

Program note

Twilight Serenade

for SATB choir and string quintet

(2024)



Benjamin Gabbay (b. 1995)

Text by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

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Duration: 5"00"

Edgar Allan Poe's 1833 poem "Serenade" embodies a blitheness and optimism that stand in stark contrast to the grim nature of his better-known works. Reflecting on the beauty of nature at nighttime, Poe evokes numerous pastoral images from Greek mythology—the paradisaical afterlife of Elysium; the seven star-sisters, the Pleiades; and Endymion, the shepherd lover of the moon goddess. In the emotional height of the poem, Poe's adoration of nature transforms into a declaration of love for a mysterious "Adeline," who, though asleep, will hear his words as "the music of a dream."

This setting of Poe's text revolves around a simple, strophic theme passed through a constantly shifting harmonic landscape. Emerging from an introspective stillness, the tune grows in momentum up to the emphatic affirmation of the narrator's "enthraling love" before withdrawing again into the poem's bucolic Elysium.

So sweet the hour — so calm the time,
Upon the air a chill sublime*
When Nature sleeps and stars are mute,
I hear the sound of Heaven's lute.*
At rest on ocean's brilliant dies
An image of Elysium lies:
Seven Pleiades entranced in Heaven,
Form in the deep another seven:
Endymion nodding from above
Sees in the sea a second love:
Within the valleys dim and brown,
And on the spectral mountain's crown
The wearied light is lying down:
The earth, and stars, and sea, and sky
Are redolent of sleep, as I
Am redolent of thee and thine
Enthralling love, my Adeline.

But list, O list! — so soft and low
Thy lover's voice to night shall flow
That, scarce awake, thy soul shall deem
My words the music of a dream.
Thus, while no single sound too rude,
Upon thy slumber shall intrude,
Our thoughts, our souls — O God above!
In every deed shall mingle, love.

- "Serenade" (1833)
by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
(*adapted*)*

* The second and fourth lines of the poem have been modified from the original, "I feel it more than half a crime / To mar the silence ev'n with lute," on account of the second line being linguistically confusing and thematically jarring to modern ears, especially in a sung setting. It is the composer's hope that the poet would have felt his work had not been unduly tampered with.

Cover art: *Whispering Eve* (1897) by William Gilbert Foster (1855–1906)