

Faculty and Guest Artist Recital:

2021-10-24 – Red Vespa



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The University of Iowa
School of Music
presents



*In a Woman's Voice:
Musical Readings by Women Composers*

Marian Wilson Kimber, reciter
Natalie Landowski, piano

Stark Opera Studio
October 24, 2021
7:30 pm

PROGRAM

Announcement

<i>Dame Fashion</i> (1924)	Frieda Peycke (1884–1964)
<i>Apples</i> (1921)	Phyllis Fergus (1887–1964)
<i>If Only We Could</i> (1943)	Frieda Peycke

<i>A Summer Idyll</i> (1925)	Phyllis Fergus
<i>I Doubt It</i> (1923)	Lalla Ryckoff (b. 1891)
<i>Wishful Waiting</i> (c. 1947)	Frieda Peycke

<i>Ain't It Fine Today</i> (1920)	Phyllis Fergus
<i>Lie Awake Song</i> (1922)	Phyllis Fergus
<i>Lost Illusions</i> (1932)	Frieda Peycke

Five-minute intermission

<i>Upon a Broken World</i> (2019–2020)*	Lisa Neher (b. 1985)
<i>September, 1918</i> (Amy Lowell)	
<i>Good Bones</i> (Maggie Smith)	
<i>Small Kindnesses</i> (Danusha Laméris)	

Two Uses for a Fan

Excerpt from <i>The Red Fan</i> (1893)	Nettie Arthur Brown (1864–1914)
<i>A Lesson with the Fan</i> (1898)	Guy d'Hardelot (1858–1936)

<i>The Canoe</i> (1916)	Phyllis Fergus
<i>Husbands</i> (1942)	Frieda Peycke
<i>The Usual Way</i> (1914)	Phyllis Fergus

*Premiere

PROGRAM NOTES

The genre of “musical readings” arose following the widespread popularity of spoken-word performance by American women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Young women filled the elocution schools that opened in major cities during this period. Elocutionists were regularly featured on concerts, sometimes reciting to music in informal, unnotated arrangements. Because women dominated elocution, they also became the primary composers of published pieces for spoken word and piano.

Most composers of musical readings are not well known. **Nettie Arthur Brown** composed very little, yet *The Red Fan*, her early example of the genre, was performed in the chamber music room of New York’s Carnegie Hall in 1896. **Lalla Ryckoff**, who also published music for children, was active in women’s clubs and lived in Milwaukee, Kansas City, and southern California.

Frieda Peycke was a prolific composer of at least 340 musical readings, a fourth of which were published. Peycke recorded nineteen of her pieces, but only one was released commercially. She spent her career performing for civic groups in Los Angeles and could reportedly hold an audience spellbound. Peycke’s earliest appearances date from 1909, and her last was fifty years later in 1959, when she was seventy-five years old.

Phyllis Fergus composed sixty spoken-word pieces, which she called “story poems.” She was very active in Chicago’s women’s clubs, and in the 1930s she organized two women composers’ concerts at the White House for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Fergus sometimes accompanied Beatrice Welles reciting; she also taught piano lessons to Welles’s son, Orson, and *Lie Awake Song* is dedicated to the famous movie director. For an encore, Fergus sometimes spoke the song, *A Lesson with the Fan*, by **Guy d’Hardelot**, playing the accompaniment with her left hand and wielding a fan in her right. Fergus’s most popular piece, *The Usual Way*, was frequently heard at bridal showers, from 1924 in Ardmore, Oklahoma, to as late as 1976 in Milton, Iowa.

Settings of three serious poems by American women, *Upon a Broken World* was composed for Red Vespa by Portland composer and singer **Lisa Neher**. The final words of Amy Lowell’s *September, 1918*, published after World War I, gives the set its title. Maggie Smith’s poem *Good Bones* became an internet sensation in 2016, shared by millions. Danusha Laméris wrote *Small Kindnesses* to provide solace in 2017, “when the world seemed to be imploding a bit, the country fractured in new (and old) ways.” Neher’s sensitive settings of the three women’s voices reveal that the musical reading remains a viable genre in the twenty-first century.

Red Vespa would like to extend our thanks to George Ferencz, Michael Kimber, John Muriello, Tammie Walker, and the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies for their support of our project. Funding for the video of tonight’s performance has been provided by the College of Liberal and Arts and Sciences and a Sight and Sound Subvention awarded by the Society for American Music. Our logo was designed by Mark Rheume.

Marian Wilson Kimber, Professor of Musicology at the University of Iowa, is the author of numerous articles and book chapters about the composers Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, and women's roles in American musical life. She was the keynote speaker at Seoul University for the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth and gave the Master Teacher Lecture for the American Musicological Society in 2011. Her book, *The Elocutionists: Women, Music, and the Spoken Word* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), received the Society for American Music's H. Earle Johnson Publication Subvention, as well as a subvention from the American Musicological Society. In collaboration with Natalie Landowski, Wilson Kimber has performed the compositions she explores in her book across Iowa and in Kansas City, Boston, Washington, DC, and as the William A. Hammond Lecture on the American Tradition at The Ohio State University.

Natalie Landowski joined the faculty of Western Illinois University in 2019; she previously taught at Grand View University. Landowski holds the B.M. (Univ. of California, Irvine), M.M. (Univ. of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana), and D.M.A. (Univ. of Iowa) degrees. At Iowa, she studied piano with Ksenia Nosikova and piano pedagogy with Alan Huckleberry. Landowski has performed in master classes by Gary Graffman, Menahem Pressler, and Kenneth Drake, and was a finalist in the 2008 and 2015 International Schlern Piano Competitions. Landowski was president of Illinois' MTNA Collegiate Chapter and recipient of the Illinois Center for Teaching Excellence's Certificate. She taught a full piano studio at West Music in Coralville for four years, and her students placed in and won Iowa Music Teachers' Association district and state auditions. Landowski has served on the piano faculty of the University of Iowa's Pre-College Piano Conservatory and Piano Youth festivals, and the Illinois Summer Youth Music festival. She has presented lecture recitals, pedagogy workshops, and master classes in Georgia, Nevada, Oregon, California, and Illinois.

New music powerhouse and University of Iowa graduate **Lisa Neher** is a mezzo-soprano, composer, and actress on a mission to transform audiences through story, sound, and vulnerability. Described by Oregon ArtsWatch as "a small woman with a very big voice" and "especially alive," Neher captivates audiences with her electrifying dramatic commitment and unforgettable vocal colors. She recently performed with Third Angle New Music, the Resonance Ensemble, New Music Gathering, Queer Opera, the International Saxophone Symposium, and Opera Theatre Oregon. As a composer, Neher is inspired by female athleticism, the tender love of friends, the ambiguities of death, and the eerie mystery of deep ocean life. Her collaborators include Third Angle New Music, Delgani String Quartet, Rhymes With Opera, and Choral Arts Ensemble of Portland. Neher is the winner of the 2021 Iowa Choral Director's Association / Iowa Composers Forum Choral Composition Competition for her set *Three Basho Haiku*. For more information, visit www.lisanehermusic.com.