



RUSSELL STEINBERG

Lights of Amethyst

from James Joyce's *Chamber Music*

For Soprano and Piano

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# Lights of Amethyst

from James Joyce's *Chamber Music*

op. 85

For Soprano and Piano

1. Strings in the earth and air
2. The twilight turns to amethyst
3. O lonely watcher of the skies
4. Goldenhair
5. To and fro
6. I hear an army charging upon the land

Duration: 22 minutes

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for Soprano and Piano  
Music by Russell Steinberg

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**Lights of Amethyst**

**Poetry of James Joyce (from *Chamber Music*)**

**1. Strings in the earth and air**

Strings in the earth and air  
Make music sweet;  
Strings by the river where  
The willows meet.

There's music along the river  
For Love wanders there,  
Pale flowers on his mantle,  
Dark leaves on his hair.

All softly playing,  
With head to the music bent,  
And fingers straying  
Upon an instrument.  
\*\*\*

**2. The twilight turns from amethyst**

The twilight turns from amethyst  
To deep and deeper blue,  
The lamp fills with a pale green glow  
The trees of the avenue.

The old piano plays an air,  
Sedate and slow and gay;  
She bends upon the yellow keys,  
Her head inclines this way.

Shy thoughts and grave wide eyes and hands  
that wander as they list—  
The twilight turns to darker blue  
With lights of amethyst.  
\*\*\*

**3. O lonely watcher of the skies**

At that hour when all things have repose,  
O lonely watcher of the skies,  
Do you hear the night wind and the sighs  
Of harps playing unto Love to unclothe  
The pale gates of sunrise?

When all things repose do you alone  
Awake to hear the sweet harps play  
To Love before him on his way,  
And the night wind answering in antiphon  
Till night is overgone?

Play on, invisible harps, unto Love,  
Whose way in heaven is aglow  
At that hour when soft lights come and go,  
Soft sweet music in the air above  
And in the earth below.

**4. Goldenhair**

Lean out of the window,  
Goldenhair,  
I heard you singing  
A merry air.

My book was closed;  
I read no more,  
Watching the fire dance  
On the floor.

I have left my book,  
I have left my room,  
For I heard you singing  
Through the gloom.

Singing and singing  
A merry air,  
Lean out of the window,  
Goldenhair.  
\*\*\*

**5. To and fro**

All day I hear the noise of waters  
Making moan,  
Sad as the sea-bird is, when going  
Forth alone,  
He hears the winds cry to the waters'  
Monotone.

The grew winds, the cold winds are blowing  
Where I go.

I hear the noise of many waters  
Far below.  
All day, all night, I hear them flowing  
To and fro.  
\*\*\*

**5. I hear an army charging upon the land**

I hear an army charging upon the land,  
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about  
their knees:  
Arrogant, in black armor, behind them stand,  
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the  
charioteers.

They cry unto the night their battle-name:  
I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling  
laughter.  
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,  
Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an  
anvil.

They come shaking in triumph their long, green  
hair:

They come out of the sea and run shouting by  
the shore.

My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?  
My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?  
\*\*\*

## Performance Notes

At a post-concert reception, Hila Plitmann spontaneously asked me to write her a piece. Was she serious? Did she even know my music? I had heard her magnificent operatic voice in performances with the LA Philharmonic and wondered how it might glow in more intimate art song. I had recently discovered James Joyce's poem "The Twilight Turns From Amethyst" (from his early poetry collection titled *Chamber Music*). The way Joyce described the changing colors of the darkening sky, that was how I imagined the changing colors in Hila's voice. Months later I wrote the song, invited her over to read it through, and her simple reaction, "Great. Why don't you write some more."

"More" became this collection of six songs distilled from the larger Joyce collection. In deceptively simple language, Joyce illuminates the beauty of earthly life, while all the time actually speaking about love and the pain of love's loss. The journey begins with Love sounding a string instrument along the river. Then the sound of an old piano drifts in the air as twilight enfolds the earth. That piano becomes a harp of the heavens at night. Reading by the hearth, the poet imagines the golden-haired lover singing cheerfully, leaning out the window. Then a meditation on the tide of the sea, "the noise of waters making moan...flowing to and fro." Finally, a dream vision of an army on horseback charging from the sea, arrogant, shouting, and laughing, tearing away denial, raining despair, and wresting a final heart-wrenching plea from the poet: "My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?"

for Hila Plitmann

# 1. Strings in the earth and air

Poems by James Joyce

Music by Russell Steinberg

**Fast and flowing** ♩=132

The musical score is written for piano and strings. It begins with a tempo marking of 'Fast and flowing' and a metronome marking of ♩=132. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains four measures. The piano part features triplets and dynamic markings of *f*, *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. The string part provides harmonic support with chords and tremolos. The second system starts at measure 5. The piano part continues with a melodic line that includes a crescendo from *p* to *f*. The string part continues with tremolos and sustained notes. A large 'Preview Copy Only' watermark is overlaid diagonally across the page.

8 *mf* *p* *f* *mp*

in the earth and air with mu-sic sweet

(tr) *mp* *p* *f* *ff* *p* *tr*

8va- *tr*

13

(tr) *f* *mp* *p*

L.H. *3* *p*

8va- L.H. R.H.

17 *<mf* *p* *mf* *mp*

Strings Strings by the

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



21 **Poco più mosso**

ri - ver where the wil-lows meet.

*p*

8<sup>va</sup>

There's etc.

*f*

mus - sic a - long the

32

ri - ver for Love wan - ders there...

35

Pale...

*ff* *mp*

39

*p* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p* **poco meno mosso**

flow - ers on his man - tle Dark leaves

44 *mp* *p* *p*  
on his hair All soft-ly

49  
play-ing ah with head to the mu-sic

53 *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp*  
bent and the fin-gers stray-ing u - pon an

accel. . . . . A tempo

58 *mf* in-stru-ment. ah ah *f*

*mf* *f* *tr mf*

61 *sub. p* *ff* Broader, slower ♩=100 ah

*sub. p* *ff* *sub. p* *ff*

64

*p < mf*

u - pon an in - stru - ment.

68

*p*

u -

71

pon an in - stru - ment.

*8va*-----  
Pluck inside piano

for Hila Plitmann

## 2. The twilight turns from amethyst

With deep color and nostalgia

1  $\text{♩} = 60$   $\text{♩} = 60$  poco accel. . . . .

*pp*

*Red.* \_\_\_\_\_

4 **A tempo**

*p* *mf*

The twi\_\_\_\_\_ light

*f* *p* *mf* *8va*

*sfz*

6 *p* *mf* > *p* *mf*

twi light twi - - - light

8 *p*

turns from am-e-thyst to deep and deep-er blue. \_\_\_\_\_

11 *delicatissimo*

*pp* *pp* *mf* *p* *mf*

14

Musical score for measures 14-17. The piano part features chords and arpeggios with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mp*.

18

Musical score for measures 18-20. Includes vocal line with lyrics "The lamp fills with a pale green glow" and piano accompaniment with dynamics *p*, *mf*, and *f*.

21

Musical score for measures 21-23. Includes vocal line with lyrics "The trees in the av-e-nue The old pi" and piano accompaniment with dynamics *p*, *mp*, and *pp*. Includes the instruction "nostalgic, more flowing".



24

a - no plays an air se - date

*mp* *p*

26

and slow and gay

*mp*

28

**Più mosso**

She bends

*mf* *p*

30 *mp*

She bends \_\_\_\_\_ u-pon the yel-low keys

32

her head in-clines this way

*p*

34

Shy thoughts and grave wide eyes and

*mp* *p*

36 *mf* *mp*

hands that wan - der

37 *mp*

wan - der as they list

38 *ff* *mp*

*8va*

41

Musical score for measures 41-43. The system consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef, 3/4 time), a piano right-hand line (treble clef, 3/4 time), and a piano left-hand line (treble clef, 3/4 time). The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *mp*. An *8va* marking is present above the piano right-hand line. A large watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid on the score.

44 rit. . . . .

A tempo

Musical score for measures 44-46. The system consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef, 5/4 time), a piano right-hand line (treble clef, 5/4 time), and a piano left-hand line (bass clef, 5/4 time). The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *pp*. A large watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid on the score.

47

*p*

*< mp*

The twi-light twi - -

Musical score for measures 47-50. The system consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef, 5/4 time), a piano right-hand line (treble clef, 5/4 time), and a piano left-hand line (bass clef, 5/4 time). The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. A large watermark 'Preview Only' is overlaid on the score.

flowing, faster

49 *mf* *p* *mp* *sub. pp*

light turns to dark-er blue

calm

52

turns to dark-er blue turns to dark er blue

56 *p* *mp* *p* *pp*

turns to dark-er blue turns to dark er blue

60 *p* *mp*

with lights of am-e-thyst

63

The twi-light turns to dark-er blue with

*mf* *mp* *8va*

66

lights of am-e-thyst with lights of

(8) *p* *p*

69

*pp*

am-e - thyst. —

lights —

*espr.*

*pp*

*Ped.*

*accel.* ..

*rit.* ..

*ff*

72

of am-e-thyst —

*ff*

*f*

*pp*

*sfz*

*v*

### 3. O lonely watcher of the skies

1 Nocturne  $\text{♩} = 80$

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

At that hour when all things have re

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

*Red.*

4

*pp*

pose,

*8va*

*pp* *mf* *pp* *f* *p*

*slow*

*8va*

*Red.*



8 **accel.** . . . . . **rit.** . . . . . **A tempo**

Musical score for measures 8-10. The vocal line consists of rests. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*.

11 **p** **con moto**

Musical score for measures 11-13. The vocal line includes the lyrics "O lone - ly watch-er of the skies". The piano accompaniment includes a *Red.* (Reduction) section. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, *espr.*, and *mf*. A time signature change to 6/8 is indicated.

14 **lilting** **mp**

Musical score for measures 14-16. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Do you". The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mp*.

17

hear the night wind and the sighs

*p*

This system contains measures 17 and 18. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Measure 17 features a piano (*p*) accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measure 18 continues the accompaniment with similar textures.

19

of harps play-ing un - to Love

*mf* *mp*

*mf* *mp* *mf*

This system contains measures 19 and 20. The vocal line is in treble clef. Measure 19 has a dynamic of *mf* and measure 20 has a dynamic of *mp*. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measure 20 includes a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#).

21

to un-close the pale gates of

*mf* *mp* *mf*

*mp*

This system contains measures 21 and 22. The vocal line is in treble clef. Measure 21 has a dynamic of *mf* and measure 22 has a dynamic of *mp*. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Measure 22 includes a key signature change to one sharp (F#).

24 *f*

sun - rise

27

*accel.*

*rit.*

*A tempo misterioso*

*p*  
When all things

29

re-pose

Do you a - lone

a - wake to

31 *mf* *p* *mp* *mp*

hear to hear the

*3 tranquillo*

*p* *mf* *p*

33 *p* *mf*

sweet harps play to Love be - fore him on his

*p* *mf*

35 *p*

way And the

*pp tender, intimate*

37

night wind is an-swer-ing in an-ti-phon

*mp* *pp*

39

till night is o - ver

*mp* *p*

41

gone till

*p* *mf*

*espr.* *mf*

43 *p*

night is o - ver - gone.

*mf cantabile*

45

*mp* *pp*

47 **Fantastical** *p*

*pp* *p*

Play

*8va*

48

on in-vis - i - ble harps *mp* Play on in-vis - i - ble harps unto

50

Love, Whose

52

way in hea - ven is a-glow *f*

53

Musical score for measures 53-54. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex texture with multiple voices in both hands, including chords and moving lines. The vocal line is mostly rests in measure 53 and begins in measure 54.

54

Musical score for measures 54-55. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "At that hour when". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar complex texture. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano).

55

Musical score for measures 55-56. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "soft lights come and go. Soft". The piano accompaniment features a dynamic range from *f* (forte) to *pp* (pianissimo). The system concludes with a *8va* (octave) marking and a *p* (piano) dynamic. The time signature changes to 4/4.



57 *mf* *p*  
sweet mu - - sic

*p* *mf*

58 *p* *f*  
in the air a - bove

*p* *f* *8va*

59

*8va*

60 *f* *mp*

and in the earth

*p* *pp*

62 *pp* **Adagio, as in a dream**

be - low

*pp* simply

65 *p*

O lone - ly watch - er of the skies

68

*pp* *p*  
skies\_

*p* *mp* *p*

71

*pp* *ppp*

*mf* *pp* *p*  
Ped.

74

*p* *mp* *ppp*  
of the skies

*mp* *pp* *mp* *ppp*  
8va

## 4. Goldenhair

1 Exuberant, carefree ♩=92

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a whole rest followed by a half note G4, then a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The lyrics "Lean out the win-dow" are written below the notes. The middle and bottom staves are for the piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a rapid sixteenth-note arpeggiated pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The system concludes with a 2/2 time signature change, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a fermata over the vocal line.

The second system of the musical score also consists of three staves. The top staff continues the vocal line with the lyrics "Gol-den-hair I heard you sing-ing a mer-ry air." The notes include a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The piano accompaniment continues with the arpeggiated pattern, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the middle of the system and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic towards the end. The system concludes with a fermata over the vocal line and a triplet of eighth notes in the piano part.

7

*mp* *mf*

My book was closed, I read no more watch-ing the fire dance on the

*tr* *mp* *mf*

11

*mp* *f*

floor. I have left my book

*tr* *mp* *f* *8va*

14

*mp* *f*

I have left my room, For I heard you

*tr* *mp* *f* *8va*

17

sing-ing — through the gloom.

*mp sfz p*

21

*trm mf*

26

**Più mosso**

*p f*

31 *f*

Sing-ing and sing-ing a mer - ry air

35

Gold - en hair

38

Gold - en hair Gold - en hair Gold - en hair //

40

Gold - en Gold - en Gold - en Gold - en Gold - en hair

*ff*

*8va*

*sfz*

42

*ff*

*mp*

*ff*



## 5. To and fro

Fragile, meditative, simple; with a beautiful sadness

♩.=52 slow but flowing

1

*p* All day I

*p* *pp* *p*

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

6

hear the noise of waters making moan

*mp* *p*

*mp* *mf* *p*

10

Sad as the sea bird is when go - ing forth a - lone\_\_

*mp* *p*

*mp* *mf*

3 3 3

14

*pp* *p*

3 3 3 3 3

17

*mp cantabile*

He hears the winds cry\_\_

*mp* *p*

3 3 3 3 3

20 *mf*

to the wat - er's Mo - no - tone\_

*mf* *f*

23

*sub. p*

*sub. p*

26 *p*

The grey\_ winds\_ the cold winds the

*dolce*

*pp*

30 *mf* *p*

grey winds, the cold winds are blow - ing where I go. —

33 *p*

I hear the noise the noise of man - y

37 *mf* *p*

wat - ers far be low —

40

Musical score for measures 40-43. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood is marked *cantabile*. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The piano part features triplet markings in the bass line.

44

Musical score for measures 44-47. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature changes to two flats (Bb, Eb). The tempo/mood is marked *lontano*. Dynamics include *sub. p*, *muted*, and *pp*. The piano part features a *lontano p* section.

48

Musical score for measures 48-51. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (Bb, Eb). The tempo/mood is marked *mp*. The lyrics are: "day\_ all\_ night\_ I hear them flow-ing To\_ and". Dynamics include *mp* and *p*.

53

fro To

*pp*

*pp*

57

and fro To.

*mp* *pp* *p*

*mp* *pp* *mp*

61

and fro

*mp* *mf* *pp*

*pp* *mf* *pp*

64

*pp* **morendo** *mp*

To \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

*mf* *pp*

*tr*

This musical system covers measures 64 to 66. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 64. In measure 65, the vocal line has the lyrics "To" and "and" with long horizontal lines underneath, indicating a sustained note. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand has a melody with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. The left hand has a bass line with a trill marked "tr" in measure 65.

67

*p* *ppp*

fro \_\_\_\_\_

*mp* *ppp*

This musical system covers measures 67 to 69. The vocal line has the lyric "fro" with a long horizontal line underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand has a melody with dynamics *p* and *ppp*. The left hand has a bass line with dynamics *mp* and *ppp*.

## 6. I hear an army charging upon the land

1 Allegro ♩=120 hushed, tense, with sudden outbursts

The first system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. It features a grand staff with three staves. The top staff is empty. The middle staff (bass clef) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and contains a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and triplets. The system concludes with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic and a sforzando (*sfz*) accent on a chord.

The second system of the musical score is in 4/4 time. It features a grand staff with three staves. The top staff is empty. The middle staff (treble clef) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and contains a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The bottom staff (bass clef) contains a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and triplets. A text box with a white background and black border is positioned in the middle of the system, containing the instruction: "Inside piano strum lower bass strings". Below this instruction, there are markings for a double bass (*8vb*) and a sforzando (*sfz*) accent on a chord.



6 *f*

I

*mf*  $\triangleright$  *mp*  $\triangleright$  *p* *f*

Ped.  $\overbrace{\hspace{10em}}^{8vb}$

10 **March**

hear — an ar - my charg-ing charg-ing u-pon the

13

land,

*f*  $\triangleright$  *mp* *p*

Bang fists inside piano lower bass strings

$\overbrace{\hspace{10em}}^{8vb}$

17

Musical score for measures 17-19. The vocal line is mostly rests. The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns in both hands. A dashed line labeled *8vb* indicates an octave reduction for the bass line.

20

Musical score for measures 20-21. The vocal line has lyrics: "and the thun-der of hors es plun-ging, plun-ging". The piano accompaniment includes dynamics *p* and *f* for the vocal line, and *p lightly* for the piano. Triplet patterns are present in the piano accompaniment.

22

Musical score for measures 22-23. The vocal line has lyrics: "foam a-bout their knees arr-o-gant in black". The piano accompaniment includes the dynamic *mp*.

25

ar mor *mf* Be - hind them stand, dis-

8va

28

dain-ing the reins with flut-ter-ing whips the char i - o -

31

*ff* teers.

34

34

*f* *sfz* *p*

Ped.

36

36

They cry un-to the night their bat-tle name:

38

38

I moan in sleep

*f* *p* *espr.*

41

when I hear a-far their whirl-ing their whirl - ing laugh - ter

*mf* *p*

3 3 3 3

43

They cleave the gloom of dreams, a

*f* *p*

46

blin-ding flame.

*mp* *f*

*8vb*

49

*mf*

Clang-ing Clang-ing

*p*

Inside piano:  
tap pencil tip  
on lower bass  
strings

52

*p* *mf*

u-pon the heart as u-pon an an - vil

*mf*

8<sup>vb</sup>

55

*mf*

They come shak-ing shak-ing in

*p* *mp*

8

58 *f*

tri-umph their long green hair:

*f* *sfz* *p*

61 *mp* *f* *mp* *accel.*

They come out of the sea and run shout-ing by the shore.

*p* *mp* *p*

64

*f* *mp*

67

Musical score for measures 67-69. The vocal line is mostly rests. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand.

**Dramatic, A tempo**

70

Musical score for measures 70-74. The vocal line has lyrics: "My heart, have you no wis-dom thus to des pair?". Dynamics include *ff*, *sfz*, *f*, *mp*, and *pp*. Performance markings include *8va-7* and *Ped.*

75 **becoming dream-like***rit.*

Musical score for measures 75-79. The vocal line has lyrics: "My love\_ my love\_ my". Dynamics include *p*. Performance markings include *rit.* and a fermata.



Ethereal and tender, molto adagio

80 *pp* *p* *mp*

love \_\_\_\_\_ my love \_\_\_\_\_ why have you left me

*pp* like bells

Ped. Ped.

85 *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *pp*

\_\_\_\_\_ a - lone \_\_\_\_\_ my love \_\_\_\_\_

8va

90 *mp*

why have you left \_\_\_\_\_ me a - lone \_\_\_\_\_

93 *p* *pp*

my love, my love, my love

*mp* *pp* *8va*

97 *mp* *pp* *pp* *mp* *ppp*

my love

*rit.*

*ppp* at pitch

*8va* *8vb*