

Systole: Book I (3 songs)

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No. 1. *Ivory Eyes* (full moon) [Ireland] | No. 2. *Bamboo Skies* (new moon) [Taiwan]
No. 3. *Mosaic Flame* (crescent moon) [Israel]

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Systole (Greek, pronounced “Si’-stō-lee) refers to the compression beat of the heart. It is the root Greek word from which physicians have derived the medical term “systolic.”

These 3 songs in *Book I* are connected by several factors. First, they were written in close succession expressly for inclusion in this triptych. Second, they all refer in words and music to specific, real geographic and cultural settings in which the composer has taken 3-week residencies. Third, they all share allegory and personification based upon moon phases as well as a sense of romantic loss or pining. Finally, they rise in succession from a low (No. 1) to medium (No. 2) to high (No. 3) tessitura with regard to soprano voice. As a song cycle, *Book I* will clearly shine in the hands of a versatile vocalist possessing a wide lyric range and the interest to access character affect—a charismatic story teller.

Ivory Eyes (3 minutes) is low for soprano (only to E-flat), but all by design. This is a quiet, intimately restrained song which does use the vulnerable and less powerful areas of the range. It requires a competent and classically-trained voice, however it can be delivered in a straight concert style, or, with theatrical license toward a folk effect; it can be sung with an Irish accent such as used for *Finnian’s Rainbow* or not. Mostly, it is imperative that variations of attitude be presented and tempo variations be employed. The successful performance will be as much in the hands of a sensitive, almost empathic accompanist, as it is delivered by a confident, comfortable soloist (true of all 3 songs).

Bamboo Skies (2 minutes, 50 seconds) moves up to F-sharp and includes some dramatic leaps to paint the foreboding text. It is otherwise a gentle quiet apostrophe to the lyric oriental music traditions. It will benefit from a light, somewhat non-vibrato style which mimics the classic Chinese voice, either partially or in full.

Mosaic Flame (4 minutes) offers a more serious stretch in flashy technique and bravura, both in voice and piano, and a mid-east decorative technique is referenced amidst modal and tonal shifts that imply the duality of so many issues. The highest vocal note is A-natural but the technical demands come mostly from *subito* changes in dynamics, widely varying tempi, and mood changes which alternate between simplistic, exuberant innocence, sophisticated mystery, even a veiled melancholy.