

N° 1142

Eve Beglarian

# The Island of the Sirens

2011

for solo voice, three additional instruments or voices, and pre-recorded  
electronics



EVBVD MUSIC  
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## PROGRAM NOTE

**THE ISLAND OF THE SIRENS** is a piece about defective transcription and the failures of translation. I started with a recording of a warning siren I heard in Plaquemine, Louisiana, while I was traveling down the Mississippi River in the autumn of 2009. I sliced the warning siren into eight layers of partials and then asked the computer to transcribe those eight recordings into musical notation. Because the computer's transcription algorithm was confused by the sounds, the resulting scores were quite strange. I recorded eight women singing these transcriptions, and mixed them in quasi-unison against the eight layers of electronically transformed siren. I then made three separate submixes of the electronics, which are fed into three sets of headphones for the backup performers, who can be instrumentalists or singers. The backup chorus is asked to perform in real time what they are hearing in their headphones, a task at which they will invariably fail to fulfill entirely successfully, creating yet more quasi-unison layers that deviate from the actual sound of the transformed siren.

The lead vocal, a setting of Rilke's poem about the impossibility of describing an experience to those who haven't shared it, is the only notated music in the piece. It also incorporates elements I heard in the siren recording, filtered through my own biases and limitations.

**THE ISLAND OF THE SIRENS** was written for the New York ensemble loadbang, and is dedicated to the band with vast affection.

## The Island of the Sirens

When his hosts would ask him late in the evening  
to tell of his voyages and the perils they brought,  
the words came easily enough,  
but he never knew

just how to convey the fear and with what startling  
language to let them perceive, as he had,  
that distant island turn to gold  
across the blue and sudden stillness of the sea.

The sight of it announces a menace  
different from the storm and fury  
which had always signaled danger.  
Silently it casts its spell upon the sailors.

They know that on that golden island  
there is sometimes a singing--  
and they lean on their oars, like blind men,  
as though imprisoned

by the stillness. That quiet contains  
all that is. It enters the ear  
as if it were the other side  
of the singing that no one resists.

[Joanna Macy, Anita Barrow, translators]

## DIE INSEL DER SIRENEN

Wenn er denen, die ihm gastlich waren,  
spät, nach ihrem Tage noch, da sie  
fragten nach den Fahrten und Gefahren,  
still berichtete: er wußte nie,

wie sie schrecken und mit welchem jähem  
Wort sie wenden, daß sie so wie er  
in dem blau gestillten Inselmeer  
die Vergoldung jener Inseln sähen,

deren Anblick macht, daß die Gefahr  
umschlägt; denn nun ist sie nicht im Tosen  
und im Wüten, wo sie immer war.  
Lautlos kommt sie über die Matrosen,

welche wissen, daß es dort auf jenen  
goldnen Inseln manchmal singt —,  
und sich blindlings in die Ruder lehnen,  
wie umringt

von der Stille, die die ganze Weite  
in sich hat und an die Ohren weht,  
so als wäre ihre andre Seite  
der Gesang, dem keiner widersteht.

Rainer Maria Rilke, from *New Poems*

# The Island of the Sirens

Eve Beglarian  
text: Rilke, trans Macy/Barrow

$\text{♩} = 96$

**26**

VOX

When \_\_\_\_\_ his \_\_\_\_\_ hosts \_\_\_\_\_ would ask \_\_\_\_\_

29  
\_\_\_\_\_ him late \_\_\_\_\_ in the eve - ning to tell of his voy - a - ges \_\_\_\_\_ and the

33  
pe - rils they \_\_\_\_\_ brought, the \_\_\_\_\_ words \_\_\_\_\_ came ea - si - ly

38  
e - nough, but he ne - ver knew \_\_\_\_\_

42  
just \_\_\_\_\_ how to con - vey \_\_\_\_\_ the fear \_\_\_\_\_

48  
\_\_\_\_\_ and with what star - tling

54  
lan - guage \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ let \_\_\_\_\_ them \_\_\_\_\_

60  
per - ceive, \_\_\_\_\_ as he had, \_\_\_\_\_

**2**

The Island of the Sirens, page 2

66  
8 that dis - tant is - land turn to

72  
8 gold a - cross the blue

80  
8 and sud - den still - ness

86  
8 of the sea. The sight of it

99  
8 an - noun - ces a me - nace diff - rent

103  
8 from the storm and fu - ry

107  
8 which had al - ways sig - naled dan - ger. Si -

116  
8 lent - ly it casts its spell

123  
8 u - pon the sail - ors.

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137  
They know that on that gol -

143  
den is - - - land there -

152  
is some - times a sing - ing - - and -

158  
they lean

164  
on their oars, like

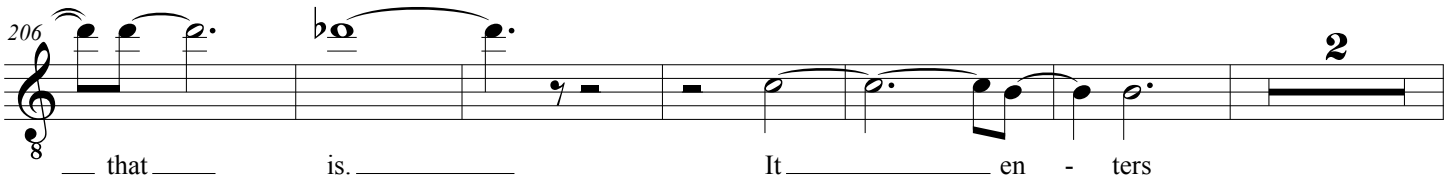
170  
blind men, as though im -

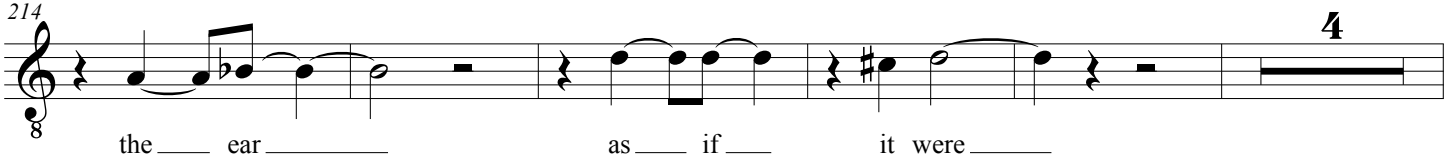
178  
pri - soned by the -

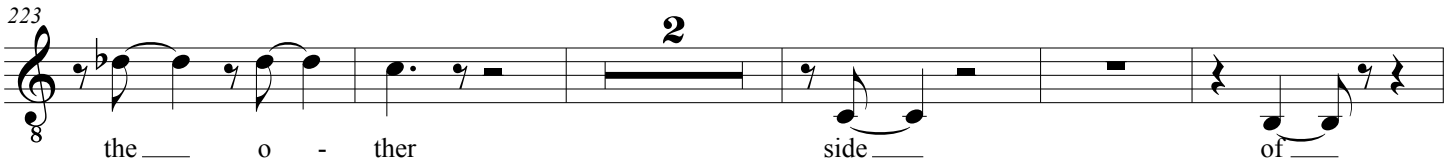
186  
still - ness. That

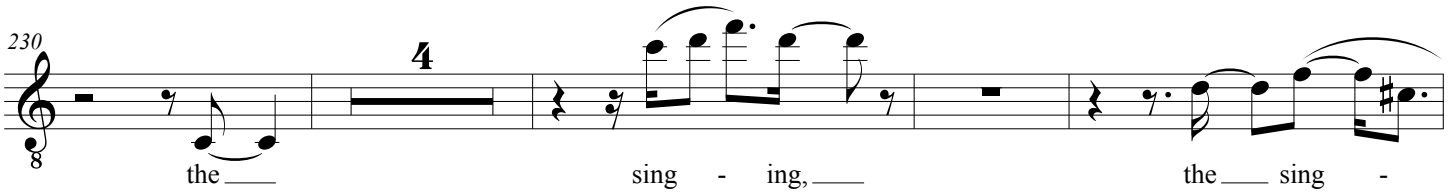
199  
qui - et con - tains all

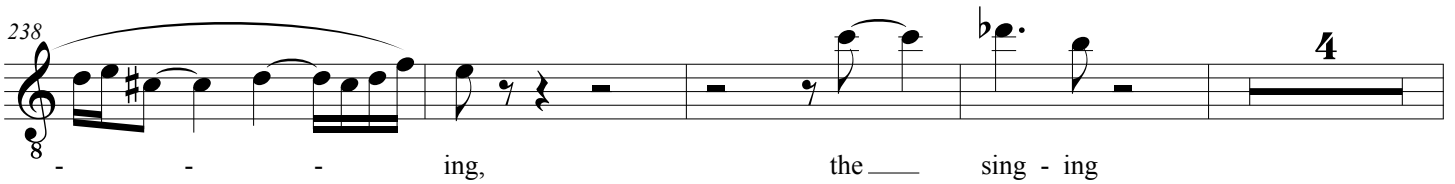
The Island of the Sirens, page 4

206  8    that    is.    It    en - ters **2**

214  8 the    ear    as    if    it were    **4**

223  8 the    o - ther **2** side    of   

230  8 the    **4** sing - ing,    the    sing -

238  8             ing,    the    sing - ing **4**

246  8 that    no    one    re-sists.    **10**