

# **Pleasing Myself**

*Six songs after the textile images of Janet Bolton*

*For soprano and piano*

*Words and music by Nigel Morgan*

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## **Pleasing Myself**

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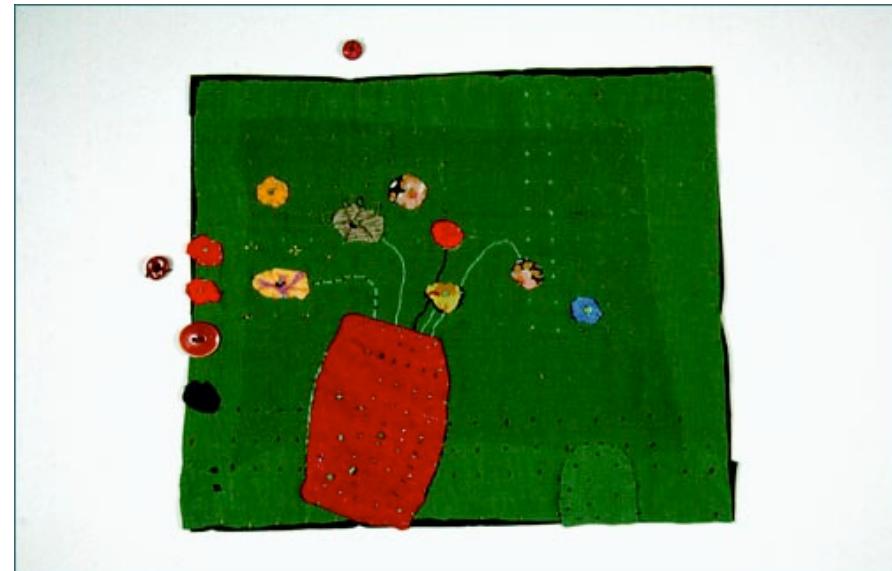
*Words and music by Nigel Morgan*

These six songs represent my first venture in creating my own words for music. *Pleasing Myself* began life following a talk and exhibition by Janet Bolton at the Saltaire Festival in 2009. I was smitten by the simplicity and charm of her textile ‘stories’, miniature quilts that played on and with my imagination. I wrote about my reaction to her images on the Internet and this particular ‘blog’ continues to receive more hits per day than any other I have written. Janet’s textile images I now realise affect many people. They tell stories that relate to the gentle mainstream of personal and family life. When we view them they touch our memories and we invest them with our past and possibly, in what they say about children, our hopes for the future too.

The poems I have written are influenced stylistically by Arthur Waley’s timeless translations of poems from the ancient Chinese, poems that I set as a teenager and which still resonate for me today as vividly as they did 40 years ago. The music, almost wholly based on the motif and harmony of the opening bar, explores aspects of harmony somewhat between Purcell and modal jazz. The keyboard part may be played on electric piano, an instrument found in many of my recent scores including the song cycle *Stone and Flower*. Expressive markings, tempo, dynamics and articulation are to be considered as guides, no more.

*Pleasing Myself* was written for the mezzo-soprano and actress Philippa Reeves and the pianist Michael Appleton.

I wake.  
The sky is clear blue  
above the rooftops  
whose shadows the sun  
sharpens on the grass.  
Dew on bare toes,  
the limb-caressing air,  
my garden breathes, waits, breathes  
for you  
these flowers . . .  
I gather them against my breasts  
and lay them flat  
on a cold slab,  
cut, then grasp their stems as one:  
to place in the red flower vase.



Clearing the town  
of its Sunday streets,  
up to the close-cropped  
grass of playing fields  
green and red and blue  
frocked girls pig-tailed  
in the Spring wind  
brace their yet-to-be-shaped  
bodies against the breeze  
tugging at their kites  
tossed in the air  
by invisible hands . . .  
Turn and spin,  
climb and soar,  
float, dive, dive, float  
spin, float, spin, climb  
and soar.



I shield my eyes  
against the glare  
and see the lighthouse  
far distant  
stand erect  
before the sleeping sea  
the tired strand  
where seabirds wade  
children play and  
parents guard their  
moves and makings.  
. . . at my feet  
the detritus of time:  
tide-gathered wood,  
salt-stripped,  
sea-stained yet  
polished by the restless  
turn and tilt  
of the absent moon.



(Chorus)

There is a pale bird  
In the blue night.  
It stays awake  
Beneath my window.  
It does not sing.  
It has no call,  
And in the morning  
It is gone.

(Verse 2)

Oh palest bird,  
With moon and stars  
Your only friends,  
You keep this vigil long.  
Sing in my heart  
A silent song  
To reach beyond  
The curtain of my doubts and dreams



(Verse I)

Life so rich.  
Thoughts so full.  
Intentions mainly  
Firm and good and strong.  
My children sleep.  
And I at peace,  
My husband's arms  
Surround my selfish foes and fears.

(Verse 3)

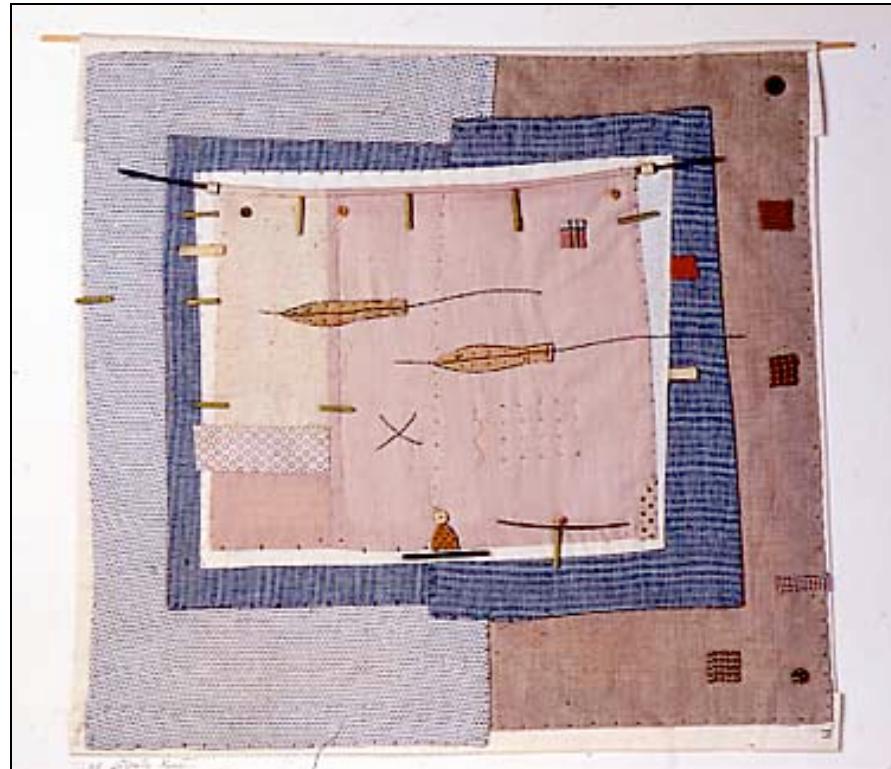
And then one night  
I'll sense you've gone.  
Oh pale bird taken  
From its garden home.  
What will I do?  
Where shall I go?  
The door now closed  
On tenderness in sight and sound.

Oh sweet garden.  
Dearest friend,  
My conscience,  
Confidant,  
Companion-perennial,  
My hands' desire,  
Let me be your Guardian  
Angel among the flowers.  
Not for me  
H.C. Anderson's grisly tale  
of sunbeams and sick children,  
with the angel filching the flowers  
to bloom more brightly in  
heaven than on earth.  
God forbid!  
My garden is my heaven,  
and I'll make myself wings  
if I must  
to fool such  
fair-weather flowers.



As the light dies  
I pace the field edge  
to the square pond  
enclosed, hedged and treed.  
The water,  
once revealed,  
lies cold  
in the still air.

At its bank,  
solitary,  
I let my thoughts of you  
float on the surface.  
And like two boats  
moored abreast  
at the season's end,  
our reflections merge  
in one dark form.





# The Red Flower Vase

Soprano      with conviction  $\text{♩} = 55$

Piano

I wake.      The sky is clear blue

7

a- bove the roof - tops      whose sha - dows the sun      shar - pens on the grass.

12

Dew on bare toes the limb ca - re-ssing air      for you      these flow - ers

This musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano voice, starting with a rest followed by a melodic line. The middle staff is for the Piano, featuring a bass line and various chords. The bottom staff is also for the Piano, providing harmonic support. The score includes lyrics such as 'I wake.', 'The sky is clear blue', 'a- bove the roof - tops', 'whose sha - dows the sun', 'shar - pens on the grass.', 'Dew on bare toes the limb ca - re-ssing air', 'for you', and 'these flow - ers'. Dynamic markings include 'with conviction  $\text{♩} = 55$ ', **f**, **mp**, **p**, **ff**, **mf**, and **ff**.

17

and ga - ther a - gainst my breasts

and lay them flat

*mf*

*mf*

*Ped.*

24

on a cold slab Cut, then grasp the stems as one to place in

*ff*

*mf*

*f*

31

the red flow - er vase.

*mf*

*Ped.*

# *Three Happy Girls Flying Kites*

*with spirit and energy* ♩ = 210

Piano

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, showing two hands playing in 5/8 time with various dynamics like *mp*, *cresc...*, *mf*, *f*, and *mfp*. The middle staff is for the voice, starting with lyrics "Clea - ring the town" and continuing with "of its Sun - day streets up to the close cropped grass of play - ing fields". The bottom staff is also for the piano, with dynamics *mf* and *mfp*. The score includes several key changes and time signature shifts (e.g., 2/4, 3/4, 5/8, 7/8, 5/8, 3/4). The vocal part starts at measure 7 and continues through measure 14.

7

Clea - ring the town      of its Sun - day streets      up      to the      close cropped grass      of play - ing fields

14

green and red and blue frocked girls      pig - tailed      in the Spr - - - ing wind

20

Brace their yet to be shaped bodies against the breeze tugging at their

26

kites tossed in the air by in - vi - si - ble hands

*meno mosso*

32

*a tempo* freely but with energy ,  
turn turn and spin

*calando*

*pp*

*f*

4

*mf*

38

climb and soar

float

dive

dive

float and

*f*

*mp*

*p*

*pp*

*mp*

46

spin

float

spin

climb

and

soar.

*f*

*mf*

*p*

*f*

*mf*

# *Seascape*

*restrained but intense*  $\text{♩} = 50$

Piano

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, showing two hands playing in various keys (3/4, 6/8, 3/4, 6/8, 6/8, 4/4) and time signatures. The middle staff is for the voice, with lyrics appearing below the notes. The bottom staff is for the piano bass. Measure 1 starts with piano dynamics *mp*, followed by *mf*. Measure 2 begins with a piano bass line. Measures 3-5 show piano chords. Measure 6 starts with piano bass. Measures 7-9 show piano chords. Measure 10 starts with piano bass. Measures 11-13 show piano chords. Measure 14 starts with piano bass.

6

I shield my eyes a - gainst the glare and see the light -house far di- stant stand e - rect be - fore the slee - - ping sea

p

cresc. poco a poco

mp

11

the tir - ed strand where sea - birds wade chil - dren play pa - rents guard their moves and ma - kings

cresc.

6

mf

dim.

15 *poco rit.* *Pesante e poco Lento*

At my feet the de - tri - tus of time tide ga- thered wood sea stripped salt

20

stained yet po - lished by the turn and tilt of the ab - sent moon.

# Pale Bird in the Blue Night

with tenderness  $\text{♩} = 55$

Soprano

There is a pale bird in the blue night it stays a-wake be -neath my

Piano

*mp*

*p*

*mp*

5

window it does not sing it has no call and in the mor -ning it is gone

*mp* *mf*

*mp* *p* *mf*

9

Life so rich, thoughts so full, in - ten- tions mai - nly firm and good and strong. My chil - dren sleep, and I in peace

*f*

*sub. p*

*mf*

*mp*

13

*molto ritard e calando*

*a tempo*

my hus- band's arms su- rround my sel- fish foes and fears      There is a pale bird in the blue night

*mf*

*mp*

*mp*

*mf*

A musical score for piano and voice. The vocal part (top staff) begins with a rest followed by eighth-note patterns. The lyrics are: "it stays a-wake be-neath my win-dow". The piano accompaniment (bottom two staves) consists of sustained notes and chords. Measure 17 ends with a fermata over the piano's bass note. Measure 18 begins with a piano dynamic of *mf*. Measure 19 starts with a piano dynamic of *mp*. Measure 20 concludes with a piano dynamic of *mp*.

21

allargando

gone      Oh pa -lest bird      with moon and stars      your on -ly friends you keep this      vi -gil long.      Sing in my

*mf*

*f*

5

25

*molto rit e calando*

*a tempo*

heart a si - lent song to reach be-yond the cur-tain of my doubts and dreams There is a pale bird

*mf* *dim.* *mp*

29

in the blue night it stays a-wake be-neath my win-dow it does not sing it has no call

*mf*

33

and in the mor-ning it is gone and then one day I sensed you gone your pre-sence ta-ken from its

*mp* *p* *mp* *mp*

37

*molto rit e calando*

gar - den home. What will I do, Where shall I go? The door now closed on ten - der - ness of sight and sound.

41 *a tempo*

There was a pale bird in the blue night it stayed a - wake be -neath my win - dow it did not

45

*molto rit e calando*

sing it had no call it left no clue where it had gone

## *Angel among the Flowers*

*with purpose and clarity* = 80

Soprano

A musical score for voice and piano. The vocal line starts with a rest, followed by eighth notes and sixteenth-note patterns. The lyrics are: "Oh sweet gar-den dear- est friend my con-science, my". The piano accompaniment consists of eighth-note chords.

*Oh sweet gar-den dear- est friend my con-science, my*

Piano

Musical score for piano, page 10, measures 11-12. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef, 3/4 time, dynamic *mf*, and has a repeat sign with a '1' above it. It contains eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff is in bass clef, 3/4 time, and has a repeat sign with a '2' above it. It contains quarter-note patterns.

6

*poco a poco rit.*

A musical score for voice and piano. The vocal line starts with a melodic line in G major, featuring eighth-note patterns and grace notes. The lyrics are: "con - fi - dant, com - pa - nion pe - - re - nni - al my hands' de - sire. Let me be your guar - di - an an - gel a -". The piano accompaniment consists of harmonic chords and bass notes.

*con - fi - dant, com - pa - nion pe - -re - nni - al my hands' de - sire.* Let me be your guar - di - an an - gel a -

Let me be your guardian angel a -

A musical score for piano, featuring two staves. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff uses a bass clef. The music consists of various notes and rests, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests indicated by vertical dashes. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

11

*lento e pesante*

*poco a poco accel.*

A musical score for a single melodic line, likely a soprano or alto part. The score consists of a staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes. Below the staff, lyrics are written in a cursive font, corresponding to the music. The lyrics are: "mong the flowers. Not for me H. C. An -der-son's gri -sley tale of sun beams and sick chil-dren with the An -gel". The first measure ends with a fermata over the note 's'. The second measure ends with a fermata over the note 's'.

*mong the flowers. Not for me H. C. An -der-son's gri -sley tale of sun beams and sick chil-dren with the An -gel*

Musical score for piano showing measures 11-12. The score consists of two staves. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff uses a bass clef. Measure 11 starts with a forte dynamic (f) in the bass staff. Measure 12 begins with a piano dynamic (mp) in the treble staff, followed by a dynamic marking consisting of three horizontal bars.

*Red.*

17

*a tempo primo*

poco lento

fil-ching the flowers to bloom more bright-ly in hea-ven than on earth. God for -bid!

poco cresc.

2d.

23

My gar-den is my hea-ven and I'll put on wings if I must

mp

28

*3*

to fool those fair-wea-ther flowers.

p

# Reflections on a Square Pond

*calm* ♩ = 50

*Soprano*

I pace the field edge to the square pond en-closed, hedged and

*Piano*

7

treed.

The wa - ter,

once re - vealed, lies cold cold in the still air.

*mf* (come eco) (sim.) *ppp* *mf*

13

At the bank so- li - ta - ry I let my thoughts of you float float on the sur-face

*Ad. mp*

18

*poco piu mosso*

And like two boats moored a - breast at the sea- son's end our re - flec - tions merge

*poco a poco rit.*

3

*mf**mp*

23

*molto adagio*

in one dark form.

*for Alice*