols in B-flat Major, Z736	Henry Purcell
Fantazie, from Suite No. 2 for four viols in D Minor/Major	Matthew Locke (1621–1677)
"Come again! Sweet love doth now invite"	John Dowland (1563–1626) arr. Stephen Prutsman
Courante, from Suite No. 2	Matthew Locke
"Can she excuse my wrongs"	John Dowland arr. Stephen Prutsman
Ayre, from Suite No. 2	Matthew Locke
"Weep you no more, sad fountains"	John Dowland arr. Stephen Prutsman
Saraband, from Suite No. 2	Matthew Locke
<i>Alman</i>	Thomas Tomkins (1572–1656)
"Though Amaryllis dance in green"	William Byrd (1543–1623)
<i>The Witty Wanton</i>	Robert Johnson (1583–1633)
Fantasia No. 7 for four viols in C Minor, Z738	Henry Purcell
"When I am laid in earth" (Dido's Lament) from <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> , Z626	Henry Purcell

INTERMISSION

Dido Reimagined
a response to Purcell's "Lament"

Music by Melinda Wagner
Libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann

Dido Reimagined was commissioned by Chamber Music Northwest, Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College, Interlochen Center for the Arts, Rockport Music, Tisch Center for the Arts at 92nd St. Y, Wake Forest University - Secrest Artists Series, and the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Center

The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists
davidroweartists.com | brentanoquartet.com

Dawn Upshaw appears by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management, Inc. | colbertartists.com

Melinda Wagner is represented by Theodore Presser Company | presser.com

Stephanie Fleischmann is represented by The Barbara Hogenson Agency, Inc. | barbarahogenson@gmail.com

EVENT PARTNERS

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The Brentano String Quartet

MARK STEINBERG, violin
SERENA CANIN, violin
MISHA AMORY, viola
NINA LEE, cello

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. “Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding,” raves the London *Independent*; *The New York Times* extols its “luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism.”

Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award and was also honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut. Since then, the Quartet has concertized widely, performing in the world’s most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet maintains a strong interest in contemporary music and has commissioned many new works. Their latest project, a monodrama for quartet and voice called “Dido Reimagined,” was composed by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Melinda Wagner and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, and premiered in spring 2022 with soprano Dawn Upshaw. Other recent commissions include the composers Matthew Aucoin, Lei Liang, Vijay Iyer, James MacMillan, and a cello quintet by Steven Mackey (with Wilhelmina Smith, cello.)

The Brentano Quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. They have also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida. The Quartet has recorded works by Mozart and Schubert for Azica Records, and all of Beethoven’s late quartets for the Aeon label. In 2012, they provided the central music (Beethoven op. 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as artists in residence at the Yale School of Music. They were formerly the ensemble in residence at Princeton University, and were twice invited to be the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved,” the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DAWN UPSHAW, soprano

Joining a rare natural warmth with a fierce commitment to the transforming communicative power of music, Dawn Upshaw has achieved worldwide celebrity as a singer of opera and concert repertoire ranging from the sacred works of Bach to the freshest sounds of today. Her ability to reach to the heart of music and text has earned her both the devotion of an exceptionally diverse audience, and the awards and distinctions accorded to only the most distinguished of artists. In 2007, she was named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation, the first vocal artist to be awarded the five-year “genius” prize, and in 2008 she was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Her acclaimed performances on the opera stage comprise the great Mozart roles (Susanna, Ilia, Pamina, Despina, and Zerlina) as well as modern works by Stravinsky, Poulenc, and Messiaen. From Salzburg, Paris, and Glyndebourne to the Metropolitan Opera, where she began her career in 1984 and has since made nearly 300 appearances, Dawn Upshaw has also championed numerous new works created for her including *The Great Gatsby* by John Harbison; the Grawemeyer Award–winning opera, *L’Amour de Loin* and oratorio *La Passion de Simone* by Kaija Saariaho; John Adams’s Nativity oratorio *El Niño*; and Osvaldo Golijov’s chamber opera *Ainadamar* and song cycle *Ayre*.

It says much about Dawn Upshaw’s sensibilities as an artist and colleague that she is a favored partner of many leading musicians, including Gilbert Kalish, the Kronos Quartet, James Levine, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. In her work as a recitalist, and particularly in her work with composers, Dawn Upshaw has become a generative force in concert music, having premiered more than 25 works in the past decade. From Carnegie Hall to large and small venues throughout the world she regularly presents specially designed programs composed of lieder, contemporary works in many languages, and folk and popular music. She furthers this work in master classes and workshops with young singers at major music festivals, conservatories, and liberal arts colleges. She is the head of the Vocal Arts Program at the Tanglewood Music Center and was the founding artistic director of the Vocal Arts Program at the Bard College Conservatory of Music.

A five-time Grammy Award–winner, Dawn Upshaw is featured on more than 50 recordings, including the million-selling Symphony No. 3 by Henryk Górecki for Nonesuch Records. Her discography also includes full-length opera recordings of Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*; Messiaen’s *St. François d’Assise*; Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*; John Adams’s *El Niño*; two volumes of Canteloube’s *Songs of the Auvergne*, a dozen recital recordings, and an acclaimed three-disc series of Osvaldo Golijov’s music for Deutsche Grammophon. She received the 2014 Best Classical Vocal Solo Grammy for Maria Schneider’s *Winter Morning Walks* on the ArtistShare Label.

Dawn Upshaw holds honorary doctorate degrees from Yale, the Manhattan School of Music, the Juilliard School, Allegheny College, and Illinois Wesleyan University. She began her career as a 1984 winner of the Young Concert Artists Auditions and the 1985 Walter W. Naumburg Competition, and was a member of the Metropolitan Opera Young Artists Development Program.



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ms. Upshaw has recorded extensively for the Nonesuch label. She may also be heard on Angel/EMI, BMG, Deutsche Grammophon, London, Sony Classical, Telarc, and on Erato and Teldec in the Warner Classics Family of labels.

MELINDA WAGNER, composer

Hailed as an "...eloquent, poetic voice in contemporary music..." (*American Record Guide*), Melinda Wagner achieved widespread attention when her colorful *Concerto for Flute, Strings and Percussion* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1999. Since then, major compositions have included *Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra*, for Joseph Alessi and the New York Philharmonic, and a piano concerto, *Extremity of Sky*, commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for Emanuel Ax, who has also performed it with the National Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony, the Staatskapelle Berlin, and the Kansas City Symphony. In all, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has commissioned three works by Wagner: *Falling Angels*, *Extremity of Sky*, and a new work, *Proceed, Moon*, which received its premiere under the baton of Susanna Mälkki in 2017. Other recent commissions include *Elegy Flywheel*, composed for the New York Philharmonic's *Project 19* series, and *Dido Reimagined*, for Dawn Upshaw and the Brentano String Quartet.

Wagner's works have been performed by many other leading ensembles, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, American Brass Quintet, the American Composers Orchestra, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.

Among honors Wagner has received is a Guggenheim Fellowship, and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and ASCAP. In 2001, Wagner received an honorary doctorate from Hamilton College, and she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2017. Project support has come from the Barlow Endowment, the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, and the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

A passionate and inspiring teacher, Melinda Wagner is currently chair of the Department of Composition at the Juilliard School. She has presented master classes at many institutions including Harvard, Yale, Cornell, the Cleveland Institute, and Eastman. She recently served as master artist at the Atlantic Center for the Arts and distinguished visiting professor at the Frost School of Music, University of Miami. Ms. Wagner has been a mentor composer at the Wellesley Composers Conference (2010, 2012, 2013) and the American Composers Orchestra Underwood New Music and EarShot Readings. Other residencies include the Bowdoin, Yellow Barn, Monadnock, and Vail Valley Music Festivals, the MacDowell Colony, and in 2021, the Atlantic Music Festival.

"Imagine Elliott Carter and Olivier Messiaen teaming up to write a concerto, add a certain lithe sense of mystery that is Wagner's own and you'll have some idea of *Extremity of Sky*." When Tim Page wrote those words in the *Washington Post* about Wagner's *Piano Concerto*, he also referred to its "prismatic color and romantic fantasy." Time and time again, commentators on Wagner's music use a similarly rich, highly descriptive, emotive vocabulary.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

In the composer's own words: "Music offers composers an immeasurably rich and generous sonic landscape in which to explore the 'life story' of each musical idea—its dramas, intrigues, joys and sorrows—a life. I strive to find various and persuasive ways of moving through the resulting temporal narrative, and to traverse a wide spectrum of expression and color on the way. Ultimately, I want listeners to know me; I want them to hear that while I enjoy the cerebral exercise, I am led principally by my ear, and by my heart."

Ms. Wagner lives in New Jersey with her husband, percussionist James Saporito, and their children.

STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN, librettist

Stephanie Fleischmann is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Her "lyrical monologues" (*The New York Times*), "smart" opera libretti (*Opera News*), plays, and music-theater works have been performed internationally and across the United States.

Libretti (upcoming): *In a Grove* (Christopher Cerrone; Pittsburgh & LA Opera); *Another City* (Jeremy Howard Beck; Houston Grand Opera); *The Pigeon Keeper* (David Hanlon; Santa Fe Opera); *Arkhipov* (Peter Knell; Seattle Opera/Jacaranda). Operas premiered: *Poppaea* (Michael Hersch; Wien Moderne, Vienna, & ZeitRäume Basel); *The Long Walk* (Opera Saratoga, Utah Opera, Pittsburgh Opera); *After the Storm* (HGOco); *The Property* (Chicago Lyric Unlimited). Current collaborations: Matthew Recio (COT; West Edge's Aperture), Justine F. Chen, Christina Campanella; Julia Adolphe. Texts for voice: Anna Clyne (Scottish National Chamber Orchestra), Chris Cerrone (Yale/Northeastern), Gity Razaz (Brooklyn Youth Chorus), Olga Neuwirth (Aldeburgh, Basel, Berlin).

Selected plays/music-theater works: *Dio* (Daniel Kluger); *Sound House* (the Flea/ New Georges); *The Visitation*, a sound walk (HERE) and *Red Fly/Blue Bottle* (HERE; EMPAC, Noorderzon, NL), both with Christina Campanella and Mallory Catlett; *Niagara* (Bobby Previte/Daniel Fish; Hudson Opera House); *The Secret Lives of Coats* (Red Eye, Minneapolis); *The Sweetest Life* (New Victory LabWorks); *Eloise & Ray* (New Georges); *Orpheus* (HERE). Performed/developed via: Roundhouse Studio (London), Exit Festival (France), MASS MoCA, Birmingham Rep (UK), Synchronicity, Roadworks, Son of Semele, Soho Rep, Mabou Mines/SUITE, Public Theater.

Grants/Fellowships: Café Royal Cultural Foundation, Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Venturous Theater Fund, Howard Foundation Fellowship, 3 NYSCA Individual Artist Commissions, NEA Opera/Music-Theater, 3 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, Tennessee Williams Fellowship, Frederick Loewe and Whitfield Cook Awards; MAPFund, Opera America, NY State Music Fund, Greenwall Foundation, Mid-Atlantic Fund, Macdowell, Hedgebrook. Alumna: New Dramatists; New Georges Audrey Residency; American Lyric Theater; HARP; Playwrights Center Core Writer. BFA: Wesleyan University; MFA: Brooklyn College. She taught playwriting at Skidmore College for nine years.

PROGRAM NOTES

Introduction to the Purcell, Dowland, Locke, Tomkins, Byrd, and Johnson Selections

By Mark Steinberg

Imagine yourself before a painting by Vermeer. The light is soft, yet penetrating. The captured moment is inward, almost clandestine, yet here we are gazing into it, in relationship with it. The scene is simple, mundane even, yet replete with intricate detail, rewarding close attention. The intimacy of the experience, unassuming and direct, can also be piercingly emotional. We see the painting; simultaneously it seems to see into us.

This blending of interiority with revelation, this clarity of vision melding the rational and the instinctive, is a quality often evinced by the English music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. We, as a string quartet, have in our ancestry the plaintive, pungent voices of the viol family, as well as the idea of the viol consort as an intimate gathering of friends conversing, cavorting, and entangling strands of sense and sound. Our group has long been enriched by exploring this repertoire, enjoying the vibrant camaraderie and the *frisson* of lines that lean into each other as they both frolic and keen. The song repertoire of the period is, if anything, even more vulnerable, delicate, and disarmingly pellucid. Gathering works here by composers Henry Purcell, John Dowland, Matthew Locke, Thomas Tomkins, William Byrd, and Robert Johnson (who supplied music for Shakespeare's productions) gives us a chance to shrink the concert hall into a parlor, to invite our audience to be our confidantes. The music combines elements of the public and the private; the listener can eavesdrop on the proceedings, can get drawn into the conversations and collisions, the friendliness and the frictions.

And with whom better to do this than Dawn Upshaw, a treasured collaborator of ours? Dawn has a way, when she sings, of making you feel she is speaking plainly, with utter candor, right to you, so beautifully suited to music both confessional and personal. The first half of our collaborative program weaves together instrumental and vocal music, starting and ending with Purcell arias on love and loss. The final aria, the perennially beloved *Dido's Lament*, opens the door for the great new monodrama on the second half, Melinda Wagner and Stephanie Fleischmann's *Dido Reimagined*, a reexamination of the archetypal figure of Dido, an operatic investigation drawn into the world of chamber music. It is with great gratitude for this new work and great excitement for the opportunity to discover it and bring it to life that we offer this program.

On *Dido Reimagined*

By Stephanie Fleischmann

Dido, Queen of Carthage, was a remarkable woman. Unlike many heroines in the pantheon of Greek and Roman mythology, her beginnings were not rooted in aether. Nor was she merely a figment of the classical imagination. A historical figure who became myth, Dido has shifted shape and agendas through the ages. She has been transmogrified from lived personage to fictional character by Virgil in *The Aeneid*; by playwrights Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe in the play, *Dido, Queen of*

PROGRAM NOTES

Carthage; and by Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate in their opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, from which this evening's "Lament" is excerpted; as well as by writers from Ovid to Dante, from Petrarch to Chaucer and beyond.

The real Dido, whose name evokes meanings encompassing "beloved" and "the wanderer," was most likely a Phoenician queen of the city-state of Tyre, which is now Şūr, in Lebanon. After Dido's brother murdered her husband, she fled to what is currently Tunisia, where the Berber king Iarbas offered her as much land as could be encircled by an ox hide. Dido cut the hide into strips, exponentially expanding the perimeter of her new kingdom, which would become Carthage, the prosperous city-state she founded. The "Dido Problem" in mathematics—the oldest problem in the Calculus of Variations—takes its name from Dido's innovative thinking. King Iarbas's offering did not come without strings attached. To avoid having to marry him, Dido built a funeral pyre and committed suicide, a practice not uncommon during the Greco-Roman era. In Dido's clear-sighted hands, the gesture took the form of political protest.

When Melinda Wagner and I first spoke about writing a contemporary *Dido* for Dawn Upshaw and the Brentano String Quartet, we knew immediately that our Dido would not partake of the depiction of women imprinted on us by men through the centuries. We knew, too, that Dido's epic love for Aeneas and her self-immolation in response to what she perceived as his abandonment of her—romantic tropes devised by Virgil and immortalized by Purcell and Tate (for Aeneas post-dated Dido by anywhere between 50 and 400 years)—needed to metamorphose in our hands. We were compelled by the notion of an epic love in contemporary times. What form might that take for a powerfully strong, complex woman of today, who has long realized her full potential in terms of both career and family? A woman whose experience of first love is but a distant memory. How does she allow herself to get so knocked off kilter, so swept off her feet? What is the fallout of that? In both Virgil and Purcell/Tate's versions, Dido's lovesickness is incited and meddled with by Venus and Juno. But in an era without any gods, where does that intensity of feeling come from? It seemed to us that there was no better medium than music with which to explore this question.

Dido of ancient times, whether real or fictional, had no choice. Our Dido, however, has the power to determine her own fate. I have been lucky enough to keep returning, over the years, to a writing retreat on an island where there are no cars, no shops, only a few houses, and a landscape strewn with ancient rocks, covered with windblown trees, and ringed by sea. Our Dido's refuge was inspired by my time in this place. Our Dido does not choose death. She removes herself from the everyday world, she chooses solitude. She returns to nature, she becomes one with it.

Together, Melinda and I have attempted to make something between a song cycle and a monodrama. A piece of music drama that is simultaneously journey and meditation. A reflection on the power of love, on the passage of time, on loss, resilience, and the restorative power of a disappearing world.

SONG TEXTS

“O let me weep” (Purcell)

O let me forever weep!
My Eyes no more shall welcome sleep:

I'll hide me from the sight of Day,
and sigh my Soul away.

He's gone, his loss deplore;
and I shall never see him more.

O let me weep! forever weep!

“Come again! Sweet love doth now invite” (Dowland) (selected verses)

Come again!
Sweet love doth now invite
Thy graces that refrain
To do me due delight,
To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die,
With thee again in sweetest sympathy.

All the night
My sleeps are full of dreams,
My eyes are full of streams.
My heart takes no delight
To see the fruits and joys that some do find
And mark the storms are me assign'd.

Come again!
That I may cease to mourn
Through thy unkind disdain;
For now left and forlorn
I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die
In deadly pain and endless misery.

“Can she excuse my wrongs” (Dowland)

Can she excuse my wrongs with virtue's cloak?
shall I call her good when she proves unkind?
Are those clear fires which vanish into smoke?
must I praise the leaves where no fruit I find?

No, no: where shadows do for bodies stand,
thou may'st be abused if thy sight be dim.

SONG TEXTS

Cold love is like to words written on sand,
or to bubbles which on the water swim.

Wilt thou be thus abused still,
seeing that she will right thee never?
if thou canst not overcome her will,
thy love will be thus fruitless ever.

Was I so base, that I might not aspire
Unto those high joys which she holds from me?
As they are high, so high is my desire:
If she this deny what can granted be?

If she will yield to that which reason is,
It is reasons will that love should be just.
Dear make me happy still by granting this,
Or cut off delays if that I die must.

Better a thousand times to die,
then for to live thus still tormented:
Dear but remember it was I
Who for thy sake did die contented.

"Weep you no more, sad fountains" (Dowland)

Weep you no more, sad fountains;
What need you flow so fast?
Look how the snowy mountains
Heaven's sun doth gently waste.
But my sun's heavenly eyes
View not your weeping,
That now lie sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

Sleep is a reconciling,
A rest that peace begets.
Doth not the sun rise smiling
When fair at even he sets?
Rest you then, rest, sad eyes,
Melt not in weeping
While she lies sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

SONG TEXTS

"Though Amaryllis dance in green" (Byrd) (selected verses)

Though Amaryllis dance in green
 Like Fairy Queen,
 And sing full clear;
Corinna can, with smiling cheer.
Yet since their eyes make heart so sore,
Hey ho! chil love no more.

My sheep are lost for want of food
 And I so wood
 That all the day
I sit and watch a herd-maid gay;
Who laughs to see me sigh so sore,
Hey ho! chil love no more.

"When I am laid in earth" (Purcell; Nahum Tate, text)

When I am laid in earth,
May my wrongs create
No trouble in thy breast;
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.

INTERMISSION

Dido Reimagined ***a response to Purcell's "Lament"***

a monodrama
for Dawn Upshaw & the Brentano String Quartet
music by MELINDA WAGNER
libretto by STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN © 2019

EPIGRAPHS

He sought her. He sought her everywhere. Through the nakednesses
of his imagination. In sorrow. In foxholes. As deer flicker way off in a wood in late
winter.

...

This wind at Night carrying it all over the Sky like Quartets
or Dido surviving between Lightning Sets.

—Anne Carson, *The Beauty of the Husband*

SONG TEXTS

For to wish to forget how much you loved someone—and then, to actually forget—can feel, at times, like the slaughter of a beautiful bird who chose, by nothing short of grace, to make a habitat of your heart. I have heard that this pain can be converted, as it were, by accepting “the fundamental impermanence of all things.” this acceptance bewilders me: sometimes it seems an act of will; at others, of surrender. Often I feel myself to be rocking between them (seasickness).

—Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

Some lovers do not commit suicide.

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

While rivers run into the sea and the shadows
still sweep the mountain slopes and stars still pasture
upon the sky, your name and praise and honor
shall last, whatever be the lands that call me.

—Virgil, *Dido & Aeneas*, Book 1
translated by Allen Mandelbaum

LIBRETTO

1. *end of summer*

DIDO

I am not dead.

I did not die.

Overcome, I did not throw myself

on the funeral pyre—

or off the roof,

nine stories high.

I did not thrust myself over the balcony railing,

or fill a bath, lock the door,

and bleed myself to death

like a good, honorable Roman.

I am not dead.

I hijacked a lobster boat instead—

Ursa, the bear—

ordered her skipper to take me north;

motored eight hours up the coast

against the wind,

whitecaps scarring obsidian sea,

detritus of a parade of distant storms—

hurricane season—

charting our course.

SONG TEXTS

On the way, I saw:
a humpbacked whale,
dolphins circling the prow,
osprey, plovers, bluefish, bass,
an army of undulating jellyfish.
These were not Portuguese Men of war—
they were pink—
but they stung all the same.
I dove in. I wanted to be stung.
I wanted to feel the unbearable pain
scoring, piercing my shoulder blades.
I wanted one stinging pain to erase the other.

No, I am not dead.
I did not hijack a boat.
I stole a car
so my passage would not be traced,
on the run,
throttling past
I can't breathe, can't sleep, can't eat, I can't go on.

Or, I if I did not steal a car,
I took the bus,
paying my fare in cash,
riding beside
a grey-skinned, gravel-voiced
husk of a woman,
her allotment of hope
ransacked decades ago,
all the way from Port Authority,
its purgatorio,
to Sea Stone Harbor.

Not dead,
not wholly alive,
I hijacked a boat, stole a car, rode the bus,
rowed a dinghy across the sound,
mooring it here,
this island, overrun
with wild chamomile, asters, rosehips, goldenrod,
ancient spreading oak—
taking root in an old stone house,
salt air fading the patterns
papering the walls,
grazing meadows in the distance
littered with the sun-bleached bones of fallen sheep,
wild irises growing like gold
at the edges of ponds,
and the sea,
everywhere I turn.

SONG TEXTS

I came here, to this island,
and I stayed.
Away.
Apart from the pith of the world
but in it.
To reflect on what I'd lost.
To wrest myself from it.
To remember—
 deeper in,
 farther back—
turn that remembering
 inside out,
exhume yesterday,
resurrect tomorrow,
shed my skin,
shake it off,
sand between toes,
salt grasses underfoot,
trampled by the horses
that make this place their home.

2. *autumn*

DIDO
As a child, Dido summered here,
running wild, free,
riding the length of the island,
chasing flights of plovers, swallows,
traversing inlet and marsh,
glade and hollow,
tasting first love
before she wed,
before she was widowed—still young—
and turned her back on this place.

Left to her own devices,
she built an empire of her own,
filling the space her widowhood had left
with a flourishing.
Steady. Measured. Kind.
Generous.
She had known love.
She didn't need more of it.
And yet she was loved.
Her world was full.

Until she fell.

SONG TEXTS

3. *winter*

DIDO

You look up.

You see a man.

You see beauty

in the eyes of the other.

Red glow of glimmering hearth
on cold mornings in an old house—
the fire is lit.

You are undone.

Sleepless,

beset,

welter of racing heart

and melt of skin.

You will do anything

for those eyes,

undo all you have made—

stave off sense and care.

The you you thought you knew,

boxed up,

stashed safely away

from the long-ago throes of longing,

has betrayed you.

Jupiter raped Calisto.

Juno turned her into a bear.

Jupiter, who wanted to possess

the broken bear of a girl,

tossed Juno's *Ursa* to the night sky,

a constellation to navigate by:

Ursa major,

the Wagon,

the Big Dipper,

pointing north,

towards

Ursa Minor,

the pole star,

by which Ursula and her eleven-thousand martyred virgins

made their way—

tangle of femurs, pelvises, rib bones, eleven-hundred-year-old skulls—

resting in a reliquary in Cologne.

You are not dead.

You hijacked a lobster boat instead—

Ursa, the bear—

SONG TEXTS

4. *spring*

DIDO

Cove, silt, ash, peat,
common tern's blazing beak,
blue heron standing by.

I am old. Weathered.

Winter on this island,
a thing to behold.

Lone inhabitant.

Mail boat bringing supplies
every odd week—

olive oil, oranges, kerosene,
envelopes,

post-marked the world over,
Dido scrawled in the blurry
hand of the beloved.

I toss the letters, unopened,
into the smoldering flame
and set out,

across upland pasture,
through sepia woods,

past silent stones,
blind-siding lament

as I gather barnacles from tidal pools, moon stones on silver beach,
a riot of *rosa rugosa* heralding

yet another spring—

cove, silt, ash, peat,
common tern's blazing beak,
blue heron standing by.

5. *summer*

DIDO

Dido dissolves into the sea.

Dido disappears.

Elides with the horizon line.

Dido rises with the sun.

Rose light of dawn.

Clean, new air of day.

Dido doles out mist and squalls,

north winds,

sweet, still, surrendering

summer afternoons.

SONG TEXTS

Dido descends with the dark.
Silver moon washing the island.
Inky, starry sky.

But Dido doesn't die.
Dido remains.
Keeps coming back
each turning day.
In the crash of the waves
against the bow of the skiff,
the striped bass flocking the bay,
the bells sounding across the reach.
In the tall grass.
And the lichen-cragged stones,
the water-logged marsh,
the cormorant's cry,
the waiting heron,
the swallow's crossing,
the beech trees' stirring,
the big dipper
splayed across the night.
Dido wonders:
Is this what it is to die?
But no. Dead or alive, Dido knows:
She is love.
She is love.

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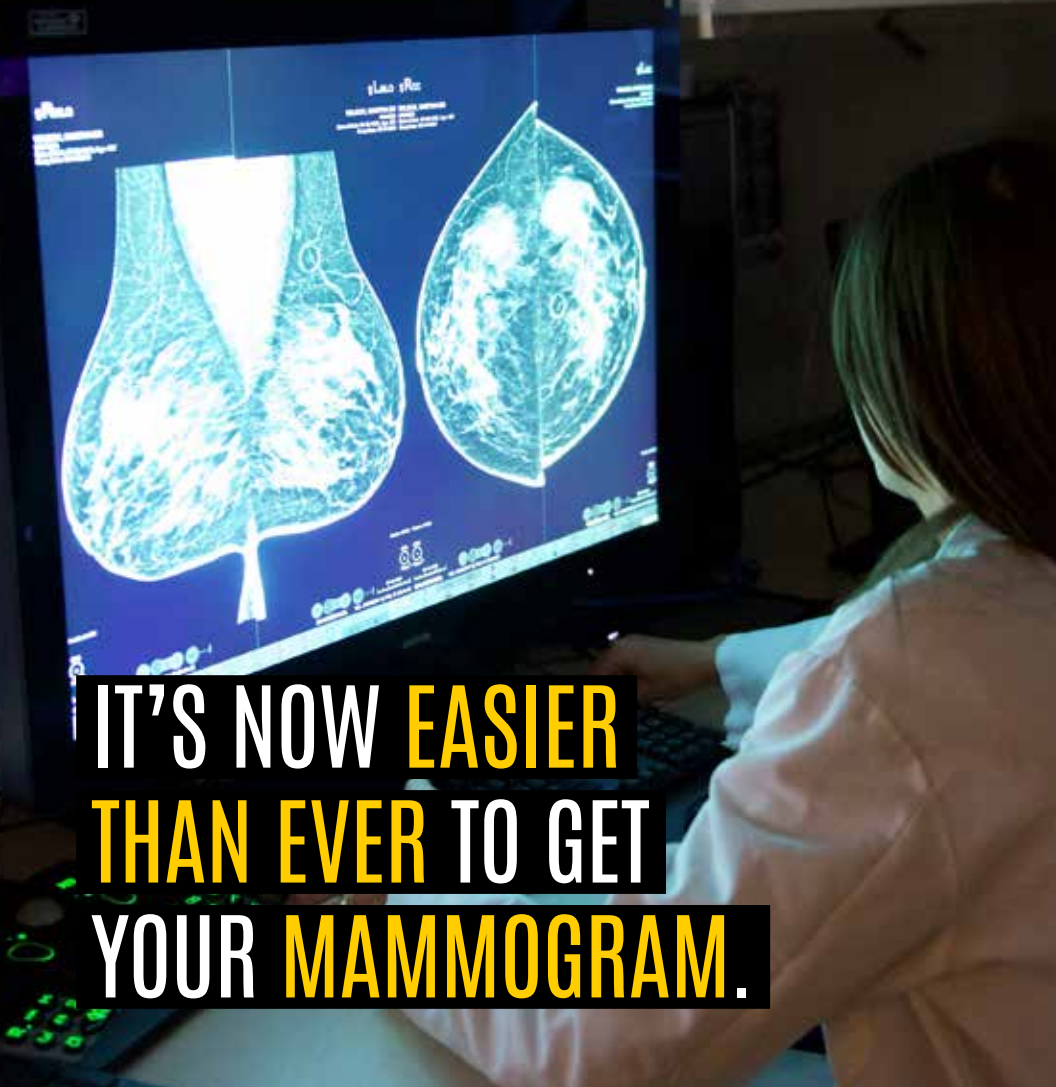
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