

Sealed Lips

From the Poetry of Anna Margolin

Talia Berenbaum

Transposing Score

2023

1. Demons Whistled Gratingly

Text by Anna Margolin, translated from Yiddish by Talia Berenbaum

Mezzo: Ikh bin arayn garten vi in a vildn volkn.
I went into the garden as into a wild cloud.

Alto Flute: Sheydem hobn umetik gefayft.
Demons whistled gratingly.

Mezzo: Shtern hobn blutik, platsndik gerayft.
The stars bled, bursting and ripe
A shmol flamendik moyl hot az-o-y langzam tzu mir zikh tsugeboygn
A small flaming mouth, soooo slowly, bent over me.

Alto Flute: Sheydem hobn umetik gefayft.
Demons whistled gratingly.

2. This is the Night

Alto: Dos iz di nakht, der troyer, dos nit-vern,
This is the night, the sadness, the not-being
fun troymen, der farreterishe shayn.
From dreams, the traitorous luster.
Umgliklekhe, vos vet zayn?
Unlucky one, what do you bet?

Mezzo: Ikh red sh sh sh sh sh shta-m m-len-dik z z zukh ikh zukh ikh dos vort
I speak st st st st stam-m-er-ingly s sear searching I'm searching for the word

Alto Flute: blas?
Pale?
Mezzo: nayn.
no.
Harp: Krum?
crooked?
Mezzo: nayn.
no.
Cello: Freylekhn?
Happiness?
Perc: has?
hatred?
Mezzo: nayn, nayn, ale zenen nisht-
No, no, all of these aren't-

Alto:
Zay kalt, zay klug. ker op zikh fun di shtern,
Be cold, be clever, turn away from the stars,
zay shtil zay shtil,
Be still, be still,
un mitn gantsen frirndikn blut vestu derhern,
And with all your freezing blood you will learn,
vi es efnt zikh di erd
How the earth opens
un vi der vorem ruft.
And the worm beckons.

3. Be Still

Alto: zay shtiler un shtiler. Azoy... ot azoy...
Be still and stiller. Like this... just like this...
s’iz gornit gevezn s’iz alts shoyn fariber.
It was nothing. Everything is already past.

Mezzo: Ikh bin haynt mid
I am weary today.
farvundet fun di sharfe shtimen fun emetsns tsu gutn blik
Wounded from the sharp voices from someone’s overly thorough gaze.
un ikh hob derhert a vort vos glit in mir un glit
And I discovered a word that glowed within me and glowed

Alto Flute: azoy mid
So weary.

Demons

Alto: Zey kayklen zikh farbay
They roll by
in grinem shtral fun histererisher levone
In green beams of light from the hysterical moon
un tunklen zikh,
And they darken,
di dine fislekh unter zikh,
Thin little feet under them
in ale shotendike vinklen.
in all shadowy corners

Un zaynen gut.
And they are good.

Un du, mentsh, vos tsiterstu?
And you, human, why do you tremble?
Du indzl shlanker tsvishn shtaygndike khvalyes,
You lithe island climbing through waves.
Du shmoler blits, vos lesht zikh tsvishn khmares,
You narrow lightning-bolt, spent between clouds.

Du fun gots hant geshlayderter kunzhal,
You dagger, flung from God’s hand
Mit zunshayn ongegosenener bokal,
With sunshine filled goblet
Tseshmetert fun nakht–
Shattered by the night
Du nar, du nar, du oremer nar, in tifer nakht,
You fool, you fool, you poor fool, in the deep night
In droendikn shayn fun der histererishe levone.
In the threatening gleam of the hysterical moon.

4. Night

Mezzo: Ikh shlog zikh in der finsternish mit sonem,
I fight with enemies in the darkness,
nit zeendik keyn ayntsik punim.
Not seeing a single face.

un yede nakht a svishtshen un a klang,
And every night a whistle and a bang,
a shtampn fun farshvindndike trit.
a stomp of disappearing steps.
un ikh shtey blutndik un toytlekh-mid,
and I stand bleeding and dead-weary
un vil nit, vil nit foln.
and will not, will not fall.

un yede nakht dernokh dos breyte shtromendike shvaygn
And each night thereafter, the broad, radiant silence
vi fun file orglen, un oyfgekhvalyet likht,
as from full pipe-organs, and restless lights,
un iber mayne oygn,
and over my eyes,
shmeykhlendik aribergeboygn
smiling over me
a rizik shotndik gezikht.
an enormous, shadowy face.

6. Epitaph

(note: mezzo and alto are often singing simultaneously)
Mezzo: Dertseyl es im: zi hot fargebn
Tell him this: She hadn’t forgiven
zikh nit gekent ir troyerik gemit,
herself, not knowing her mournful mood,
iz zi gegangen durkhn lebn
she went through life
mit zikh ontshuldiknde trit.
with meek, repentant steps.

Dertsayl, az zi hot bizn toyt
Tell, that until death she
geshitst getray mit hoyle hent
faithfully protected with bare hands
dos fayer vos ir geven fartroyt
the fire, which was entrusted to her
un in eygenem fayer gebrent.
and in the very same fire she burned.

un vi in shoen ibermut
And how in hours of bravery,
hot zi mit Got zikh shver gevert,
She swore to defend against God,
vi tif gezungen hot dos blut,
how deeply sang her blood,
vi tsvergn hobn zi tseshtert.
how gnomes destroyed her.

Alto: hart farakhtndik harts,
Hard, contemptuous heart,
loz arayn di likhtike khvalye
Move into the bright wave
fun zoynes, muters un kinder,
From prostitutes, mothers, and children
betlers, kripels un tentsers
Beggars, cripples, and dancers
un alte layt fun der shtot,
And old people from the town.
nor blayb nit mit zikh un mit Got.
Only remain with yourself and with God.
hart harts,
Hard heart,
antloyf tsu mentshn fun Got.
Run from God to people.

Instrumentation

Mezzo Soprano
Alto (offstage)

Alto Flute (doubling Piccolo)
Violin
Violincello
Prepared Harp (doubling Finger Cymbals)

Percussion (Suspended Cymbal, Tom-toms, Tam-Tam, Vibraphone, Marimba [offstage])

Harp Preparation

Plastic butterfly hair-clips should be placed on the E2 and G2-G3 strings. The result should be an almost gong-like sound, with a little buzz. The performer should experiment with placing the clips on different harmonic nodes, which will alter the timbre.

Notes from the Composer

Sealed Lips was composed in the summer and early fall of 2023, although my initial interest in Anna Margolin (née Rosa Lebensboym) began much earlier. Many details of Margolin's life remain a mystery, but we know she lived from 1887-1952, that she was born in Brest, then part of the Russian Empire, that she moved to New York City in 1913, and a few other cursory details of her life. She didn't publish much poetry other than one collection called "Lider" in 1929, which garnered little to no critical reception. This is not to say that it was poorly received, simply that nobody paid much attention to this woman poet, even though her poetry was frequently recognized as quite good, more than matching her male contemporaries. She wrote some poetry after, but never again published a collection of her work.

This cycle stood out to me immediately among the body of her work because of its rawness and supernatural nature; the supernatural does not appear much at all in any of her other works. I connected with this the moment I first read it and felt that I had to set these poems to music. The work is constructed as a dialogue between an onstage mezzo soprano and an offstage alto, with the mezzo playing the part of the main speaker, a woman who is dying and seeing all sorts of demons and monsters calling to her, and with the alto playing the part of the monsters beckoning the speaker to her death. Through these interactions the ensemble is eventually "convinced" and joins the alto offstage, until finally the mezzo gives in and leaves as well, singing in vocalise with the alto, symbolizing her death.

This piece contains many quotes from other works which deal with similar themes, such as a nocturne by Mikhail Glinka, Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire, and Crumb's Black Angels. The alto frequently sings in these quotes, borrowing from the (admittedly Christian) idea that the devil cannot create, only corrupt that which exists. The alto also sings in "fabricated quotation," or music which is originally composed but sounds like a quotation of something older, like a Sarabande. This eventually "infects" the mezzo, who begins to sing in fabricated quotation as well towards the end of the piece, foreshadowing her eventual death.

In writing this piece and translating these poems I have come to love them even more, and it is my hope that the listener will share in the joy of this under-appreciated poet's work.

1. **שדים האבן אומעטיק געפייפט**

איך בין אריין גארטן ווי אין אַ ווילדן וואלקן.
שדים האבן אומעטיק געפייפט.
שטערן האָבן בוטיק, פלאצנדיק גערייפט...

...אַ שמאַל פלימענדיקע מויל האט א-ז-וי לאַנגזאַם צו מיר זיך
צוגעבויגן.
שדים האבן אומעטיק געפייפט

2. **דאָב איז די נאכט**

דאָב איז די נאַכט, דער טרויער, דאָס ניט-ווערן,
פון טרוימען דער פאַררעטערישער שיין.
אומגליקלעכע, וואָס וועט זען?

איך רעד ש ש ש ש שטאַם מ מלענדיק
ז ז זוך איך זוך איך דאס ווארט

בלאָס?
ניין.
קרום?
ניין.
פריילעכן? האָס?
ניין, ניין, אלע זענען נישט-

זיי קאַלט, זיי קלוג. קער אָפ זיך פון די שטערן...
...זיי שטיל, זיי שטיל
און מיטן גאַנצן פרירנדיקע בלוט וועסטו דערהערן,
ווי עס עפנט זיך דער ערד
און ווי דער וואָרעם רופט.

3. **שטילער**

זיי שטילער און שטילער., אזוי... אָט אזוי...
ס'איז נאָרניט געוועזן. ס'איז אַלץ שוין פאריבער.

איך בין היינט מיד. פארווונדעט פון די שאַרפע שטימען,
פון עמעצנס צו גוטן בליק.
אין איך האָב דערהערט אַ וואָרט,
וואָס גליט אין מיר און גליט.

אַזוי מיד.

4. **טייוואַליס**

זיי קייקלען זיך פארביי
אין גרינעם שטראַל פון היסטערישע לבנה.
אין טונקלען זיך,
די דינע פיסלעך אונטער זיך,
אין אַלע שאַטנדיקע ווינקלען.

און זיינען גוט...

...און דו, מענטש, וואָס ציטערסטו?
דו אינזל שלאַנקער צווישן שטיידנדיקע כוואליעס,
דו שמאַלער בליץ, וואָס לעשט זיך צווישן כמאַרעס,
דו פון גאָטס האַנט געשלידערטער קונדזאָל,
מיט זונשיין אַמגעגאָסענער באַקאַל,

צעשמעטערט, פון נאכט–
דו נאָר, דו נאָר, דו אַרעמער נאָר, אין טיפער נאכט,
אין דראַענדיק פון היסטערישע לבנה.

5. **נאכט**

איך שלאָג זיך אין דער פינצטערניש מיט שונאים,
ניט זעענען קיין איינציק פנים.

און יעדע נאכט א סווישטשען און א קלאַנג,
א שטאַמפן פון פאַרשןינדנדיקע טריט.
און איך שטיי בלוטנדיק און טויטלעך מיד
און וויל ניט, וויל ניט פאַלן,
און יעדע נאָכט דערנאָך, דאָס ברייטע שטראַמענדיקע שווייגן
ווי פון פילע אַרגלען, און אויפֿגעכוואליעט ליכט,
און איבער מיינע אויגן,
ש ייכלענדיק אַריבערגעבויגן,
אַ ריזיק שאַטנדיק געזיכט.

6. **עפיטאף**

דערווייל עס אים: זי האט פארגעבן
זיך ניט געקענט איר טרויעריק געמיט,
איז זי געגאַנגען דורכן לעבן,
מיט זיך אַנטשולדיקנדע טריט.

דערווייל, אַז זי האט ביזן טויט
געשיצט געטראפן מיט הוילע הענט
דאָס פייער, וואָס געווען פארטרויט
און אין אייגענעם פייער געברענט.

און ווי אין שעהען פון איבערמוט
האט זי מיט גאָט זיך שווער געווערט,
ווי טיף געזונגען האָט דאָס בלוט,
ווי שווערן האָבן זי צעשטערט.

האַרט פאַראַכנדיק האַרץ,
לאַז אַריין די ליכטיקע כוואליע
פון זונות, מוטערס און קינדער,
בעטלערס, קריפלס און טענצערס
און אַלטע לייט פון דער שטאָט,
נאָר בלייב ניט מיט זיך און מיט גאָט,
האַרט האַרץ,
אַנטלויף צו מענטשן פון גאָט.

Sealed Lips

Anna Margolin

Talia Berenbaum

1. Demons Whistled Gratingly

Rubato ♩ = 56 *p* ————— *pp* ————— *mf* ————— *p*

Mezzo-soprano

Ikh bin a - rayn gar - ten vi in a vil - dn vol - kn
I went in - to the garden____ as into a wil - d cloud_____

Alto (Offstage)

Alto Flute

shey - dem hob - n u - me - tik ge - fayft____
demons whistled____ gratingly
p

Violin

Violoncello

Harp

Vibraphone

Sus. Cym.

6

8

sotto voce
p

shtern
Stars

pp

sul d
sul pont.

ppp

5

5

5

5

gliss.

fff

senza vib.
ord.

p

sul pont.

ppp

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

fff

senza vib.
ord.

p

Hp

mp

6

6

6

fff

Sus. Cym.

ppp

f

Toms

mp

3

ff

2. This is the Night

Sarabande ♩ = 63

Mezzo-soprano

Alto (Offstage)

Alto Flute

Violin

Violoncello

Harp

Vibraphone

Dos iz di nakht, der troy - er dos nit - ver - - - n fun troy - men der far - re - ter - i - she shay - - - n
This is the night, the sad - ness, the not- being From dreams the trai - - tor - ous luster

mp like a broken music box

mp

3. Be Still

Adagietto ♩ = 63

Lento ♩ = 52

3

Mezzo-soprano

Look as if hyperventilating
and trying to calm down

a little calmer

finally calmed down

Alto (Offstage)

mp dreamy

zay shti - - - ler un shti - - - ler a -
Be still and still - - - er like

Alto Flute

Violin

sul pont. → ord.

f *pp*

Violoncello

sul pont.

gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss.

f *pp*

Harp

p.d.l.t.
l.v. sempre

mp dreamy

6 6

Vibraphone

motor on

Ped. *p* dreamy

Mezzo-soprano

Alto (Offstage)

fade in from nothing
ppp *mp* *mf* *p*
 zey kayk - len zikh far - bay in_ gri-nem shtral_ fun his - ter - er - ish - - er le - vo - ne_ un tun - klen zikh di din - e fis - lekh un - ter zikh
 they roll_ by_ In_ green_ beams_ of light from the hysterical_ moon_ and they_ darken thin lit - tle feet_ un - der them

Alto Flute

p *mp* **ppp**

Violin

Violoncello

Harp

l.v. sempre
ppp *mp*
fade in from nothing
 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 *l.v.*

Vibraphone

motor on
pp *dreamy* *p* *mp* **Tam.**

5. Night

Like a medieval organ ♩ = 52

Mezzo-soprano

Alto (Offstage)

Piccolo

Violin

Violoncello

Harp

Toms

Suspended Cymbal

mp *f*_{sub.} *p*

ikh shlog zikh in der fin - ster - nish mit
I *fight* *in the dark - ness* with

multo sul tasto senza vib. *p*
molto sul tasto senza vib. *p*

short *short* *ff* *ff* *p*

flz. *ord.* *ord.* *8va* *gliss.* *gliss.* *gliss.* *8va* *8ba* *fff*

mf *f* *ff* *ff* *f*

9 *5* *3*

Thunder Effect

6. Epitaph

Mezzo-soprano

$\text{♩} = 52$

mp

der - tseyl es im: zi hot far - gib - n zikh nit ge -
tell him this She hadn't for - giv - en herself, not know -

(ossia is provided to help follow the conductor, who is still in 9/8)

mp

Alto (Offstage)

mp

hart far - okht - n - dik harts loz a -
hard con - temp - to - us heart Move in -

Alto Flute

mp

pp *p*

Violin

p

gliss.

Violoncello

p

gliss.

Harp

(without hairclips)

Vibraphone

Ped. sempre

mp

p

