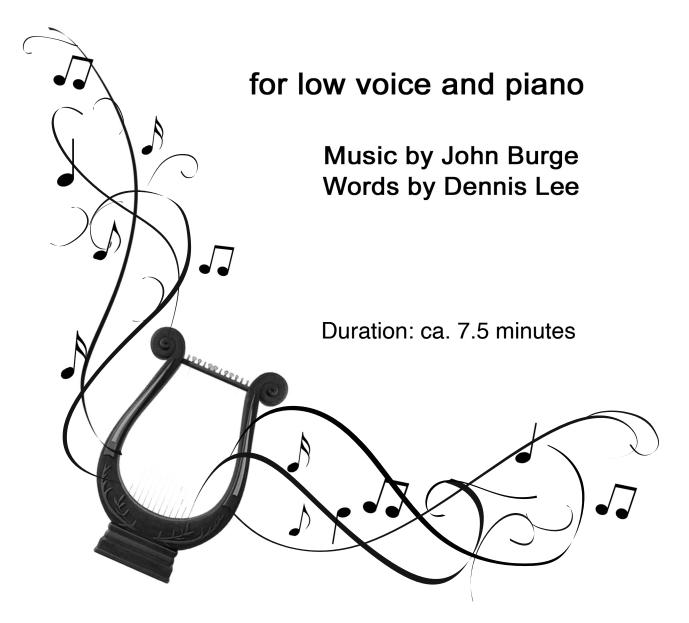


Blue Psalm



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BLUE PSALM

Keep low, my

life. Be still in the

cardiac sessions, small when the

cornerstone gives.

I am not my self, I'm

foreign goods - things own me,

I know that now.

Keep low, little life.

Nicotine owns me.

Cholesterol too, and the sweet deadly

booze owns my body. And in my mind:

money, security, fame – how many non-stop

compulsions repeat their

imperious tics in my ego?

Even the dream of no-ego, of

goodbye desire: it binds me and owns me.

And,

being: teach me to be.

Not crouch like this, in

cobbled time, in stigma. Not

freak on a leash. Nor

listless in slavery trudge,

captive, abroad, and mouthing the alien tongue ...

Yes, and the

unstrung harp hung high, still dreaming what

dirge? what rage? what wind-bourne snatch of home?

From *Nightwatch* (McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1996). Copyright © 1996 Dennis Lee. Use with permission of the author.

Blue Psalm was premiered by Bruce Kelly, baritone, and John Burge, piano, on November 23, 1999, at Harrison-LeCaine Hall, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Bruce Kelly also premiered the cello ensemble version on November 24, 1999, in Grant Hall at Queen's University, with the Queen's Cello Ensemble, Wolf Tormann, Director.

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John Burge is a classically trained composer and pianist, holding degrees from the University of Toronto (BMus and MMus) and British Columbia (DMA). He has composed a large body of instrumental and vocal music in all genres including opera. Many of his orchestral works, such as Snowdrift, The Canadian Shield and Rocky Mountain Overture, are regularly performed by orchestras across Canada and internationally. His string orchestra work, Flanders Fields Reflections, as recorded by Sinfonia Toronto, received the 2009 Juno Award for the Best Canadian Classical Composition. Since 1987 he has been teaching at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he is a full professor and was the Director of the School of Music (now named the DAN School of Drama and Music). Since 2013, Red Leaf Pianoworks has been publishing his solo piano music, with a number of these piano pieces now being listed in conservatory syllabi and used as test pieces for competitions. An active music festival adjudicator and clinician, John Burge enjoys working with musicians young and old, greatly enjoying the opportunity to share musical ideas and insights.

Blue Psalm is a setting of a poem written by Canadian poet, Dennis Lee. The text is a modern-day slant on the biblical Psalms of David, even making reference to the unstrung harp that is now hanging silently. The viewpoint in Lee's poem is of someone looking back on their life and finding their values and ideals have been compromised too much in a lifetime of consumption. This present-day angst is given a musical voice in the blues inspired harmonies that slowly unfold beneath the melody. While originally written for low voice and piano, the piano part was subsequently rescored for an ensemble of four or more cellos.

This composition is dedicated to baritone, Bruce Kelly. For many years, Bruce taught voice students at Queen's University in the office directly beside John Burge's office. The combination of Bruce's penetrating speaking voice, John's constant piano playing, and lack of sound proofing in the wall made for close colleagues. When Bruce moved to a different office, this piece was written as a kind of parting gift and to let Bruce know just how much the composer enjoyed hearing his resonant vocal projection, jokes and pep-talks to his students over the years.

Difficulty Level: Advanced

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