

RICHARD FESTINGER

The Locust Tree

For four part chorus
Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass

Commissioned by Volti

Special thanks to the Corporation of Yaddo
for its generous support of the composition of *The Locust Tree*

Accidentals are applied in the traditional manner, modifying all notes
on a given line or space until cancelled by another accidental or a barline.

"Kora in Hell" (excerpt) by William Carlos Williams, from IMAGINATIONS, copyright © 1970 by Florence H. Williams. "The Locust Tree In Flower, versions 1 & 2, by William Carlos Williams, from AN EARLY MARTYR, copyright © 1935. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) is one of the great modern American poets. His writing embodies his vision of a free, fresh, and simple language capable of apprehending the world directly, without literary allusion.

The texts of the outer movements of *The Locust Tree* are from Williams' short book of "improvisations" entitled *Kora in Hell*. The Greek goddess Kora, better known as Persephone, or by her later Latin name Proserpina, was the fair daughter of Zeus and Demeter. She dwelt not on Olympus, but within nature, a nature predating human agriculture. While picking flowers one day in a field in Enna, in what we now call Sicily, she was abducted by Hades, who made her his queen in the underworld. Grief stricken Demeter, goddess of the earth, allowed nature to go to ruin as she searched for her lost daughter. Responding to the anguish of the dying natural world, not least the anguish of the human race, Zeus intervened. Hades was forced to return Kora, but not before he was able to trick her into eating three pomegranate seeds, the effect of which was to compel her to return to the underworld once a year. Thus each year while Kora is united in the world with her mother Demeter, the earth is abundant with life, an abundance which fades to barrenness during her yearly sojourn in the underworld. Her story tells of the origin of the seasons, and is an allegory of spring. Perhaps we need her now more than ever before.

Williams writes, "March had always been my favorite month, the month of the first robin's songs signaling the return of the sun to these latitudes; I existed through the tough winter months of my profession as a physician only for that... I thought of myself as Springtime and I felt I was on my way to Hell (but I didn't go very far). This was what the Improvisations were trying to say."

The central movement combines Williams' two versions of another springtime poem, *The Locust Tree in Flower*. The music's fragmented rhythms follow the poet's line breaks; the unifying dramatic arch follows the gradually flowering tone and mood of the poem's first version, while the second version provides the opportunity for a musical reprise.

The Locust Tree Texts

1. Little Round Moon

from *Kora in Hell* (1920)

Little round moon up there – wait a while – do not walk so quickly. I could sing you a song – :
Wine clear the sky is and the stars no bigger than sparks! Wait for me and next winter we'll
build a fire and shake up twists of sparks out of it and you shall see yourself in the ashes, young
– as you were one time.

2. The Locust Tree in Flower

(*first version*)

from *An Early Martyr* (1935)

Among
the leaves
bright

green
of wrist-thick
tree

and old
stiff broken
branch

ferncool
swaying
loosely strung –

come May
again
white blossom

clusters
hide
to spill

their sweets
almost
unnoticed

down
and quickly
fall

The Locust Tree in Flower

(second version)

from *An Early Martyr* (1935)

Among
of
green

stiff
old
bright

broken
branch
come

white
sweet
May

Again

3. Mamselle Day

from *Kora in Hell* (1920)

Mamselle Day, Mamselle Day, come back again! Slip your clothes off! – the jingling of those little shell ornaments so deftly fastened – ! The streets are turning in their covers. They smile with shut eyes. I have been twice to the moon since supper but she has nothing to tell me. Mamselle come back! I will be wiser this time.

for Robert Geary and Volti
The Locust Tree

1. Little Round Moon

Text by William Carlos Williams

Music by Richard Festinger

Moderato ♩ = 66

Soprano 1
lit tle round moon moon up there

Soprano 2
lit tle round moon moon up there

Alto 1
round lit - tle round moon up there

Alto 2
lit - tle round moon up

Tenor 1
round moon up there

Tenor 2
moon up

Bass

8

S.
wait a while quick - ly

A.
mmm do not walk so quick - ly

T.
mmm quick - ly

B.
mmm quick - ly

13

Sop. Solo *mf*

I could sing you _____ a _____ song _____

S. _____ ah _____

A. *p* quick-ly _____ ooo _____ ah _____

T. *p* quick-ly _____ ooo _____ ah _____

B. *p* quick-ly _____ ooo _____ ah _____

Slower ♩ = 60

18

S. *p* wine_ clear the sky _____ is _____ and the stars no big- ger_ than. sparks_ *mf* *p*

A. *p* wine_ clear the sky _____ is _____ and the stars no big- ger_ than. sparks_ *mf* *p*

T. *p* wine clear_ the sky and_ the stars_ no big - ger_ than sparks_ *mf* *p*

B. *p* wine clear_ the sky and_ the stars_ no big - ger_ than sparks_ *mf* *p*

23 *mf* *p*

S. wait for me

A. *mf* *p* wait for me and next win - ter

T. *mf* *p* wait for me next win - ter

B. *mf* *p* wait for me and next

26 *p* *cresc.* *Stringendo*

S. we'll build a fire we'll build a fire and shake up twists of

A. *cresc.* *mf* ter fire we'll build a fire and shake up twists of

T. *cresc.* we'll build a fire and shake up twists of sparks and

B. *cresc.* win - ter we'll build a fire and shake up twists of sparks and

29 *f* *A tempo* ♩ = 60 *p*

S. sparks out of it

A. *f* sparks out of it

T. *f* shake up twists of sparks out of it

B. *f* shake up twists of sparks out of it

33

S. *p* and you shall see

A. *p* and you shall see your - self

T. *p* and you shall see

B. *p* and you shall see your - self

36

S. *mf* your-self in the ash - es *f* ash - es

A. *mf* in the ash - es *f* ash - es

T. *mf* your-self in the ash - es *f* ash - es

B. *mf* in the ash - es *f* ash - es

40

S. *pp* as you were one time

A. *pp* young as you were one time

T. *pp* young as you were one time

B. *pp* young as you were one time

2. The Locust Tree in Flower

Moderato ♩ = 68 *pp dolce*

SOPRANO
bright green of wrist-thick

ALTO
pp dolce
a - mong the leaves bright green

TENOR
pp dolce
a - mong the leaves of wrist-thick

BASS
pp dolce
a - mong the leaves bright green of wrist-thick

7

S.
tree and old stiff bro - ken

A.
poco cresc. tree and old old bro - ken bro - ken

T.
p tree and old stiff bro - ken

B.
poco cresc. and old old bro - ken bro - ken

p *poco cresc.* *mp*

10 *p* *mp* *poco cresc.* *mf*

S. branch fern cool sway-ing loose - ly strung come May come

A. branch fern - cool sway-ing loose - ly strung come May come May—

T. branch fern cool sway-ing loose - ly strung come May come

B. branch fern cool sway-ing loose - ly strung come May—

16 *poco cresc.* *f*

S. May— a - gain white blos - som— clus-ters hide to

A. — a - gain white blos - som_ blos-som clus-ters hide

T. May— a - gain white blos - som— clus-ters hide to

B. — a - gain white blos - som_ blos-som clus-ters hide

21 *p* *3*

S. spill their sweets al - most— al - most un-no ticed—

A. spill_ spill their sweets_ al - most— al-most un-no ticed—

T. spill their sweets al - most— al - most un-no ticed—

B. spill_ spill their sweets_ al - most— al-most

Movendo ♩ = 76

26 *p*

S. — down and quick-ly fall —

A. — down and quick-ly fall — a - mong of green

T. — down and quick-ly fall — a - mong of green

B. — a - mong of green

33 *p* *pp*

S. stiff old bright bro - ken — branch

A. stiff old branch come

T. bright bro - ken — branch come

B. stiff old bright bro - ken — branch come

39

S. white — sweet — May a - gain

A. white white sweet May May —

T. white sweet — May a - gain

B. white — sweet May May —

3. Ma'mselle Day

Allegretto ♩ = 100

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

f mam - selle day mam - selle day

mp mam - selle day mam selle day mam - selle day

mp m(a)m m(a)m ay m(a)m m(a)m day

poco

6

S.

A.

T.

B.

f come back a - gain mam - selle day

mf come back a - gain mam - selle day mam - selle day

f come back a - gain mam - selle mam - selle day

f come back a - gain mam - selle mam - selle day

13

S.

A.

T.

B.

mp slip your clothes off slip your clothes off

p slip your clothes off

mp slip your clothes off slip your clothes off

mp slip your clothes off slip your clothes off

20

S. *p* the jing-ling of those lit - tle shell — those lit-tle shell — the jing-ling of those lit-tle shell *mf*

A. *unis. p* the jing-ling of the *divisi* jing-ling of those lit - tle shell — *mf* the jing-ling of those lit - tle shell — those lit-tle

T. *p* the jing-ling of those lit - tle shell — those lit-tle *mf*

B. — — — —

24

S. *poco* *mp* or - na - ments — so deft-ly fas - tened — so deft-ly fas - tened

A. *poco* *mp* lit - tle shell or - na - ments — so deft-ly fas - tened — so deft-ly fas - tened

T. *poco* *mp* lit - tle shell or - na - ments — so deft - ly fas - tened so deft-ly fas - tened

B. *mp* so deft - ly fas tened so deft-ly fas - tened

29 **A la breve** ♩ = 60, ♪ = 120

S. *soprano solo mf* the streets

A. *half the altos p* the streets *tutti p* / *mmm*

T. *pp* *mmm* the *p* *mmm*

B. *baritone solo p* the streets are tur-ning in their co - vers. *gli altri pp* *mmm*

35

S. *mp* ————— *mf*
are turn - ing in their co - vers

A. *mp* ————— *mf*
they — smile

T. *mp* ————— *mf*
they — smile

B. *mp* ————— *mf*
they smile

41

S. *tutti p* ————— *p cresc.*
smile with shut eyes I have been

A. *p* ————— *p cresc.*
with shut eyes I have been

T. *p* ————— *p cresc.*
with shut eyes I have been

B. *p* ————— *p cresc.*
with shut eyes I

Più mosso ♩ = 144

48

S. *f* ————— *mf*
twice to the moon twice

A. *f* ————— *mf*
twice to the moon twice

T. *f* ————— *mf*
twice to the moon twice

B. *f* ————— *mf*
moon twice

55

S. to the moon since sup - per but she but she has

A. to the moon since sup - per since sup - per but she has

T. to the moon since sup - per since sup - per mmm

B. to the moon since sup - per since sup mmm

61

S. no - thing to tell me no - thing to tell me *p*

A. no - thing to tell me no - thing to tell me *p*

T. mmm *p*

B. mmm *p*

67 **Tempo primo** ♩ = 100

S. —

A. mam - selle come back *f* *mf* *cresc.*

T. mam-selle come back *mp* *mf* *cresc.*

B. mam - selle mam - selle come back *mp* *mf* *cresc.*

12

73

Meno mosso $\text{♩} = 80$ poch. rit.

S. *p* I will be wi - ser

A. *f* *mp* *unis. p* come back I will be wi - ser

T. *f* *mp* come back come back

B. *f* *mp* come back

79

A tempo $\text{♩} = 80$ poch. rit. $\text{♩} = 72$

S. I will be wi - ser this time

A. *unis.* I will be wi - ser I ser this time

T. *p* I will be wi - ser this time

B. *p* this time