

Orange Torches Against the Rain

songs of flowers and rain
on poems by Amy Lowell

Karim Al-Zand
(2012)

PROGRAM NOTE:

Orange Torches Against the Rain is a song cycle on poems by American poet Amy Lowell (1874–1925), its verses drawn largely from her 1919 collection *Pictures of the Floating World*. The eleven short poems in the cycle are united by their naturalistic imagery and by their shared references to flowers and rain. Lowell was a major figure in the so-called “imagist” movement, an early 20th century Anglo-American school of poetry that rejected the prolix sentiment and metrical forms of Romantic poetry, in favor of free verse written in a crisp, economical, yet highly descriptive style.

Lowell’s poems are compact, focused and direct—she believed “concentration is of the very essence of poetry”—and often feature a single striking image. The settings in *Orange Torches* aim to complement the concise and elegant character of Lowell’s originals, to capture what Ezra Pound, another imagist, called “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” Lowell employs what she termed “polyphonic prose” in her poems, a technique that replaces regular metric structure with an idiosyncratic formal design created by alliteration, assonance and occasional rhyme.

Lowell’s scholarly work include adaptations of ancient Chinese poetry, an interest that is often reflected in her own poems, which frequently echo Asian poetry in their atmosphere, subject matter and form. (Her work includes some of the earliest English-language examples of Japanese *tanka* and *haiku*—for an example, see song no. 2.) Amy Lowell was awarded the Pulitzer Prize posthumously in 1926. to compose in sequence of the musical phrase”

Dani Al-Zand. May 2012

ORANGE TORCHES AGAINST THE RAIN

songs of flowers and rain on poems by Amy Lowell

1. PRAYER FOR A PROFUSION OF SUNFLOWERS

Send sunflowers!
With my turkey-bone whistle
I am calling the birds
To sing upon the sunflowers.
For when the clouds hear them singing
They will come quickly,
And rain will fall upon our fields.
Send sunflowers!

2. TANKA

Roses and larkspur
And slender serried lilies;
I wonder whether
These are worth your attention.
Consider it, and if not—

3. VERNAL EQUINOX

The scent of hyacinths, like a pale mist, lies between me and my book;
And the South Wind, washing through the room,
Makes the candles quiver.
My nerves sting at a spatter of rain on the shutter,
And I am uneasy with the thrusting of green shoots
Outside, in the night.

Why are you not here to overpower me with your tense and urgent love?

4. THE PEDDLER OF FLOWERS

I came from the country
With flowers,
Larkspur and roses,
Fretted lilies
In their leaves,
And long, cool lavender.
I carried them
From house to house,
And cried them
Down hot streets.
The sun fell
Upon my flowers,
And the dust of the streets
Blew over my basket.

5. FROM A WINDOW

Your footfalls on the drum bridge beside my house
Are like the pattering drops of a passing shower,
So soon are they gone.

6. GROTESQUE

Why do the lilies goggle their tongues at me
When I pluck them;
And writhe, and twist,
And strangle themselves against my fingers,
So that I can hardly weave the garland
For your hair?
Why do they shriek your name
And spit at me
When I would cluster them?
Must I kill them
To make them lie still,
And send you a wreath of lolling corpses
To turn putrid and soft
On your forehead
While you dance?

7. A SHOWER

That sputter of rain, flipping the hedge-rows
And making the highways hiss,
How I love it!
And the touch of you upon my arm
As you press against me that my umbrella
May cover you.

Tinkle of drops on stretched silk.
We murmur though green branches.

8. PASSING THE BAMBOO FENCE

What fell upon my open umbrella—
A plum-blossom?

9. THE TWO RAINS

Spring Rain
Tinkling of ankle bracelets.
Dull striking
Of jade and sardonyx
From whirling ends of jointed circlets.

Summer Rain
Clashing of bronze bucklers,
Screaming of horses.
Red plumes of head-trappings
Flashing above spears.

10. SUNSHINE

The pool is edged with the blade-like leaves of irises.
If I throw a stone into the placid water,
It suddenly stiffens
Into rings and rings
Of sharp gold wire.

11. SUMMER RAIN

All night our room was outer-walled with rain.
Drops fell and flattened on the tin roof,
And rang like little disks of metal.
Ping! Ping! and there was not a pin-point of silence between them.

The rain rattled and clashed,
And the slats of the shutters danced and glittered.
But to me the darkness was red-gold and crocus-colored

With your brightness,
And the words you whispered to me
Sprang up and flamed—orange torches against the rain.
Torches against the wall of cool, silver rain!

AMY LOWELL

SOURCES:

Prayer for a Profusion of Sunflowers from *Songs of the Pueblo Indians* (uncollected poems); *Tanka* from *Ballads for Sale* (1927); *Vernal Equinox*, *The Peddler of Flowers*, *From a Window*, *Grotesque*, *A Shower*, *Passing the Bamboo Fence*, *The Two Rains*, *Sunshine* and *Summer Rain* from *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919).

Orange Torches Against the Rain

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2012)

1. Prayer for a profusion of sunflowers

Quickly; joyous ♩=108

f

ecstatic ringing

Send sun - flow - ers!

Send sun - flow - ers!

decresc.

④

⑦

$\frac{3}{4}$ ♩=162

mp

With my turk - ey - bone whist - le

becoming smooth

mp

legato

11 *cresc.*

I am call - ing the birds to sing, to sing to sing

15 *mf*

up - on the sun - - - - flowr's.

mf expressive, singing

19 *p* *cresc.*

For when the clouds hear them sing - ing they will come quick - ly and

sub. p *cresc.*

23 $\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{ (♩} = 120)$ *ff*

rain will fall up - on our fields.

ff

27

Send sun . . . flow'rs!

30 *triumphant*

Send sun . . . flow'rs!

2. Tanka

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Moderately; gently ♩=60 *mp* più mosso ♩=84 *mf*

Ros-es and lark-spur_ and slen-der ser-ried lil-ies; I

⑥ won-der wheth-er these are worth your at-ten-tion. Con-sid-er it,

⑥

⑪ *pp* and if not-

⑪

3. Vernal Equinox

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2012)

Moderately; atmospheric, languid ♩=72

pp
The scent of

③
hy - a - cinths, like a pale mist

⑤ *p* *ritenuto* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *mp*
lies be-tween me and my book; and the South Wind wash - ing

⑦ *mf* *ritenuto* *poco rit.* *accel. a*
through the room, makes the can - dles qui ver.

—5—

⑨ ----- Più Mosso; nervous ♩=96 *mp* *cresc. poco a poco*

My nerves sting at a splat-ter of rain on the shut-ter

⑫

and I am un-eas-y with the thrust-ing of green shoots out

⑬

side, in the night.

⑱ *f* *mf* (ad libitum)

Why Why are you not here — to o-ver-

②1 *f* *mp* *p*

pow - er me with your tense and ur - gent love.

②4 [$\text{♩} = 96$] *p* *mp* poco rit.-----

4. The Peddler of Flowers

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2012)

Quickly; swaying, hypnotic $\text{♩} = 132$ ($\text{♩} = 66$)

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a complex rhythmic structure with multiple time signatures: 4/4, 3/4, 4/8, and 6/8. The piano accompaniment is characterized by dense, arpeggiated chords in the right hand and sustained bass notes in the left hand. The voice line is melodic and expressive, with lyrics in English. Performance instructions include dynamics such as *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *poco f* (poco fortissimo), and articulation like *do not rush* and *(sim.)* (simile). The score is divided into systems, with measure numbers 6, 12, and 18 marked at the beginning of each system. The lyrics are: "I came from the coun-try with flow'rs, lark-spur and ros-es fret-ted li-lies in their leaves and long, cool la-ven-der I car-ried them".

mp I came from the coun-try with
do not rush
mp (sim.)
following the dynamic contour of the voice, but always significantly softer

⑥
flow'rs, lark-spur and ros-es fret-ted

⑫
li-lies in their leaves and long, cool la-ven-der
poco f

⑱
I car-ried them
mp

24

from house to house and cried them, cried cried

30

cried down hot streets.

36

The sun fell up-on my flow'rs,

42

and the dust of the streets blew o-ver my bas-ket.

48

pp

Flow'rs... Flow'rs... Flow'rs...

54

dying away

Flow'rs...

decresc.

5. From a window

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Andante; atmospheric ♩=69

P rhythmic

Your foot - falls on the drum bridge be - side my

P

RH

dampened with the LH in the piano

pp resonant

ad. ad lib

⑤

rhythmic

house are like the pat - ter - ing drops of a pass - ing show'r,

⑤

f

⑧

so soon are they gone.

⑧

repeat ad lib, al niente

pp

6. Grotesque

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Very Quickly; playful, impudent ♩=162; ♪.=108 (♩=♪)

p Why do the

f *cheeky* *sub p*

⑧ li - lies gog - gle their tongues at me when I pluck them;

mp *cresc.*

⑭ and writhe and twist, and twist_ and writhe, _ and

cresc.

⑳ *mf* *f*

stran_ gle them - selves a - gainst_ my fin - gers,

28 *mf*

so that I can hard - ly weave the gar - land, for your

34 *p*

hair? Why do they

41 *f*

shriek your name and spit at me

taunting *ff* *sub p*

49 *p*

when I would clus - ter them?

mp

56 *f* *mp*

Must I kill them to make them lie still, and

63 *f* *mp*

send you a wreath of lol - ling corp - ses to turn pu - trid and soft

70 *f* *ff*

on your fore - head while you dance?

(let ring through m. 81)

78

7. A Shower

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Quickly; liquid, effervescent $\text{♩} = 116$

Musical score for the first system of "A Shower". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "That sput-ter of rain,". The piano accompaniment is marked *p* and includes a "sparkling" texture. The score includes a triplet of eighth notes in the vocal line and a "liberal use of ped. " instruction for the piano.

Musical score for the second system of "A Shower". The vocal line continues with the lyrics "(f)-lip-ping the hedge-rows" and "and mak-ing the". The piano accompaniment features a "poco cresc." marking and a trill in the right hand. The score includes a triplet of eighth notes in the vocal line and a "7" marking under the piano accompaniment.

Musical score for the third system of "A Shower". The vocal line continues with the lyrics "high - ways_ hiss, (ss)_" and "how I". The piano accompaniment features a "cresc." marking and a trill in the right hand. The score includes a "7" marking under the piano accompaniment and an "8th" marking at the end.

Musical score for the fourth system of "A Shower". The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "love it!_" and "And the touch of you up-on my arm". The piano accompaniment features a "pp" marking and a "tremolo" marking. The score includes a triplet of eighth notes in the vocal line and a "7" marking under the piano accompaniment. The system ends with an "8th" marking.

12 *mp*

as you press a - gainst me _____ that my um - brel - la _____

16

— may cov - er you. _____

glisc. *pp* *Una Corda* *harp.* *hypnotic*

20 *mp*

Tink - le of drops _____ on stretched silk. _____ Wet

24 *p* fading away

mur-mur through green _____ bran - - - ches. _____

28

(as long as possible)

niente

Musical score for measures 28-30. The score consists of three staves. The top staff is a single treble clef staff with a long note in measure 28 and a whole rest in measure 29. The middle and bottom staves are a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The middle staff features three triplet chords in measures 28 and 29, followed by a melodic line in measure 30. The bottom staff features a bass line with a flat in measure 28 and various notes in measures 29 and 30.

8. Passing the Bamboo Fence

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Moderately; recitative-like ♩=60

sotto voce
p *slightly surprised* *3* *playful, pp* *mischievous* (full voice)

What fell up-on my o - pen um-brel - la — A plum blos - som? (m)

delicately
p

Red.

④ *molto rit.* -----

④ *bouncing*
mp *pp*

9. The Two Rains

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Quickly; ringing throughout ♩=116 (♩=232)

Spring Rain

Una Corda →
Ped. →

* the rhythm ♩ should be accented throughout as though the first note is a down beat

⑥

⑫

⑰

poco cresc.

23 *p* >

Tink - ling of ank - le brace - lets. Dull strik - ing of jade, _____

29 *decresc.*

Tink - ling, Strik - ing, Whirl - ing, Tink - ling, Strik - ing, Whirl - ing...

37 *Summer Rain* *f* >

Clash - ing of bronze - buck - lers, scream - ing of hors - es.

sub. f *tr*

Tre Corde →

43

Red plumes of head - trap - pings

50

flash - ing a - bove spears.

tr

57

Clash - ing, Scream - ing, Flash - ing, Clash - ing, Scream - ing, Flash - ing...

cresc. *ff*

cresc.

63

rit. - - - - -

sub. p like an echo

repeat several times

ff *decresc.*

attacca

Una Corda

for Anne Chao, in gratitude

10. Sunshine

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2011)

Slowly with rubato; wistful (♩=52)

Voice *p*

The pool is edged with the blade-like leaves of i-ri-ses.

Piano *p* *colla parte*

Quickly, in tempo; animated (♩=108)

mf *mp*

If I throw a stone in-to the pla-cid wa-ter, —

Fairly slow (ca. ♩= 80) and steady

poco f floating need not be precisely coordinated with piano

it sud-den-ly stiff-ens in-to rings and

Beginning quickly (♩=120) then slowing down gradually

mf *decrescendo poco a poco*

Red. →
Una Corda →

rings of sharp gold wire. —

(♩=52)

ppp

very gradually change pedal while holding the Bs and G's

11. Summer Rain

Text: Amy Lowell
(1875-1925)

Music: Karim Al-Zand
(2012)

Quickly; anxious, jumpy ♩ = 138
p tense, nervous

(2+3) All night, all night our room was out-er - walled with

p pingingly brightly

(2+3)

7 *mp* rain. Drops fell, drops fell and flat-tened on the tin roof, and

13 *poco f* rang, rang, rang, like lit-tle discs of met-al. Ping! *pp* *poco f*

19 *pp* Ping! Ping! and there was not a pin-point of si-lence be - tween them. *f*

25

f

The rain _____ rat - tled and

32

clashed, and the slats _____ of the shut-ters danced _____

40

_____ and glit - tered _____ and there was not a pin-point of si - lence be -

pp

47

Slightly Slower; calmer

mp warmly

tween them. But to me the

suddenly legato, but slightly emphasizing the groups of 4

mp

53

dark - ness was red - gold and cro - cus col - ored with your

59

bright - ness, and the words you whis - pered to

66

mf animated *poco accel.* *cresc.*
me sprang up, sprang up and flamed—

73

f *ecstatic* *tempo primo*
or - - - ange torch - es a - gainst

79 *clarion*

the rain... Torch - - - es Torch - - - es

accents becoming stronger

Sub

86 *cresc.* *ff* *exultant*

a - gainst the wall of cool, sil - ver rain!

joyous bells!

cresc. *ff*

Sub

93

let ring

Sub