

Still Lost Bird Music

August

ABOUT THE ALBUM

August is a cycle of songs based on poems by various authors from various eras. In classical music, composers do this kind of thing all the time—that is, take previously written poetry and set it to music for voice and accompaniment—and have for centuries. It felt natural to me to carry the practice into the context of the rock album and, in this case, into a sound world especially steeped in the traditions of American folk music. I chose these poems first because they really spoke to me but also because they were in the public domain. Most of them are about love, the loss of it, the memory of, and longing for it.

—Simon Fink

Music by Simon Fink.

All poems are in the public domain.

Produced by Simon Fink and J Kerr.

Special thanks to:

Pedro “Chili” Squella, harp on “A Garden by the Sea”.

Rebecca Foley, vocals on “Intrigue” and “Home Thoughts/At Night”.

J Kerr, electric guitars on “Old Familiar Faces”.

THE POEMS

The Storm (1920)

by Sara Teasdale (1884–1937)

I thought of you when I was wakened
 By a wind that made me glad and afraid
Of the rushing, pouring sound of the sea
 That the great trees made.

One thought in my mind went over and over
 While the darkness shook and the leaves were thinned—
I thought it was you who had come to find me,
 You were the wind.

Lament for the Makers (ca. 1505)
William Dunbar (1460–1520)

I that in health was and gladness
Am trublit now with great sickness
And feblit with infirmitie

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Our plesance here is all vain glory,
This fals world is but transitory,
The flesh is bruckle, the Feynd is slee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The state of man does change and vary,
Now sound, now sick, now blyth, now sary,
Now dansand merry, now like to die.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

No state in erd here standis sicker;
As with the wynd wavis the wicker
So wavis this world's vanitie.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Unto the death gois all estatis
Princis, prelatis, and potestatis,
Baith rich and poor of all degree.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He takis the knichtis into the field
Enarmit under helmet and scheid;
Victor he is all mellie.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

That strong unmerciful tyrand
Takis, on the motheris breast sowkand,
The babe full of benignitie.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He takis the campion in the stour,
The captain closit in the tour,
The lady in bour full of bewtie.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He sparis no lord for his piscence,
Na clerk for his intelligence;
His awful straik may no man flee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Art magicianis and astrologgis,
Rethoris, logicians, and theologgis,
Them helpis no conlusionis slee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

In medicine the most practicianis,
Leechis, surrigianis, and physicianis,
Themselves from Death may not supplee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

I see that makaris amang the laif
Playis here their pageant, soon gois to graif;
Sparit is nocht their facultie.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has done petuously devour
The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour;
The Monk of Bury, and Gower, all three.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The scorpion fell has done infeck
Maister John Clerk, and James Affleck,
Fra ballat-making and tragedie.

Timor Mortis contrubat me.

Holland and Barbour he has berevit;
Alas! That he not with us levit
Sir Mungo Lockart of the Lee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Clerk of Tranent eik he has tane,
That made the Anteris of Gawaine;
Sir Gilbert Hay endit has he.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has Blind Harry and Sandy Traill
Slain with his schour of mortal hail,
Quhilk Patrick Johnstoun might nocht flee.

Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has reft Merseir his endite,
That did luve so lively write,
So short, so quick, of sentence hie.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has tane Rowll of Aberdene,
And gentill Rowll of Corstorphine;
Two better fallowis did no man see.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

In Dunfermline he has done rounne
With Maister Robert Henrysoun;
Sir John the Ross enbrast has he.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

And he has now tane, last of aw,
Good gentil Stobo and Quintin Shaw,
Of whom all wichtis hes pitie.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Good Maister Walter Kennedy
In point of Death lies verily;
Great ruth it were that so shuld be.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Sen he has all my brether tane,
He will nocht let me live alane;
Of force I must his next prey be.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Since for the Death remeid is none,
Best is that we for Death dispone,
After our death that live may we.
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Nightfall (1920)
by Sara Teasdale (1884–1937)

We will never walk again
As we used to walk at night,
Watching our shadows lengthen
Under the gold street-light
When the snow as new and white.

We will never walk again
 Slowly, we two,
In spring when the park is sweet
 With midnight and with dew,
 And the passers-by are few.

I sit and think of it all,
 And the blue June twilight dies,—
Down in the clanging square
 A street-piano cries
 And stars come out in the skies.

Wild Peaches (1921)
Elinor Wylie (1885–1928)

1

When the world turns completely upside down
You say we'll emigrate to the Eastern Shore
Aboard a river-boat from Baltimore;
We'll live among wild peach trees, miles from town.
You'll wear a coonskin cap, and I a gown
Homespun, dyed butternut's dark color.
Lost, like your lotus-eating ancestor,
We'll swim in milk and honey till we drown.

The winter will be short, the summer long,
The autumn amber-hued, sunny and hot,
Tasting of cider and scuppernong;
All seasons sweet, but autumn best of all.
The squirrels in their silver fur will fall
Like falling leaves, like fruit, before your shot.

2

The autumn frosts will lie upon the grass
Like blooms on grapes of purple-brown and gold.
The misted early mornings will be cold;
The little puddles will be roofed with glass.
The sun, which burns from copper into brass,
Melts these at noon, and makes the boys unfold
Their knitted mufflers; full as they can hold,
Fat pockets dribble chestnuts as they pass.

Peaches grow wild, and pigs can live in clover;
A barrel of salted herrings lasts a year;
The spring begins before the winter's over.
By February you may find the skins
Of garter snakes and water moccasins
Dwindled and harsh, dead-white and cloudy-clear.

3

When April pours the colors of a shell
Upon the hills, when every little creek
Is shot with silver from the Chesapeake
In shoals new-minted by the ocean swell,
When strawberries go begging, and the sleek
Blue plums lie open to the blackbird's beak,
We shall live well—we shall live very well.

The months between the cherries and the peaches
Are brimming cornucopias which spill
Fruits red and purple, somber-bloomed and black;
Then, down rich fields and frosty river beaches
We'll trample bright persimmons, while we kill
Bronze partridge, speckled quail, and canvasback.

4

Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones
There's something in this richness that I hate.
I love the look, austere, immaculate,
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones.
There's something in my very blood that owns
Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,
A thread of water turned to milky spate
Streaming through slanted pastures fenced with stones.

I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,
Those fields sparse-planted, rendering meager sheaves;
That spring, briefer than apple-blossom's breath,
Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,
Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,
And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death.

Old Familiar Faces (1798)

Charles Lamb (1775–1834)

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?

I had a mother, but she died, and left me,
Died prematurely in a day of horrors –
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays –
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among the women;
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her –
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man;
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly,
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why wert thou not born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces –

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me – all are departed –
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

The Stolen Child (1886)

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake

The drowsy water rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries,
And the reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim gray sands with light,
Far off by the furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside;

Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
*For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.*

Francesca (1909)
Ezra Pound(1885–1972)

You came in out of the night
And there were flowers in your hands,
Now you will come out of a confusion of people,
Out of a turmoil of speech about you.

I who have seen you amid the primal things
Was angry when the spoke your name
In ordinary places.
I would that the cool waves might flow over my mind,
And that the world should dry as a dead leaf,
Or as a dandelion seed pod and be swept away,
So that I might find you again,
Alone.

Home Thoughts (1922)
by Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

The sea rocks have a green moss.
The pine trees have red berries.
I have memories of you.

Speak to me of how you miss me.
Tell me the hours go long and slow.

Speak to me of the drag on your heart,
The iron drag of the long days.

I know hours empty as a beggar's tin cup on a rainy day,
empty as a soldier's sleeve with an arm lost.

Speak to me...

At Night (1915)

by Sara Teasdale (1884–1937)

We are apart; the city grows quiet between us,
 She hushes herself, for midnight makes heavy her eyes,
The tangle of traffic is ended, the cars are empty,
 Five streets divide us, and on them the moonlight lies.

Oh are you asleep, or lying awake, my lover?
 Open your dreams to my love and your heart to my words,
I send you my thoughts—the air between us is laden,
 My thoughts fly in at your window, a flock of wild birds.

August (1866)

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909)

There were four apples on the bough,
Half gold half red, that one might know
The blood was ripe inside the core;
The colour of the leaves was more
Like stems of yellow corn that grow
Through all the gold June meadow's floor.

The warm smell of the fruit was good
To feed on, and the split green wood,
With all its bearded lips and stains
Of mosses in the cloven veins,
Most pleasant, if one lay or stood
In sunshine or in happy rains.

There were four apples on the tree,
Red stained through gold, that all might see
The sun went warm from core to rind;
The green leaves made the summer blind
In that soft place they kept for me
With golden apples shut behind.

The leaves caught gold across the sun,
And where the bluest air begun,
Thirsted for song to help the heat;
As I to feel my lady's feet
Draw close before the day were done;
Both lips grew dry with dreams of it.

In the mute August afternoon
They trembled to some undertune
Of music in the silver air;
Great pleasure was it to be there
Till green turned duskier and the moon
Coloured the corn-sheaves like gold hair.

That August time it was delight
To watch the red moons wane to white
'Twixt grey seamed stems of apple-trees;
A sense of heavy harmonies
Grew on the growth of patient night,
More sweet than shapen music is.

But some three hours before the moon
The air, still eager from the noon,
Flagged after heat, not wholly dead;
Against the stem I leant my head;
The colour soothed me like a tune,
Green leaves all round the gold and red.

I lay there till the warm smell grew
More sharp, when flecks of yellow dew
Between the round ripe leaves had blurred
The rind with stain and sweat; I heard
A wind that blew and breathed and blew,
Too weak to alter its one word.

The wet leaves next the gentle fruit
Felt smoother, and the brown tree-root
Felt the mould warmer: I too felt
(As water feels the slow gold melt
Right through it when the day burns mute)
The peace of time wherein love dwelt.

There were four apples on the tree,
Gold stained on red that all might see
The sweet blood filled them to the core:
The colour of her hair is more
Like stems of fair faint gold, that be
Mown from the harvest's middle floor.

A Garden by the Sea (1867/91)
William Morris (1834–1896)

I know a little garden-close,
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night.
And have one with me wandering.

And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared house is there,
And though the apple-boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before.

There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the place two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea:
Dark hills whose heath-bloom feeds no bee,
Dark shore not ship has ever seen,
Tormented by the billows green
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.

For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
Whereby I grow deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.
Yet tottering as I am and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death
An entrance to that happy place,
To seek the unforgotten face,
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.

Luke Havergal (1897)
Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935)

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,

And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

“Intrigue” (1897)

by Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

Thou art my love,
And thou art the peace of sundown
When the blue shadows soothe,
And the grasses and the leaves sleep
To the song of the little brooks,
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And thou art a storm
That breaks black in the sky,
And, sweeping headlong,
Drenches and covers each tree,
And at the panting end
There is no sound
Save the melancholy cry of a single owl—
Woe is me!

Thou art my love,
And thou art a tinsel thing,
And I in my play
Broke thee easily,
And from the little fragments
Arose my long sorrow—
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And thou art a weary violet,
Drooping from sun-caresses,
Answering mine carelessly—
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And thou art the ashes of men's love,
And I bury my face in these ashes,
And I love them—
Woe is me.

Thou art my love
And thou art the beard
On another man's face
Woe is me.

Thou art my love
And thou are a temple
And in this temple is an altar
And on this altar is my heart
Woe is me.

Thou art my love
And thou art a wretch.
Let these sacred love-lies choke thee

For I am come to where I know your lies as truth
And your truth as lies
Woe is me.

Thou art my love
And thou art a priestess
And in thy hand is a bloody dagger
And my doom comes to me surely
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And thou art a skull with ruby eyes,
And I love thee—
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And I doubt thee.
And if peace came with thy murder
Then I would murder—
Woe is me.

Thou art my love,
And thou art death,
Aye, thou art death,
Black and yet black.
But I love thee,
I love thee.
Woe, welcome woe, to me.

Song (1909)
Ezra Pound(1885–1972)

Love thou thy dream
All base love scorning,
Love thou the wind
And here take warning,
That dreams alone can truly be,
For 'tis in dream I come to thee.