



EVERYONE SANG

Vocal Music of
David Conte

American Death Ballads • Three Poems of Christina Rossetti • Love
Songs • Everyone Sang • Lincoln • Sexton Songs • Requiem Songs

Disc 1

1. American Death Ballads: I. Wicked Polly
2. American Death Ballads: II. The Unquiet Grave
3. American Death Ballads: III. The Dying Californian
4. American Death Ballads: IV. Captain Kidd
5. Three Poems of Christina Rossetti: I. Rest
6. Three Poems of Christina Rossetti: II. Echo
7. Three Poems of Christina Rossetti: III. A Hope Carol
8. Love Songs: I. Levis Exurgit Zephrus
9. Love Songs: II. D'Anne qui me jetta de la neige
10. Love Songs: III. The Moment
11. Everyone Sang: I. Homecoming
12. Everyone Sang: II. Entrance
13. Everyone Sang: III. Quilt
14. Everyone Sang: IV. Everyone Sang

Available from E. C. Schirmer Music Company

<i>American Death Ballads</i>	8454 (High Voice), 8455 (Medium Voice)
<i>Three Poems of Christina Rossetti</i>	7544 (Mezzo-Soprano), 8056 (High Voice)
<i>Love Songs</i>	8548 (Tenor)
<i>Everyone Sang</i>	5333 (Baritone), 8215 (Bass)

Disc 2

1. Lincoln
2. Sexton Songs: I. Rowing
3. Sexton Songs: II. Her Kind
4. Sexton Songs: III. Ringing the Bells
5. Sexton Songs: IV. Riding the Elevator into the Sky
6. Sexton Songs: V. Us
7. Requiem Songs: I. Exaudi
8. Requiem Songs: II. Dies Irae
9. Requiem Songs: III. In Paradisum

Available from E. C. Schirmer Music Company

Lincoln
Sexton Songs
Requiem Songs

8081 (Baritone)
5635 (Soprano)
8068 (Soprano)



David Conte (b. 1955) is the composer of over one hundred works published by E. C. Schirmer Music Company and on many commercial recordings, including six operas, a musical, works for chorus, solo voice, orchestra, chamber ensemble, and instrumental pieces. He has received commissions from Chanticleer, the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, the Dayton, Oakland, and Stockton Symphonies, the Atlantic Classical Orchestra, the American Guild of Organists, Sonoma City Opera, the Gerbode Foundation, and, in 2007, the Raymond Brock commission from the American Choral Directors Association.

His six operas are *The Dreamers*, *The Gift of the Magi*, *Stone-wall*, *Famous* (based on the book *Famous for 15 Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol*, by Ultraviolet), *Firebird Motel*, and *America Tropical* (the latter two both commissioned by San Francisco theater company Thick Description, for whom Conte was Composer in Residence from 1991-2010). His musical, *The Passion of Rita St. James*, was produced at the San Francisco Conservatory in 2003. Conte's operas have been produced at the Berlin International Opera, University of Southern California, University of Minnesota, Hidden Valley Music Seminars, and many other colleges, universities, and regional companies. In addition to his opera compositions, Conte has composed songs for Matt Boehler, Barbara Bonney, Marnie Breckenridge, Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Catherine Cook, Thomas Hampson, Ann Moss, Kindra Scharich, and Brian Thorsett. He co-wrote

the film score for the acclaimed documentary *Ballets Russes*, shown at the Sundance and Toronto Film Festivals in 2005, and composed the music for the PBS documentary, *Orozco: Man of Fire*, shown on the American Masters Series in the fall of 2007.

Conte earned his Bachelor's degree from Bowling Green State University, where he studied with Wallace DePue, and his Master's and Doctoral degrees from Cornell University, where he studied with Karel Husa and Steven Stucky. In 1982, Conte lived and worked with Aaron Copland while preparing a study of the composer's sketches, having received a Fulbright Fellowship for study with Copland's teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris, where he was one of her last students. He was also recipient of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellowship and an Aspen Music Festival Conducting Fellowship. Conte has taught at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Cornell University, Keuka College, Colgate University, and the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

In recent years, he was appointed to the composition faculty of the European American Musical Alliance in Paris in 2010, and in 2011 he joined the board of the American Composers Forum. In 2014 he was named Composer in Residence with Cappella SE, a professional chorus in San Francisco. In 2016 his *American Death Ballads* won the National Association of Teachers of Singing Art Song Composition Award, and were performed at the NATS conference in Chicago by tenor Brian Thorsett and pianist Warren Jones.

David Conte is Professor of Composition and Chair of the Composition Department at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Program Notes

by David Conte

American Death Ballads

for High Voice and Piano

Brian Thorsett, Tenor | John Churchwell, Piano

American Death Ballads were composed especially for tenor Brian Thorsett. The choice of texts was inspired partly by Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs*, which I deeply admire, and even more by my dear friend and colleague Conrad Susa's *Two Murder Ballads*.

"Wicked Polly" is a cautionary tale. Polly has lived a dissolute and immoral life, saying, "I'll turn to God when I grow old." Suddenly taken ill, she realizes that it is too late to repent. She dies in agony and is presumably sent to hell; young people are advised to heed. My musical setting is stately and preacherly in character for the narrator; for Polly it becomes pleading and remorseful.

"The Unquiet Grave" is taken from an English folk song dating from 1400. A young man mourns his deceased lover too intensely, preventing her from obtaining peace. My setting is in a flowing *andante* with a rocking accompaniment. Three voices are delineated here: the narrator, the mournful lover, and the deceased lover, speaking from the grave.

"The Dying Californian" first appeared in the *New England Diadem* in 1854. Its lyrics are based on a letter from a dying New England sailor to his brother, while at sea on the way to California to seek his fortune in the gold fields. He implores his brother to impart his message to his father, mother, wife, and children. My setting opens with the singer alone, in a moderate dirge tempo, and, joined by the piano, moves through many tonalities and moods before ending with supreme confidence as the speaker "gains a port called Heaven/Where the gold will never rust."

“Captain Kidd” was a Scottish sailor who was tried and executed for piracy and murder in 1701. Kidd escaped to America, and for a time lived in New York and Boston. He was a wanted criminal by the British authorities, and was extradited and hanged at “Executioner’s Dock.” Though the didactic tone of the text is similar to “Wicked Polly,” it expresses no regret until the final lines. My setting is fast and spirited, expressing the confidence of a man who has lived life as he wanted.

Three Poems of Christina Rossetti

for High Voice and Piano

Kindra Scharich, Mezzo-Soprano | Kevin Korth, Piano

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) began writing at age 7, but was 31 before her first work was published. She was hailed as the natural successor to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A devout Anglo-Catholic, her popularity faded in the early twentieth century from Modernism’s backlash, but in the past few decades she has been rediscovered. Her visionary poetry has a deeply religious quality, and a keen sense of the spiritual world.

“Rest” describes the soul’s journey from physical death to Paradise. “Echo” describes with great sensitivity and passion an attempt to regain a love in dreams that has been lost in reality. “A Hope Carol” describes a vigil of a soul who is called to a vision of Paradise, and the second coming of Christ. “Echo” and “Rest” were written especially for mezzo-soprano Catherine Cook. “A Hope Carol” was originally composed as a choral piece in for the San Francisco Girls’ Chorus. A version for solo voice was composed shortly after the original and is dedicated to mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Mannion. Several years after the original, I prepared an edition for high voice for tenor Brian Thorsett, who premiered it at the at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Love Songs

for Tenor, Violoncello, and Piano

Brian Thorsett, Tenor | Emil Miland, Cello | John Churchwell, Piano

The three songs gathered here were composed over a long time period. The first, “Levis Exsurgit Zephirus,” was originally composed in 1993 for male chorus and piano four-hands as the second movement of my “Carmina Juventutis.” I adapted it for solo voice, cello, and piano for several singers in 1999 and 2007, including soprano Sylvia Anderson, mezzo-soprano Catherine Cook, and countertenor Ian Howell. “D’Anne qui me jetta de la neige” and “The Moment” were composed in August, 2016, especially for Brian Thorsett, Emil Miland, and were premiered on October 11th, 2016, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. I have collaborated extensively with both artists; with Mr. Thorsett in my “Yeats Songs” for Tenor and String Quartet, and my “American Death Ballads,” and with Mr. Miland in my Sonata for Violoncello and Piano. For a specific concert, I decided to build a set of three love poems in three different languages; Latin, French, and English. In all three pieces, the violoncello, that most expressive and soulful instrument, represents the very soul of the speaker of these three texts, as he moves through many emotions, including passion, suffering, vulnerability, and joy.

“Levis Exsurgit Zephirus” is taken from the eleventh century *Cambridge Songs*. This love song is in rhymed couplets written in Ambrosian quatrains—the most common of all forms used for Latin hymns. The music has a gentle undulating quality as the speaker is “possessed by deep sighs in the midst of all this beauty,” for his soul languishes. After several climaxes, the opening music returns in the minor mode, accompanied by “sighs” in the piano and cello.

Though I’ve spent many years in France, “D’Anne qui me jetta de la neige” is my first setting in French. The text is by the sixteenth century French poet Clément Marot. The narrative describes a young man suddenly hit by what Italians poetically call the “Thunderbolt,” a single moment where one falls suddenly and passionately in love with someone. The poem is remarkable in that the speaker’s passion is also tempered

by a touching vulnerability, as he asks his beloved to show him kindness, even taking pity upon his newfound passion.

Theodore Roethke is one of my favorite American poets, whom I first set in my choral piece “The Waking” in 1985. His poem “The Moment” is both subtly and unabashedly erotic, and indeed “ends in joy.”

Everyone Sang

for Bass and Piano

Matt Boehler, Bass | Kevin Korth, Piano

Everyone Sang is a collection of four songs, composed at various times between 1998 and 2003. The fourth song which gives the collection its name, “Everyone Sang,” was commissioned by and is dedicated to the late James Schwabacher, who was a dear friend and important tenor and patron of the arts in San Francisco. It was premiered by bass-baritone Maris Vipulis and pianist Marc Shapiro in 1998. The songs “Homecoming,” dedicated to baritone Robert Barefield, and “Quilt,” dedicated to baritone Ryan Villaverde, were commissioned by the West Chester University Poetry Conference and were premiered by Robert Barefield and pianist Carl Cranmer in June 2003. “Entrance,” dedicated to baritone Tim Krol, was written in July 2003 for inclusion in this set. In 2016, I prepared an edition for bass voice for Matt Boehler, who premiered the set in April 2018.

The four songs of *Everyone Sang* treat sequentially the themes of attachment, discovery, loss, and celebration. “Homecoming” by A. E. Stallings, an American poet who lives in Greece, explores the psychic thread which binds Odysseus and Penelope. Penelope is weaving a coat to put off her suitors, hoping still for Odysseus’s return. The poem envisions “man and wife dwelling together in unity of mind and disposition.” In Rilke’s poem “Entrance,” translated by American poet Dana Gioia, the speaker entreats the listener to discover the new, see the old through fresh eyes, embrace the unknown, and ultimately let go. “Quilt” by Diane Thiel has a wonderful relaxed

formality, being in Terza Rima form, invented by Dante. The quilt is a metaphor for the compartmentalization of life; each patch represents an aspect or event. The poem suggests how we all try to make sense of life by transforming disorder into the order of a quilt. “Everyone Sang” by English poet Siegfried Sassoon expresses the varied emotions of joy and relief at the end of World War I, and sadness for those who have died.

Lincoln

for Baritone, English Horn, Trumpet, and String Orchestra

*A. J. Glueckert, Tenor | James Moore, English Horn | Scott Macomber, Trumpet
San Francisco Conservatory String Orchestra, Marika Kuzma, Conductor*

Lincoln was commissioned by the city of Concord, Massachusetts, in celebration of the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth. The text by John Stirling Walker quotes liberally from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s eulogy for Lincoln. The work alternates between recitative and lyrical passages, with the noble, visionary quality of Lincoln’s character represented by the trumpet, and the quieter, more pastorate and dignified character by the English Horn. The work was premiered by the performers on this recording at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on March 17th, 2013.

Sexton Songs

for Soprano and Chamber Ensemble

Marnie Breckenridge, Soprano

San Francisco Conservatory New Music Ensemble, Nicole Paiement, Conductor

The five poems of *Sexton Songs* span Anne Sexton’s fifteen-year career. The central two poems, “Her Kind” and “Ringing the Bells,” are taken from her book *From Bedlam And Part Way Back*, published in 1960 and inspired by her stay in a mental institution. They are framed by “Rowing” and “Riding the Elevator to the Sky,” two poems from *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, published in 1973, one year before she committed

suicide at the age of 46. “Us” is from her collection, *Love Poems*. Through my study of Sexton’s poetry and her life, I gradually formed an image of her as a kind of cabaret performer: a microphone in one hand and a cigarette in the other, delivering her funny—and often devastating—jokes. In my musical settings I have tried to mirror Sexton’s vernacular language and popular images with a style that evokes aspects of jazz and cabaret, and mixes sustained aria-type music with recitative passages. Sexton’s poet friend Maxin Kumin wrote about *Awful Rowing*: “The Sexton who had so defiantly boasted... ‘I am God la de dah,’ had now given way to a ravaged, obsessed poet fighting to put the jigsaw pieces of the puzzle together into a coherence that would save her—into ‘a whole nation of God.’” For me, Anne Sexton’s painful journey is ultimately a very brave one. She dredges up her feelings and experiences and challenges us to reflect on them, on our own. The version for chamber ensemble was written for and premiered by the San Francisco Conservatory of Music New Music Ensemble, Nicole Paiement, conductor, Marnie Breckenridge, soprano, on October 9th, 2010.

Requiem Songs

for Soprano, Solo Violin, Harp, and String Orchestra

Ann Moss, Soprano | Kay Stern, Violin | Douglas Rioth, Harp

San Francisco Conservatory String Orchestra, Eric Dudley, Conductor

Requiem Songs were commissioned by the American Music Research Center, Boulder, Colorado, Thomas Riis, director, in loving memory of Don Campbell (1946–2012). Don Campbell and I were deeply connected through our mutual teacher Nadia Boulanger. The inspiration for this commission came from organist Carolyn Shuster Fournier, a dear mutual friend and long-time resident of Paris. The work was premiered at l’Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris, in 2013 by Alexis Galpérine, violin, Magali Léger, soprano, Saori Kikuchi, harp, and Carolyn Shuster Fournier, organist. In 2016 I created a new version of these songs, replacing the organ with string orchestra.

To honor Don's memory I chose three Latin texts from the Requiem Mass. The first, "Exaudi," is *Larghetto* and serves as a prelude. The entire composition is based on a plaintive, three-note descending motive first stated in the strings and taken up by the singer and solo violin. The mood begins in a dark and questioning C-sharp minor, and only after much dissonance and tension, resolves quietly in the key of E major; the supplicant's voice has been heard.

"Dies Irae," marked *Allegro agitato*, is an intense and dark scherzo in D minor with chromatic runs in the strings and solo violin accompanying the soprano, whose line is disjunct and dramatic. There is a central, more lyrical section based on the *Lacrymosa* text in a slower tempo, which leads to the song's only serene moment: "Pie Jesu Domine." The "Dies Irae" music returns, and the song ends violently and decisively.

The third song, "In Paradisum," introduces the harp. The soprano melody is modeled very closely on the Gregorian chant based on this text. This song is consciously inspired in part by both Fauré's setting of the same text and the *Lux aeterna* of Nadia Boulanger (a work always played at the annual Lili Boulanger memorial service at La Trinité). The song is in the radiant and serene key of F-sharp major (a favorite key of Olivier Messiaen, long-time organist at La Trinité), and almost completely diatonic. There is a gentle climax on the text "habeas eternam," and the song slowly winds down to its end, having laid to rest life's struggles in the eternity of heaven.

Recording Credits

Mastering Engineer

Rob Murray

David Trembley

Executive Producer

Caitlin Custer

Recording Engineers

Zach Miley

*American Death Ballads, Three Poems of
Christina Rossetti, Love Songs, Everyone Sang,
Lincoln, Requiem Songs*

Jason O'Connell

Sexton Songs

© & © 2018 Arsis Audio. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized duplication is a violation of applicable laws. Manufactured in USA.

ARSIS