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10 minutes, 40 seconds

# *Trois Méditations*

- 1. Le Vent*
- 2. Belle Absence*
- 3. Le Reflet du Feu*

*for Soprano and Piano*

*Texts by*  
Rainer Maria Rilke

*Music by*  
Joshua Shank

**B&F Music**  
Joshua Shank

## Notes from the Composer

One of the many things I love about Rilke's poetry is the impact the texts often have at their conclusions; the revelation or epiphany that his language meanders its way towards by the end. Each poem in this set has that sort of profound moment at its close and, musically, this is what I worked to capture.

The first poem deals with loneliness by way of a ghostly pair of children who are presumably lost and a weeping girl who has been abandoned by her lover. In these two situations, however, the speaker has the relative safety of an observer rather than a participant. What Rilke then does in the last stanza is put the reader right in the driver's seat of the experience by suddenly shifting to the first person. All of the sudden we are lost in the forest or weeping over a long-lost love, and all we can do at this moment is listen to the wind—the only constant throughout the entire poem—and cry.

The second movement is a bit more straightforward; just a sparkly tune in the Lydian mode crafted into a set of variations that eventually fades away into the distance. The last stanza is the origin of the song's title.

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*Le Reflet du Feu* was the most difficult to set but, in the end, the simplest in terms of its music. The sound-picture I had in my mind was sitting around a campfire and having a conversation with a group of other people. No matter how loud or soft the discussion gets there would always be this constant underpinning of the crackle of the fire. The compositional device that came to represent this was the constant back-and-forth of a triad in the piano. The music ebbs and flows above it—or overflows, as in the case of the last four lines—until we arrive at the gorgeous final stanza of the poetry; a notion that, as a musician, I can certainly identify with.

*I am indebted to Christian Hardy for commissioning this song cycle, and Stephen Swanson for tutoring me in French during the time I was writing it.*

*It is dedicated with love and gratitude to Jessica Hardy.*

For more information visit [www.joshuashank.com](http://www.joshuashank.com)

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## The Text: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

### LE VENT

Je vois deux yeux comme deux enfants  
errant dans une forêt.

Ils disent: qui nous mange c'est le vent, le vent—  
et moi je réponds: je le sais.

Je connais une fille qui pleure, son amant  
il-y-a deux ans s'en allait,  
mais elle dit tout doucement: c'est le vent, le vent—  
et moi je réponds: je le sais.

Souvent dans ma chambre en m'éveillant  
il me semble qu'une langue me parlait.  
Toi! Mais la nuit murmure: le vent—  
et je pleure dans mon lit: je le sais.

### PORTRAIT INTÉRIEUR

Ce ne sont pas des souvenirs  
qui, en moi, t'entretiennent;  
tu n'es pas non plus mienne  
par la force d'un beau désir.

Ce qui te rend présente,  
c'est le détour ardent  
qu'une tendresse lente  
décrit dans mon propre sang.

Je suis sans besoin  
de te voir apparaître;  
il m'a suffi de naître  
pour te perdre un peu moins.

### Reflet du Feu

Peut-être n'était-ce qu'un reflet du feu  
sur quelque meuble luisant  
que beaucoup plus tarde l'enfant  
se rappelle comme un aveu

Et si dans sa vie de plus tard  
un jour, comme tant d'autres, le blesse,  
c'est qu'il a pris comme promesse  
un quelconque hasard.

N'oublions non plus la musique  
qui tôt l'avait entraîné  
vers l'absence que complique  
une âme comblée....

### The Wind

I see two eyes, like children  
wandering in a forest.

They say, "What eats at us is the wind, the wind."  
And I reply, "I know."

I know a girl who cries,  
Her lover left her two years ago,  
but she says, so sweetly, "It's the wind, the wind."  
And I reply, "I know."

Often, I wake up in my room  
thinking I hear a voice speaking to me.  
"You!" But the night murmurs, "The wind."  
And I cry in my bed, "I know."

### Interior Portrait

You don't survive in me  
because of memories.  
You are not mine because of  
the strength of a beautiful longing.

What does make you present  
is the passionate detour  
that a slow tenderness  
traces in my blood.

I do not need  
to see you appear;  
being born was enough for me  
to lose you a little less.

### Reflection of Fire

Maybe this was only a reflection of fire  
on a shining piece of furniture  
That the child recalls so much later  
like a vow.

As if, in his later life, a single day  
wounds him like so many others,  
It's because he mistook a promise  
for an ordinary chance.

Let's not forget music, either,  
Which had soon carried him along  
toward the absence complicated  
by an overflowing heart....

Translations by Stephen Swanson & Joshua Shank

Commissioned by Christian Hardy

# Trois Méditations

## 1. Le Vent

Text by  
Rainer Maria Rilke

Music by  
Joshua Shank

Slower (♩ = ca. 66)

Soprano

Piano

*p*

*mp*

*mf*

Je vois deux yeux com - me  
deux en - fants er - tant

The musical score is written for Soprano and Piano. It begins with a tempo marking 'Slower (♩ = ca. 66)'. The Soprano part has a melodic line with lyrics in French. The Piano part provides accompaniment with various textures and dynamics. The score is divided into systems, with measures 5 and 10 marked. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor) and the time signature changes between 3/4 and 4/4. There are several watermarks overlaid on the page, including 'B&F Music Joshua Shank' and a large diagonal watermark that reads 'This illegal copy will self destruct in 5...4...3...'.

— dans u - ne fo - rêt. \_\_\_\_\_ Ils —

23 Slower, with lots of rubato

di - - - sent qui nous man - ge c'est le vent, \_\_\_\_\_

*mp* *p* *colla voce*

\*15<sup>va</sup> -----

*ped.* *ped. until m. 32*

le vent \_\_\_\_\_ et moi je ré - ponds:

*p* *niente* *p*

32 With sudden motion (♩ = ca. 96)

je le sais. \_\_\_\_\_ Je con - nais

*mp* *mf* *sub. f* *mp*

36

u - ne fil - - - le qui pleu - 3... 4... 3...

40

re, son a -

*f*

\*Bring out departures from the pattern.  
Play up a dynamic level.

44

mant il - y - a deux ans

*mf*

49

s'en al - lait,

*mp* *ff*

mais el - le dit tout dou - - ce - - ment: —

*sub. mf*

\* Give a little scoop up to the note (but not too much).

59 Slower (♩ = ca. 66) *mp* *senza misura*

c'est le vent, le vent et

64 *mp* 66 (♩ = ca. 90) *mp* — *mf*

moi je ré-ponds: je — le sais. Sou - vent dans ma cham - bre —

*colla voce* *mp*

70

— en m'é-veil-lant — il me sem - ble — qu'u-ne lan - gue —

76 *mp* *3* *Gliss.*  
 me par - lait. Toi! Toi!

*mp* like a music box

82 *Toi!* *Toi!*

87 *Toi!*

*mf* *ff* *simile*

*6*

*And. and accent with every new chord*

92 *molto rit.*



97

99

*mp senza misura*

Mais la nuit mu - mu - re:

*colla voce*

102 Suddenly faster (♩ = ca. 110)

le vent

*mf*

*mf*

*Leg.*

*rit.*

*Leg.*

111

*mf senza misura to the end*

et je pleu-re dans mon lit:

*poco rit.*

*p*

*colla voce*

*p*

*Leg.*

115 *mp*

je le sais.

*mf*

*8va*

*ped.* *ped.* *ped.*

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# 2. Belle Absence

(♩ = ca. 71)

Soprano

Piano

*mp*  
Ped.

8

*poco rit.* *mf a tempo*  
Ce ne sont pas des sou-ve nirs qui,  
*mf* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *mp*  
Ped. Ped. Ped.

en moi, t'en - tre - tien - nent;  
*mf* *poco rit.*  
Ped. Ped.

14 *mf a tempo*

tu n'es pas non plus mien - ne — par la for - ce d'un beau dé-sir

*mp a tempo*

*leg.* *leg.* *leg.*

18 **19** *f* A little more motion (♩ = ca. 77)

Ce qui te rend — pré - sen - te, c'est le dé-tour ar -

*mf cantabile*

*leg.*

22 dent qu'un-e ten - dres - se len - te — dé-crit dans mon pro-pre sang.

*sub. f*

**27** *Tempo 1*

26 Je suis sans — ”

*rit.* — *a tempo* *mp* *mf (a distinct voice)*

*leg. per measure til the end*

30

— be - soin — de te voir ap - pa - raî - tre; il m'a suf - fi

Una corda til the end of the movement

34

de naî - tre pour te per - dre un peu moins, pour te per - dre

38

un peu moins. niente

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# 3. Le Reflet du Feu

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Something is always constant (♩ = ca. 120)

Soprano *mp*

Peut ê - tre n'ê - tait - ce qu'un re - flet du

Piano *p*



7

feu sur quel-que meu-ble lui - sant



14

*mf*

(two separate voices)

*p*



See. until m. 19

19

*mp*

20

que beau - coup plus tar - de l'en - fant se - rap - pel -

24

- le comme un a - veu

29

*mf*

(two separate voices)

*mp*

33

38 Suddenly a little faster for just 2 measures

sub. *f* ferocious for a moment

sub. *mp*

ped.

42 Fast again for a measure and then  $\text{♩} = \text{♪}$

*mf*

\*Et si

sub. *f*

sub. *mp*

ped. until m. 61

47

dans sa vi - e de plus tard un jour,

51

com - me tant d'au - tres,

*f*

\* The vocal part is 3/8 notated in 2/4 until measure 53.



le bles - se, \_\_\_\_\_

69 c'est qu'il a pris \_\_\_\_\_ com - me pro - mes - se \_\_\_\_\_

63 un quel - con - que ha - sard. \_\_\_\_\_

67 **69** *mf senza misura* N'ou - bli - ons non plus \_\_\_\_\_ la mu -

*ff* *colla voce*



89

une à - - me com

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92

blé - - e...

*mp*

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96

*f* *rit.* *mp*

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Minneapolis, October 2009

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