And here in your arms we are restfully lying,
Is wooing, is pleading, to hear you reply;
And your branches sing,
While we swing, swing,
So echo the anthems we warbled to you;
All day we have carolled, and now would be sleeping,
Sing to us, cedars; the twilight is creeping
I
The Birds’ Lullaby
by E. Pauline Johnson
is a lullaby in times of uncertainty. This piece was written after a very difficult year of observing collective suffering as

The enemy has no signs, counter-signs,
but swallow your words, say no more. Load your poems —
you can make your pages into white flags a thousand times
don't follow rules
and with life you can make your pages into white flags a thousand times.
Load Poems Like Guns.

Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman, No. 1
was inspired by Copland’s
Fanfare for the Common Man
and employs, in fact, the same instrumentation. In addition, the original theme resembles the first theme in the Copland. It is dedicated to women who take risks and who are adventurous. Written under the Fanfare Project and commissioned by the Houston Symphony, the premiere performance was on January 10, 1987, with the Houston Symphony, Hans Vonk, conductor. This work is dedicated to the conductor Marin Alsop.

The title of this piece is a conglomeration of two words: the Italian word ‘tuttì’, means ‘all or everyone’, and the term ‘tarana’ designates a specific Hindustani (North Indian) musical form, whose closest Western counterpart is the ‘scat’ in jazz. Made up of rhythmic syllables, a tarana is the singer’s chance to display agility and dexterity. While a Hindustani tarana is a solo form, I wanted to bring the tarana into an ensemble setting.

Jarba, Mare Jarba
Traditional Hungarian-Romani folk song

Translation:
Green grass, tall grass, I would like to go home,
but I cannot, because I have sworn not to;
Tall grass, green grass — oh, that I cannot go home!
My mother has left the village, she left the hut empty,
Adorned with leaves but full of poverty.
Tall grass, green grass — oh, that I cannot go home!
Tall grass, green grass — I would like to go home,
but I cannot, because I have sworn not to.

This excerpt from Songs for Musika features an incredible text by Somaia Ramish, a poet from Afghanistan, expertly translated by Farzana Marie and featured in her book Poems Like Guns. Features an incredible text by Somaia Ramish, a poet from Afghanistan, expertly translated by Farzana Marie and featured in her book Poems Like Guns.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) was an American poet who produced a great body of work in her lifetime. Among her works are several books of poetry, essays, plays, an opera libretto, and over two hundred sonnets. The sonnets cover a vast range of topics including love, loss, beauty, music, death, war, science, legendary figures, and the end of humanity. Beautifully constructed, I find that many of Millay’s sonnets are well suited to be set to music. From 2000-2006, I set sixteen of her sonnets for a cappella choir, arranged into six sonnet sets.

"By our first strange and fatal interview," By all desires which thereof did ensue," — John Donne

These words are found at the beginning of The Fatal Interview, a book of sonnets written in 1931 by Millay. While married to Eugene Bois- sevain, Millay had a long-term love affair with George Dillon, a poet who was fourteen years her junior. This affair inspired her to write the fifty two sonnets that comprise The Fatal Interview. John Donne’s poetry aptly describes the sparks that flew after Millay and Dillon first met. In Sonnets of the Fatal Interview, I set four sonnets that outline the curve of Millay’s and Dillon’s relationship. This beast that sends me (mvmt. 1) shows Millay’s desire for Dillon; Since of no creature (mvmt. 2) living illustrates her deep love for him; Hearing your words (mvmt. 3) and I know my mind (mvmt. 4) trace her decision to break off the affair with Dillon and return to her husband.

Tuttarana.

The Birds’ Lullaby by E. Pauline Johnson

This brief one-movement work originally for string orchestra, and arranged for chamber ensemble by Jannina Norpoth, is a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleetling melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscap.

Singing to us, cedars; the twilight is creeping
With shadowy feathers, the wilderness through;
All day we have carolled, and now would be sleeping.
So echo the anthems we warbled to you;
While we swing, swing,
And your branches sing,
And we doze to your dreamy whispering.

Sing to us, cedars; the night-wind is sighing,
Is waning, is pleading, to hear you reply,
And here in your arms we are restfully lying,
And longing to dream to your soft lullaby;
While we swing, swing,
And your branches sing,
And we doze to your dreamy whispering.

Sing to us, cedars; your voice is so lowly,
Your breathing so fragrant, your branches so strong;
Our little nest-craddles are winnying so softly;
While zephyrs are breathing their slumberous song,
And we swing, swing,
And your branches sing,
And we doze to your dreamy whispering.

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And we doze to your dreamy whispering.

IV
I know my mind.
I know my mind and I have made my choice,
Not from your temper does my doom depend,
Love me or love me not, you have no voice
In this, which is my portion to the end.
Your presence and your favours, the full part
That you could give, you now can take away.
What lies between your beauty and my heart
Not even you can trouble or betray.
Mistake me not — unto my inmost core
I do desire your kiss upon my mouth,
They have not carved a cup of water more
That bleaches upon the desserts of the south.
Here might you bless me, what you cannot do
Is bow me down, who have been loved by you.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) was an American poet who produced a great body of work in her lifetime. Among her works are several books of poetry, essays, plays, an opera libretto, and over two hundred sonnets. The sonnets cover a vast range of topics including love, loss, beauty, music, death, war, science, legendary figures, and the end of humanity. Beautifully constructed, I find that many of Millay’s sonnets are well suited to be set to music. From 2000-2006, I set sixteen of her sonnets for a cappella choir, arranged into six sonnet sets.

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Tuttarana was commissioned by the Mount Holyoke College Glee Club for their 2014-15 season, and has since been performed across the US, also in arrangements for SATB and brass quintet. An addendum: Three years after I wrote this piece, the #metoo movement, created by Tarana Burke broke on social media. It occurred to me that the title of this piece, if read a different way, literally means “We are all Tarana.” I couldn’t believe the incredible coincidence that this work, a powerful 3-minute tidal wave of sound, written for an all-female ensemble from the oldest women’s college in the country, bore this name. I am so grateful for what this movement has done to move the discussion forward about the horrors we face as women, and how we can begin to change and heal our society. -E.E
Democracy in the United States has always been a messy process that is in a constant state of flux. When the nation’s Constitution was penned, the framers of the document didn’t differentiate voting rights between men and women. This led to various interpretations in the thirteen original colonies. For instance, while most of the colonies passed state laws that stipulated only a male adult who possessed property worth fifty pounds to vote, New Jersey’s laws allowed women to vote between 1776 and 1807, after which they were excluded. Women weren’t the only disenfranchised party in these states – slaves, men of particular religions, and men too poor to own the requisite amount of land were excluded as well. As the country progressed, wording was added to many states’ voting laws to ensure that white men (and a slim grouping at that) were the sole possessors of the vote.

Women’s inability to vote carried significant consequences. They paid taxes with no legal voice in crafting the laws of the land (i.e. taxation without representation). They were barred from becoming politicians, formulating laws, and serving on juries. If a woman got married, she immediately lost custody of her wages, children, possessions, and property. Women grew progressively frustrated by these circumstances and began to organize. The first women’s rights convention was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, and officially launched the beginning of the women’s Suffrage movement. While additional conventions were held over the next several years, forward progress was halted during the Civil War (1861-1865), after which the cause was taken up again. Starting in the late 1860s, various Suffrage organizations formed, fell apart, and re-formed in pursuit of rallying women and men to the cause. Black female Suffragists were not treated well by many of their white counterparts; as a result, they created organizations and clubs of their own. Even when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1919 and ratified in 1920, many states immediately passed laws that blocked Black women from voting by one means or another; this situation wasn’t rectified until Congress passed the 1965 Voting Rights Act which federally protected all citizen’s right to vote and put an end to discriminatory practices throughout the country. Nonetheless, we still witness today how various parts of our nation try new methods to disenfranchise Black women and men from voting. For instance, in June 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court removed a significant section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act which enabled especially southern states to once again seek to disenfranchise primarily Black voters because they are no longer required to get the approval of the Justice Department when revising voting laws in their states. Even more recently, the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election brought a fresh wave of attacks on voting rights in states all around the country. Not only is democracy a messy process, but it is something we must be vigilant in safekeeping for all of our citizens.

The Battle for the Ballot features the voices of seven Suffragists, four of whom are Black (Carrie W. Clifford, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Adella Hunt Logen, and Mary Church Terrell) and three of whom are white (Jane Addams, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Chapman Catt). I excerpted lines from their speeches and writings, then interwove these lines together to form a single narrative that follows our citizens’ reasoning for fighting so hard for the right to vote.

Commissioned by the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, Music Director & Conductor Cristian Măcelaru, with generous support from John Close and Michael Good, The Battle for the Ballot commemorates the centenary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920 granting women the right to vote. - S.G.