

Afterthoughts of Lakeside Park

for tenor and piano

- I. Alligator Pond
- II. Red Wagon Death March
- III. Overflow

13 minutes

Brooke Joyce (1999-2009)

Text by Nathan Wesselowski

Commissioned by Nathan Wesselowski

Premiered in full by Nathan Wesselowski and Brooke Joyce, October 2012

Program Note:

I had previously composed two large-scale works for Nathan Wesselowski (*An Imaginary Line* and *A Winter's Journey*) when he approached me about setting some of his poems, which were reflections of vivid childhood experiences. We worked on the first song, "Alligator Pond," in 1999, when Nathan and I were both living in Charlottesville, Virginia. Ten years later, I finally set two more of Nathan's poems.

I. Alligator Pond

In a dream a vivid image was spawned
As mortality danced in my head.
This concrete vision frightened my soul
Portraying death in the form of an alligator.

The beast dwelled in the moat
Which surrounded the greenest grass,
And a tree that sang exotic tunes.

The rite of passage was granted to the masters of the stepping stones.
The concrete cylinders, seven in all, protruded from the bottomless moat.
In order to obtain neverending bliss, the task of crossing had to occur.
I must cross it! I must cross it! I must cross it! I must cross it! the bro-ken vinyl played.

Standing at the edge trembling in fear
I sensed the alligator lurking below the surface,
Disguised in the best camouflage a reptile could buy.

His presence was felt, evil energy;
Two rows of meat devouring blades,
Eyes which could detect my every move,
And a graveyard of bones resting deep.

My little legs could barely reach the first stone,
But managed to balance.
Perhaps my decision was wrong.
I envisioned my death plunge!
As I leapt to the second stone
The rhythm of my heart skipped a beat...
Then accelerated to a nerve breaking rate.
I was almost halfway arrived when fear plummeted me forth to each successive plateau The last jump appeared before my eyes
As I landed I heard the crunch of the alligator between my toes.
My foot splashed in the mud, and landed like a dragonfly upon the plush lawn.

But with each crossing thereafter
The existence of the reptile diminished
And eventually evaporated gold.
The moat became a puddle
And the alligator...
a goldfish.

II. Red Wagon Death March

Fifteen feet on rocky ledge
Reeling in a whale of a fish
A young boy exclaimed a triumphant pledge
“You shall be a tasty dish!”

Lord Catfish bathed in the sun
Waiting, waiting...
Lacking water, he was stunned
Waiting, waiting...

The young boy returned in haste
With a wagon to transport him home
So his Pa would chance to taste

And praise the prize alone.

However...the fates did not allow
The proud young boy to boast
There would be no final bow
Or orange juice to toast!

Rather a march to end
The vitality of the catch
The young boy couldn't pretend
As he grew ever attached.

With each gasp
Lord Catfish seemed to cry:
Within the boy's clasp:

"Why? Why must I die?"

After Lord Catfish
was no more
his story writ here
in one child's lore.

III. Overflow

Here I sit on your banks
Trying to recapture
What was of old
I find it hard
To remember the truth
Once deep and winding
Those veins have filled
Wider trenches
Rid narrower passages
Remembering days
Reaching past your boundaries
coming to my front door
I want you to grow.
Cleansing me

While I paddle you
Then I like you
Overflow.