

Six Songs of Old Japanese Wisdom

Haiku by Issa (1763 – 1827)

for baritone voice and piano

Richard Whalley

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Haiku of Issa (1763 – 1827)

1. Wisdom

daiko hiki daiko de michi wo oshie keru

the radish puller
pointing with a radish root
teaches me the way (1814)

2. Life

tarai kara tarai ni utsuru chimpunkan

from infant bathtub
to burial tub changing...
this utter nonsense (1827)

3. Beauty

iro tori ya kigi ni mo hana no hôjôe

like colourful birds
set free in the trees...
blossoms (1788)

bimbônin hana nimu haru wa nakari keru

for the poor
there's not a spring
without blossoms (1807)

Hana no tomo ni mata au made wa ikuharu ya

my blossom comrades
we'll meet again
how many springs? (1791)

4. Instinct

inazuma ya akke torareshi inu no kao

lightning flash –
the astonished face
of the dog
(1815)

inazuma ya he to mo omo[wa]nu hiki ga kao

lightning flash –
not giving a damn
the toad's face (1818)

5. Reflection – part one

shizukasa ya kosui no soko no kumo no mine

quietness –
the summits of clouds
at the bottom of the lake (1792)

6. Reflection – part two

yorutoshi ya suzushii tsuki mo sugu akiru

old age –
even the cool moon
soon grows tiresome (1812)

nanimonaiyo kokoroyasusa yo suzushisa yo

nothing at all
but a calm heart
and cool air (1813)

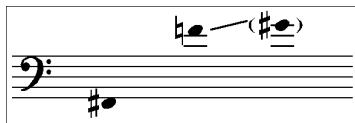
7. Wisdom

daiko hiki daiko de michi wo oshie keru

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pointing with a radish root
teaches me the way (1814)

Performance notes:

- For male (tenor) or female (mezzo-soprano) voice.
- Range:



- Total duration: c. 9 mins
- *Wisdom, Life and Reflection – part two* employ proportional notation in the vocal part. In these instances the vocalist should follow how the vocal part lines up with the piano part in the score, but is free to be somewhat flexible in the timing of local details for expressive reasons.
- In *Reflection – part one* the vocalist leads and the pianist follows. Again, with flexibility...
- Accidentals apply for entire bar. In unbarred sections accidentals are given for every note that is not a natural.
- These songs should be very intimate, sung with a pure, relatively unadulterated (mostly *non vib.*) sound.

Programme note:

Issa (1763-1827) was one of Japan's most important haiku poets. His name, which he designed himself (having been born Kobayashi Tataro) is derived from the Japanese words *ichi*, meaning "one", and *cha*, meaning "tea". His life was filled with tragedy: after his mother died when he was two, he was eventually rejected by his remaining relatives. He lost his first two wives, and all five children from his second marriage died; following this the indulgences of his third wife proved to be too much for his strength and health, and he died alone and destitute. Throughout his life he found solace in nature and was known for a sympathetic attitude towards small creatures such as frogs and insects, which comes out very strongly in his poetry.

As a composer I see many parallels between these haiku and what I strive to achieve in music. I find these beautifully poignant "snapshots" of life by Issa so powerful, as they offer through minimal means insights that tell us an inestimable amount about humanity and the world we live in. What better justification for why, as human beings, we need art? These modest songs aspire to the status of the frog in the following: *Yase gaeru makeru na Issa koko ni ari.*

*You skinny frog, you
don't be beaten, don't give up!
Here stands Issa by you.*

A first version of these songs was composed in 2004. This revised version for baritone and piano was commissioned by the York Late Music Festival, to be premiered at the Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall in Manchester on 25th May, 2007 by Mike Solomon-Williams and Melanie Jones.

Haiku and translations from www.ahapoetry.com/haiku.htm (That lovable old Issa, Earle Joshua Stone) and webusers.xula.edu/dlanone/issa/. The titles of the songs are my own, and are merely offered as to some guide to the emotional curve of the cycle as I perceive it; they are not in any way intended as a definitive interpretation of the haiku, the beauty of which is their openness to many different readings.

(i) Wisdom

Richard Whalley

Freely; natural speech rhythms; follow piano

Baritone

p

the ra - dish pull - er

p warmly

c. 120 but with rubato

3 accel. a tempo (rit.) a tempo

Bar.

ra - dish pull - er

3 rit. a tempo

mf

3 3 3 3 5

Bar.

pull - er point - ing point - ing

3 rit. a tempo rit. accel. a tempo

3 3 3 3

14 *pp*

Bar. *pp*

with the ra - dish root _____ the ra - dish pull - er _____

held back accel. *mf* held back a tempo *pp*

Pno.

19 *p*

Bar. *p*

ra - dish pull - er point - ing _____

held back a tempo accel.

Pno.

23 *mp*

Bar. *mp*

with the ra - dish root _____

a tempo held back accel.

Pno. *cresc.*

26 *mf* *p*

Bar. *mf* *p*

teach - es me the way _____

a tempo *f*

Pno.

(ii) Life

Follow piano and respond rhythmically, but with flexibility

[proportional notation]

Baritone

From in -

Strict tempo, ♩=112

Piano

fp *pp energetic* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

5

Bar.

fant bath - tub to bu - rial tub chang(e) - ing this

Pno.

p *pp* *f* *pp* *mp*

9

Bar.

ut - ter non - sense From in - fant bath - tub to bu -

(sempre *p*) [hold until comma]

Pno.

fp *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

fp

13

Bar. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

- - rial tub chang - ing this ut - ter non

Pno. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

16

Bar. *p* *mf* *p* *pp*

- - sense From in - fant bath - tub chang - ing this u - ter

Pno. *p* *mf* *p* *pp*

20

Bar. *p* *mf* *p* *sfz* [short]

non - sense this ut - ter ut - ter non - - sense

Pno. *p* *mf* *p* *sfz*

8^{va} 5:4 5:4

(50 secs)

(iii) Beauty

Freely *mf* *p* $\text{♩} = 152, \text{ with flexibility}$

Baritone

like co-lour-ful birds set free in the trees

Piano

mfp $\text{♩} = 152, \text{ with flexibility}$
dolce

6 *p espress.* *mf* *p* *fp* *accel.* *rit.* (9)

Bar.

for for the poor there's not

Pno.

mf *p* *fp* *accel.* *rit.* (9)

12 *a tempo* *mf* *p* *pp* *a tempo* *f* *pushing on*

Bar.

a spring with - out

Pno.

a tempo *f* *pushing on*

16 *f* *f* *f*

Bar.

for for the poor for

Pno.

f *f* *f*

19 *f* *Slower* *p* *Freely* *pp*

Bar. *f* *Slower* *p*

for the poor not a spring without for the poor not a spring with-out

Pno. *p espress.*

23 *Faster* *p energetic* *poco a poco crescendo*

Bar. *p* *Faster* *poco a poco crescendo*

blossoms blossoms blos soms blos soms blossoms blossoms blos soms blos soms

Pno. *p* *Faster* *poco a poco crescendo* *f* *f*

28 *f* *Rushed* *sub. p*

Bar. *f* *Rushed* *sub. p*

blos soms blos soms blos soms my blos-som com-rades we'll meet ag - ain

Pno. *f* *f* *sfz* *Rushed* *sub. p*

32 *(still rushed)* *fp*

Bar. *(still rushed)* *fp*

how man ny springs? blos soms

Pno. *(still rushed)* *f*

(iv) Instinct

Strict, ♩=144

Baritone

f

light ning flash the as - ton - ished face

Piano

Strict, ♩=144

f *mf*

24 *mp* *p* freely *(espress.)*

Bar. *3* the a - sto - - - - - nished

Pno. *sub. p* (colla voce) continue chords

26 (a tempo) *sub. f*

Bar. face of the dog

Pno. *sub. f*

30 *p marcato*

Bar. light-ning flash not gi - ving

Pno. *p leggiero* *mf espress.* *pesante* *marcato*

34

Bar. a damn the toad's face

Pno. *3* *3* (1 min)

(v) Reflection - part one

♩=c.80, very flexible, instinctive rubato

p dolce

Baritone

qui - et - ness the sum - mits of clouds at the bot - tom

Piano

Bar.

of the lake mmm

p dolcissimo (colla voce)

(with ped)

Pno.

Bar.

(mmm)

mf *pp*

Pno.

Bar. *ppp*
(mmm) aaah

Pno. *p* *mf* *p* *pp* *ppp*

Bar. (aaah)

Pno. *pp* *mp* *mp* *p* *ppp* hold pedal until end

Bar. (dying away) (aaah)

Pno. *p* *pp* *pp* *ppp*