From The Sick Sleuth Sonnets

a song cycle based on the poetry of Samuel Greenberg (1893-1917) for voice and piano

by Justin Henry Rubin
Forward

I had never heard of Samuel Greenberg. I had been deeply involved with the works of Hart Crane, had set a number of his poems, and was even inspired to write purely instrumental compositions based on some of his fantastic imagery. It was through Crane that I stumbled upon Greenberg through his documented praise. I found myself remarkably engrossed with these terse works - their pure surrealist tone (which antedates the more famous movement begun after World War I) are imbued with an expressiveness that immediately penetrated my mind. My response was the composition of a set of songs for soprano, alto, and piano (Loose Pages), which were written in the Fall of 2000, followed by two cantatas and still more songs. They were endowed with a musical character to help convey more than simply the sentiments (if that is indeed possible!) of the texts of the Poet. His works are "orgies of supersensibility" (Louis Untermeyer, 1940) wherein "words… poured …forth with a wild, chaotic passion" (James Laughlin, 1939) and therefore a narrative structure would not have been a favorable choice of settings. Instead, I try to take a distinct, non-narrative musical point of view with them.

The only image of Greenberg I know is that of him at the time of his Bar Mitzvah; the dusty, dark synagogues of early 20th century New York instantaneously came to mind. The unison rhythmic, declamatory intonations of Jewish chant, the cascade of words as if a supplication, the propulsive nature of the poems themselves, the sinuous, fleeting emotions that characterize Greenberg's words, the intimate yet universal essence of his utterances, the quality of the voice of youth turned adult only to be cut down in premature death, the speed with which the texts were written - all of these factors contributed to my choice of sounds that surround my settings of his works.

I find myself returning again and again to Greenberg, choosing poems from his large collection of sonnets, always refreshing, always inspiring new musical ideas and sentiments.

Note: Some misspellings from the original texts have been preserved, but others have been altered in the musical settings for ease of reading.
15 silence, where rest Be warms

20 a tempo

Seated, celest, though much Be guiles The fair of Human motion

24 Rit. a tempo

The Lus tre of lifes stir ring combines...

28 Rit. poco
a tempo  Rit. molto  a tempo

Yet recalls of pleasures in - ert be - hold

From paint - ing, From scul - ptures or for - eign mold

The case of sound - ing wind...  The case of sound - ing
The case of sounding wind.

By tightly shores

That treats a just minds lowly moors

What a
madness can apply in such wingéd Prize as to Be

but the hem skin idealize.

a tempo
II illusive evolution

Ondeggiante

What traveling

grace halts you to know Abuse from woes

turning grasp of ween And ever

Natures proof... ...pends a whirling show... That shades,
the lus-
.tree  From Kin, the tur-
.ban claims of prime  That

hold the bet-
.ter'd hope-
.full slime

That ne-
.ver real-
.ing, in-
.to

Rit.
helpful glee But kills the color'd windy
scent through such marvel growths unbent
By the riches of shape and gloss We happy
feel a lusive love From the state of wonder as
Ah yet he who spells rest un-

Rit.
told Brings thither, the soil of foreign mold.
III Fear

Svelto

\[\text{mf} \quad \text{There fled the o-p-en-ing ditch from sooth What gi-ving pal-pi-tates to}\n\]

Rit. \quad a \text{ tempo}

hold its loath \quad pp
The Bulky mass of real Barren waste

Let thee feel a

tool, for him the last,

A-waken self-conscious
wa·ken·ing pride A·gain sus·pends thee for a

“chick” de·nied Ah calls the

dream of sick·ly look From whence your

heart builds em·blems to re·buke, tries to
share the prison spells

That clombs beneath loves expressive

cells Who leaves answers prime of lust desired

To show the great

deeds of wonder lyr'd

Then just flitters
apt
for cleaving
lay

a tempo

ppp

Meno mosso: quasi-recit.

Here toil a-mend,
share's woe - - - ful way
IV Divine Scent

Andantemente

F

There shed

slightly the upper stall

While

a tempo

faintly the upper stall

While

a tempo

What leap'd so heavy
un-der this all un-der this all

Molto rit. e dim. a tempo

un-der this all

Rit. poco a tempo

cause to heed the wan-der-ing soul

mf

The wan-der-ing soul claims the king-dom tear

sim.
Molto rit. e dim.

The wise soul bind
this aged weir

a tempo

Subito

And the Blind inebriat

ff

spirit merely feels, merely feels

Wishes that
all would rot and peace Beyond reels...

Yet pain speaks for pain While each fibre travels powerfully in

vein Not knowing what Be-falls the charm he's seen through

grinding tolls that list of sprouts All honor
bares its stamp, un-til it shouts, it shouts, it

Rit.  

shouts, it shouts...

Thou fiegn of glide-ing,

tide-ing, hus-ling ween
V the undertone

Grave

\( \text{[Notation]} \)

\( \text{[Notation]} \)

\( \text{[Notation]} \)

The cellar of the priest, the unburden'd crave

He

could sing the song of the wild knave

That

throws the Beam - ing sand up - on the Clime of the sun's un-brea - stead
gloom

What was this joy fetter'd dry flaming zone

And remember the gaze was not for now, the gaze was not for now

It seem'd to tell the lore of blossoms vow
And loose wonder strains beneath,

Libero: quasi-recit.

that, no letter can place the wreath or seek refuge,

of creation's crawl by your meek tendon to bare it, in

Tempo I

thrall There seems to stay a glass color'd will, a glass color'd will
only taste is this sensual fire still
That sorrow's glow, love, and the pounding thrill
(pauses of increasing duration)

Molto rit.

Meno mosso