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PROGRAM NOTES

Song of the Silkie (String Quartet No. 2) is a dramatic work for high baritone (or baritone and soprano, or mezzo-soprano, or countertenor) and string quartet. The music is based on a folk song which appears in various ways throughout the piece, beginning with this text: "I am a man upon the land."

—Elena Ruehr

Based on the folk tale about a seal who sheds her skin and becomes a woman and her ensuing desire to return to the wild.

—Laura Harrington

DURATION: 17:00

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Full Score and Parts	8484
Piano/Vocal Rehearsal Score	8484A

Elena Ruehr (b. 1963)

For biographical information visit:
www.elenaruehr.org

Laura Harrington (b. 1953)

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www.lauraharringtonbooks.com

LIBRETTO
SONG OF THE SILKIE

Libretto by Laura Harrington

Music by Elena Ruehr

Commissioned by the Rockport Chamber Music Festival, 2000

James

Where is she?
Has she found her skin?
And slipped away?
Oh, Sula, Sula, silkie,
Have you left me?
Oh, Sula, Sula silkie,
Have you gone to live inside the sea?
Have you gone forever?
Are you leaving me?
Sula!

She says...

Sula

"I am a woman on the land,
I am a silkie on the sea,
And when I'm far from every strand,
My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie."

James

How can you leave me?
Isn't my love inside your blood now,

Stronger than the call of the sea?

The skin you take so eagerly
Lift in your arms like a child
The skin you take so greedily
The skin, your skin, so wild.

What I stole from you,
What I kept from you,
Now exacts its price.
I held you captive,
I held you dear,
I took you for my wife.

Stay my love, my lovely one,
My creature of the sea,
Stay, oh my wife, my precious one,
I beg you, stay by me.

Sula

Who hears the silkie when she cries,
Searching for her skin.
Who hears the silkie when she cries,
To free the seal within.

James

Sula, take me with you,
Sula, take me in,
Sula, take me to the heart of the sea,
In the folds of your magic skin.

Sula

You cannot be a silkie man,
You cannot follow me.
You cannot live your life inside the secrets of the sea.
And if you steal my skin again,
You'll be the death of me.

James

I am a man upon the land,
I am a man upon the sea,
And when you're gone from where I stand,
My heart will never be free.

I'll rig my boat,
I'll set my sails,
I'll follow where you flee.
I will follow you, Sula,
Into the green heart of the sea.

Look how you rise and fall in the wedge of
the wind, in the sighing of the sea.
You turn your dark eyes,
Rising out of the black waves,
Flying far away,
Beyond the path of heaven.
This perfect animal freedom,
Joy beyond bearing.
What will I do,
When the waves snap shut over your blue gray head,
When you finally leave this shore?

Did you dream the ocean, Sula,
The embrace and freedom of the sea?
Will you dream of me, Sula,
Now that you are free?

Sula

The song you make for me,
At what unknowable cost,
From what unknowable loss,
The song from Sule Skerrie.

James

I will wait for you, Sula.
Wait for the voice I hope to hear,
And know I never will,
I plunge into memory, come up for air,
and plunge again.

Your silence follows me,
Your silence is my own vanishing song.

I am a man upon the land,
I am a man upon the sea,
And when you're gone from where I stand,
My soul will yearn for thee, my Sula.

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for Stephen Salters and the Shanghai Quartet

Song of the Silkie

(String Quartet No. 2)

for High Baritone (or Baritone and Soprano, or Mezzo-Soprano, or Countertenor) and String Quartet

Laura Harrington

Elena Ruehr

The musical score is presented in a standard orchestral layout. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72. The Voice(s) part is in the bass clef. The Violin 1 part starts with a dynamic of *p* and a marking of *poco espr.*. The Violin 2 part starts with a dynamic of *pp*. The Viola part starts with a dynamic of *pp*. The Violoncello part starts with a dynamic of *p* and a *pizz.* marking. The score is divided into three systems, with measures 6 and 11 marked at the beginning of the second and third systems respectively. A large diagonal watermark reading 'Copyright is illegal copy' is overlaid across the entire score.

16 James

p

Voice(s) *p* *poco*

Where is she? _ Has she found her skin? _ And slipped _

Vn. 1 *pp*

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

21

p espr., legato

Voice(s) *f*

_ a - way? _ Oh, Su - la, _ Su -

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

26

pp

Voice(s) *pp*

- la sil - kie, _ Have you left _ me?

Vn. 1 *pp*

Vn. 2 *pizz.* *p*

Va.

Vc. *arco*

31 *p* *mp* *p*

Voice(s) Oh, Su - la, Su-la sil - kie, Have you gone to live in-side the sea? —

Vn. 1 *p*

Vn. 2 *arco* 3 3

Va. (*pp*) *p* *pizz.*

Vc. *pp* *p*

35 *mf* *f*

Voice(s) — Have you gone for-ev-er? — Are you leav - ing me? Su - la, Su -

Vn. 1 *mp*

Vn. 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Va. *mp* *mf* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Vc. *mp* *mf* *f* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

39 *f* *Sula p falsetto (if high baritone)*

Voice(s) la! She says... "I am a wo - man

Vn. 1 *mf* *sub. p*

Vn. 2 *pizz.* *mf* *p* (*p*)

Va. *pp*

Vc. *mf* *p* *p*

49

Voice(s) on the land, I am a silk - ie on the sea, And when I'm far from ev -

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

58

Voice(s) 'ry strand, My dwell-ing is in Sule Sker-rie."

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

mp

arco

mp

66

Voice(s)

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

arco

mf

mf

mf

70 James *p*

Voice(s) How can you

Vn. 1 *p*

Vn. 2 *p*

Va. *pp*

Vc.

75 *mp*

Voice(s) leave me? Is-n't my love in-side your blood now, Strong er than the call of the

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va. *pp*

Vc. *pp* *arco*

79 *breve pp*

Voice(s) sea? The skin you

Vn. 1 *breve ppp*

Vn. 2 *breve pizz. p*

Va. *breve pp*

Vc. *f ppp*

83

Voice(s) *p* *mp*
 take so eag - er - ly _____ Lift in your arms _____ like a child The

Vn. 1 *pp*

Vn. 2

Va. *ppp* *pp*

Vc. *pp*

87

Voice(s) *mf* *f*
 skin you take so greed - i - ly _____ The skin, your skin, _____ so wild. _____

Vn. 1 *p* *mp* *f*

Vn. 2 *mp* *mp* *f*

Va. *p* *mp* *f*

Vc. *p* *mp* *f*

90

Voice(s) *mf*
 What I stole _____ from you, -

Vn. 1 *f* *mp*

Vn. 2 *mp*

Va. *f* *mp*

Vc. *pizz.* *mp*

$\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ ($\text{♩} = 162$)

99

Voice(s) *f*
What I kept from you, Now ex-acts its price I

Vn. 1 *mf*

Vn. 2 *mf*

Va. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

107

Voice(s) *f*
held you cap - tive, I held you dear,

Vn. 1 *f*

Vn. 2 *f*

Va. *f*

Vc. *f*

114

Voice(s) *pp* *poco*
I took you for my wife.

Vn. 1 *sub. ppp*

Vn. 2

Va. *ppp*

Vc.

♩ = ♩ unless otherwise indicated

117 *p* *f*

Voice(s) Stay my love,

Vn. 1 *f* 3

Vn. 2 *f*

Va. *f* 3

Vc. *f*

124 *mf*

Voice(s) my love - - - ly one,

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va. 3

Vc.

132 *f* *poco rit.* *sub. p*

Voice(s) My crea - ture of the sea, Stay,

Vn. 1 3

Vn. 2

Va. 3 *ppp* 4

Vc.