

Insect Voices (2008)

- i. Katy-Did, Katy-Didn't**
- ii. Changed is my childhood home**
- iii. Fathomless deepens the heat**

Insect Voices was commissioned by the Selby Art Gallery at the Ringling College of Design in Sarasota, Florida, and premiered there in February 2008 as part of the exhibition *Brenda Brown In Situ*, an exhibition of works by landscape architect Brenda Brown, whose interest in the sonic dimension of landscape is what led to the idea of a piece of music with a multi-level connection to the sounds of insects. There is a large body of poetry by Chinese, Japanese and Korean authors incorporating insect sounds as an auditory image and/or symbol. The texts for *Insect Voices* are amalgamations of shorter, related texts from that body of poetry. In spite of the insect imagery, the concerns of the poems are quintessentially human. In the first song, the concern is the singer's, philosophical and metaphysical reminiscence on sounds from her childhood; in the second, her wistful and poignant meditation on the latter stages of life's journey; and in the final song her amusing distractedness brought on by the endless and maddening droning song of cicadas in the summer heat.

Always, in composing vocal music, the greatest challenge is to capture the emotional tone and climate of the text. But in these poems there is the added dimension of insect sounds themselves as a central, sonic image. It was inevitable that the instruments should here and there evoke, and even adopt outright the personae of insects. It was perhaps equally inevitable that the insects' actual songs should find their way into this work. Insect choruses provide a frame for the human performers, and participate significantly in the work's dramatic shape as well. These insect choruses are not what one would expect to hear sitting outside on a summer evening, though: their sounds are arranged and organized so as to suit my very human musical purposes.