

Judith Shatin

Plain Song

Amplified Piano &
Electronics



Program Note

One day while I was driving my car, listening to NPR, I heard a voice say 'Live life as though you were already dead, Che Guevara declared.' My responses, seemingly simultaneous, were: 'fantastic line,' and 'wait, I know that voice – it's Charles Wright.' I also knew that I would like to find a way to set it, incorporating his voice. As luck would have it, I knew Charles and his poetry and remember being taken right away with the quality of his voice: gravelly, with a soft southern flavor, not to mention the wryness and wit of his conversation. Still, I was hesitant to ask whether he would consider recording some of the poems from his new collection *Caribou* and allow me to compose a piece built around the recordings. But I did ask, and he agreed, and we had a fine time in The Sound recording studio in Charlottesville. Mark Graham was the sound engineer, and composer Joe Adkins assisted. I named *Plain Song* for one of the four poems and scored the piece for piano and electronics fashioned from his readings. I am grateful to Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC, for permission to set the four poems: *Plain Song, Shadow and Smoke, Lullaby* and *I've Been Sitting Here Thinking Back Over My Life*, © 2014 by Charles Wright.

Performance Notes

General: Flextime means that you do not have to follow the timing strictly. Once the electronics start, it becomes important to do so except as notated. There is some flexibility about where the words fall in relation to the music, though there are cues to listen for in relation to the timing.

Symbols:

S = silently depress keys

M = Mute, with RH finger at the front of the string

GM = gentle mute – gradually mute with finger of RH (do not mute too close to the front end of the string; make sure the pitch rings)

 = pluck with fingernail

Mallet symbol: Soft yarn mallet (either with head up, meaning hit string(s)

with head, or stick side up, meaning hit (gliss.) with the stick

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Duration: 12:00

1. Plain Song

CHARLES WRIGHT

JUDITH SHATIN

CUE 1

0:00

0:02

0:05

Voice

Plain Song

Where is the crack, the small crack,
where the dead come out and go
back in?

Piano

M *f*

*
+
8vb - - -

0:10

0:15

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for the 0:10-0:15 segment. The right hand is mostly silent. The left hand features a complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes, eighth notes, and triplets, marked with '6' and '3'. There are also some 'x' marks above the notes.

0:20

0:24

0:27

V.

Where is the crack, the small crack,
where the dead come out and go
back in?

Stereo canonic motion
cresc. dynamic and density

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for the 0:20-0:27 segment. The right hand has some chords and a triplet. The left hand has a triplet and a chord. There are 'x' marks above the notes.

0:30

0:34

0:37

V.

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for the 0:30-0:37 segment. The right hand has a triplet and a chord. The left hand has a triplet and a chord. There are 'x' marks above the notes. A large arrow points from 0:30 to 0:34. The letter 'S' is written above the piano part at 0:34 and 0:37.

1:30 1:32

V. Start slowly, relaxed,, repeat, a piacere, gradually accelerate; do not try to sync with the voice The nightbirds outside our window are gone away.!
The nightbirds outside our window are gone away,

Pno.

1:44 1:50 1:55

V. Are gone away | gone away | away away | away |

Pno.

1:58 2:01

V. The halo around the quarter moon means no good.

Pno.

Oscillate between trilling first and second box notes
Quiet murmuring

ppp

2:08 2:10

V. Is this the hour of our undoing?

Pno.

mf

2:14 2:16

V. Is this the hour of our undoing?

Pno.

Intensifying, panned repetitions

p

2:20 2:24

V. *cresc. poco a poco*

Pno.

2:28 2:32

V.

Pno.

2:36 2:39 2:42

V.

Pno. *ff*

2:46 2:48

V. If so, we are perfected.

Pno. *S* *f* *Let fade a niente*

2. Lullaby

Relaxed tempo
Let sound decay

Piano

GM

f

In Tempo

Pno.

mf

mp

p

CUE 1

V. Lullaby

Pno.

mp

mf

Pno.

GM

GM

CUE 2

V. I've said what I had to say as melodiously as it was given to me.

Pno.

p

0:12 0:15 0:18

V. I've said what I had to say
As far down as I could go.

Pno. *sf* *p* *sf* *p* *pp*

8^{vb}-----

0:22 0:25 0:28 0:31

Pno. *mf* GM

0:34 0:39

V. I've been everywhere but Jerusalem, which doesn't exist

Pno. *s* *f*

0:43 0:46

V. So I guess it's time to depart,

Pno. *p*

0:49 0:54

V. Time to go

Pno. *mp* *f*

0:57 1:00

V. Time to meet those you've never met | Time to say goodnight |

Pno. *mp* *f* *p*

1:06 1:10

V. Time to go Time to say goodnight Repeated, spatialized

Pno. *p* *gradual accel, repeat a piacere* *rit.*

As you go, change register of individual notes a piacere- 'pop-outs'; ok if it effects speed

1:24 Goodnight (3x) 1:29 1:32 1:35 Grant us silence

V. *In tempo*

Pno. *mp* *pp* *mp*

1:39 1:42 1:45

V. Grant us no reply

Pno. *p* *mp*

1:49 Grant us shadows and their cohorts 1:53 1:56 1:59 Stealth across the sky,

V. GM GM GM

Pno. *f* *mf*

2:02 2:05 2:08 Stealth across the sky, Stealth across the sky,

V.

Pno. *mp* *p*

2:11 2:14 2:17 2:20 across the sky, the sky.

V.

Pno. *mf* *mp* *p*

2:23 2:27 *Relaxed tempo - a piacere*

V. GM

Pno. *pp* *f* *s* *sf* *a niente*

3. Shadow and Smoke

♩ = 60 *Agitated*

CUE 1

Voice

0:00 Shadow and smoke

Piano

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

CUE 2

Sos. Ped.

0:00

V.

Live life as though you are already dead
Che Guevara declared

Pno.

0:04

0:08

0:12

0:16

0:19

V.

Che Guevara declared

Pno.

Una Corda

0:22 0:24 0:27

V. Okay, let's see how that works.

Pno. *f* *p*

0:30 0:34 0:37

V. Not much difference as far as I can see

Pno. *pp* *p*

0:40 0:43 0:46

V. Che Guevara declared

Pno. *mp*

0:48 0:52 0:56

Pno.

0:59 1:04

V. The earth the same Paradise its always wanted to be,

Pno.

1:08 | 1:11 Heaven as far away as before | 1:14

V.

Pno.

1:17 | 1:20 The clouds the same old moveable gates since time began.

V.

Pno.

1:27 | 1:30 Che Guevara declared

V.

Pno.

1:33 | 1:36 There is no circle,
there is no sentiment to be broken

V.

Pno.

1:40 | 1:44 There are only the songs
of young men | 1:47 And the songs
of old men

V.

Pno.

V. 1:50 hoping for something elsewise. 1:52

Pno.

V. 1:55 1:59 Disabuse them in their ignorance, Lord,

Pno.

Pno. 2:03

Pno.

V. 2:07 2:10 Tell them the shadows are already gone, the smoke already cleared.

Pno.

V. 2:13 2:17 2:20 Tell them that light is never a metaphor.

Pno.

2:24

2:26

2:29

V. Tell them that light is never a metaphor

Pno. *mf*

2:32

2:35

Pno. *f*

2:38

Sempre staccato

Pno.

2:41

Pno.

2:45

Pno. *pp*

2:53

2:57

3:00

V. Che Guevara declared

Pno. *ff*

4. Tutta Gloria

CUE 1

0:00

0:03

0:07

Voice: I've been sitting here thinking back over my life. | We are all going into a world of dark,

Piano: Mute the neighbor strings with your left hand *f*

8^{vb}

0:10

0:12

0:16

V. And that's o.k., given the wing-wrung alternative.

Pno. Quick gliss on low strings (except single wire) with mallet stick *f*

0:19

0:25

V. It's okay. That's where the secrets are, The big ones, the ones too tall to tell. | The way in is twisty and tortuous,

Pno.

0:30

0:33

0:38

V. But easy, they say, easy. | The way out, however, is unavailable, and not to be mimed.

Pno. *p*

0:41

0:47

V. Hard to remember when the full moon offers its efficacy downwind through the winter weeds, | Unpeeling its limitless hope.

Pno. *mf* *8^{va}*

0:49 0:55

V. But not, at least for tonight, for us.
(pointed staccato)

Pno. *p* S *f*

1:00 1:05

V. Not for us, bystanders back from the river of light.

Pno.

1:10 1:17

V. So file down your fingertips, boys,
and pull on your skins. Incandescence is temporary, we know,
but it still shines.

Pno. *f*

1:23 1:27 1:30

V. And that's it. My life has been spent trying
to leave it.

Pno. *sf*

1:33 1:39

V. As though an invisible figure in a
Schneeman landscape of Tuscany, *accel.* I've always wanted to be elsewhere,
Hair on fire, a radiance undeniable,

Pno. *mf*

1:44 1:47

V. My shoes golden,

Pno.

1:52 1:59

V. My heart tucked away, back under my shirtsleeves | Not now, not ever,
the world in winter.

Pno.

ff

2:05

V. And this is what comforts us, bare trees, bare streets, bare expectations.

Pno.

8va

2:12 2:17

V. Our lives are spent here,

Pno.

mp

2:22 2:27 2:31

V. Our ho-hum and sweet
existential lives, | Stories of cirrus and cumulus | And why not,
this world has been good to us,

Pno.

p *mp*

2:35

2:39

The sun goes up, and the sun goes down.

The stars release and disappear,

V.

Pno.

2:42

2:49

L.H.

Everything Tutta Gloria

V.

Pno.

2:51

2:58

Wherever we turn our faces.

V.

Pno.

3:00

3:06

3:10

L.V.

V.

Pno.