

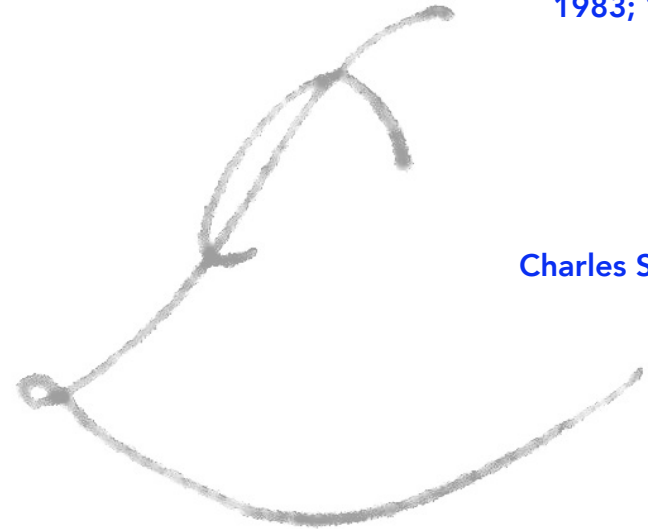
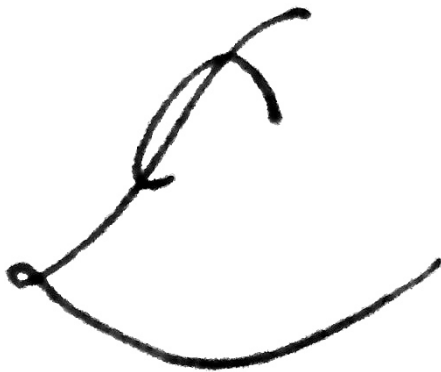
Three Songs

from

Tender Buttons

1983; 1989

Charles Shere



healdsburg : ear press : 2016

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for Judy Ruth Hubbell

I met the writing of Gertrude Stein through the old RCA Victor recording of Virgil Thomson's opera to her libretto, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. That would have been in 1955 or thereabouts. What charmed me immediately was the innocence, clarity, fantasy, and good humor of both the words and the music. There were other examples of this sort of brittle, intelligent Modernism, notably William Walton's setting of Edith Sitwell's poems in *Façade*, but it was Stein who remained a constant favorite over the years.

It was not until 1972, though, that I thought to make my own musical settings of her work. This was *Dates*, a sort of chamber cantata for soprano, clarinetist, violinist, and percussionist. (The instrumentation includes clarinets in Eb and A, bass clarinet, violin and viola, marimba and vibraphone.)

Then in 1975 I turned to *Tender Buttons*, her collection of "cubist" prose poems, most of them short, and quickly set three of them: "Peeled Pencil. Choke," "Dirt and Not Copper," and "The White Hunter." John Duykers sang the last two in one of those Bicentennial concerts nodding to American composers, but he will not remember this.

The wonderful soprano Judy Hubbell asked, I think, for some songs, and I thought of working my way slowly over the years through the whole of *Tender Buttons*, setting the texts to different performing forces. "A Carafe" was the first to appear, in 1983, and "Suppose an Eyes" and "Rhubarb" followed in 1989 for a recital she gave in San Francisco. It seemed logical to issue them as the present set.

In 1987 I got more serious about this and decided to begin setting the plays. I was learning to compose at the computer, and turned to *Ladies Voices* for inspiration, setting the play on three sopranos, woodwind quintet, and trap set. Two years later I made a complementary setting of *I Like It to Be a Play*, for three male voices (tenor, baritone, bass) and string quartet. (I would like one day to have the opportunity to set a finale to the trilogy, *What Happened a Play*, for the combined forces of the first two chamber operas.)

In 1997 I returned to *Tender Buttons* for a concert in Santa Cruz, setting "It Was Black, Black Took" and "Red Roses" for mezzo-soprano, violin, bass clarinet, and piano, and adding to them a setting of a fugitive Stein text, "You Can Only Say What You Know," which I know only from Lew Welch's quotation of it in his book *How I Read Stein*.

If you want to know more about my infatuation with Gertrude Stein I refer you to a little book I wrote in 2002, *Why I Read Stein* (thanks, Lew Welch): Oakland: Mills College Center for the Book, 2002. Foreword by Sumner Carmahan. 40 pages. ISBN 0-9648938-5-1

These *Three Songs from Tender Buttons* are meant to be light-hearted, though I do think "A Carafe" has rather a winsome quality.

—Charles Shere
Healdsburg, September 2016

ERRATUM

As originally set, there is an error in the quotation of Gertrude Stein's poem *Suppose An Eyes*. It can be rectified by substituting the following for measure 13 on page six of the present edition.

69 *mf*
 All the seats are need - ing
p
p 8^{va}

Three Songs from Tender Buttons

Rhubarb

Text by Gertrude Stein
 from *Tender Buttons*

Music by Charles Shere

Brightly, ♩ = 120

Soprano
 Rhu-barb is su-san not su-san not seat in bunch toys not

Violin
detached but on the string
mf

Piano
mf

S.
 4
 wild and laugh-a-ble not in lit-tle pla-ces not

Vln.
f *p* *mf*

Pno.
f *p* *mf*

8

S. *in neg-lect and - ve - ge - ta - ble not in fold coal age*

Vln. *mp*

Pno. *p*

12

S. *not please.*

Vln. *p*

Pno. *pp* *fp*

Berkeley, April 1989

59

sales of lea - ther and such beau - ti - ful beau - ti - ful,

pp

p

64

beau - ti - ful beau - ti - ful.

8th

Berkeley, April 21 1989

51

Lit - tle sales la - dies lit - tle sales

p

55

la - dies lit - tle sad-dles of mut-ton. Lit - tle

3

3

Three Songs from Tender Buttons
 A Carafe, That Is a Blind Glass

Gertrude Stein

Charles Shere

Gently, ♩ = 69

Soprano

A kind in glass and a cou-sin... A spec-ta-cle and no-thing

Violin

always under the voice

4

S.

strange. A sing - le... hurt co-lor... and an ar -

Vln.

bring out

arco

pp

pizz.

as before

8

S. range - ment in a sys - tem to point - ing.

Vln. arco
+ pizz.

11

S. All this and not or - di - na - ry not un - or - dered in not re - sem bling

Vln. arco
+ pizz.

14 *allargando*

S. The dif f'rence is spread - ing

Vln. 1983

42 *dramatically mp*

S. Sup - pose a col - lapse in rubbed purr,

Vln. sul tasto p mf norm.

47 *mf* *f* *mf* *Ritardando...* Slightly slower, ♩ = 106

S. in rubbed purr get.

Vln. *mf* *Ritardando...* Slightly slower, ♩ = 106

Three Songs from Tender Buttons

Suppose an Eyes

31 *off-handedly*

— he can read, he is a size to show shut-ting up— twen-ty - four—

mp *p*

l.h. *r.h.*

36 *mp* *mf* *f*

Go red go red, laugh white

p *ff*

Text by Gertrude Stein
from *Tender Buttons*

Music by Charles Shere

Brightly and a little ironically, in the style of a march

$\text{♩} = 112$ *f*

Soprano

Sup- pose it is with - in a gate which o - pen is o - pen

Brightly and a little ironically, in the style of a march

$\text{♩} = 112$ *mf*

Violin

Piano

6

at the hour of clo - sing sum- mer— that is to say it—

mp

11 *darkening* *mf* See note at end

— is so. All the seats need black-en-ing.

p *mf*

mf

8^{va}
p

15 *Cheerful* *mf*

A white dress is in sign

p *mf*

sul tasto

mp *p*

8^{va}
p

22 *alla marcia* *f* *mf*

A sol - dier a re - al sol - dier has a

f *p* *mf* *p*

26 *mf*

worn lace a worn lace of dif f'rent si - zes that is to say if—

mf