



## Sounding Out A Poet In Disguise: Richard Hageman's Five Robert Nathan Songs

by Dr. Nico de Villiers

If newspapers are anything to go by, it would be easy to think that the Metropolitan Opera conductor turned silver-screen composer Richard Hageman (1881-1966) and "Hollywood's most popular novelist" Robert Nathan (1894-1985) had little more in common than sometimes having their names printed on the same page, frequently columns apart.<sup>1</sup> Other than an item about Maggie Teyte's gala performance with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1945, which mentions both men in attendance, there is no documentation of the friendship between Hageman and Nathan. But at Hageman's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party in 1962, the *Los Angeles Times* described the men as "longtime friends," Nathan singled out among the "100 other civic leaders and friends" in attendance.<sup>2</sup> Exactly where Hageman and Nathan met for the first time is unclear. Perhaps the men rubbed shoulders at the Teyte gala sipping cocktails at intermission. What would ultimately link their names was neither the hype of Hollywood nor its society gatherings, but rather a significant body of work: an eleven song collaboration between the musicality of Nathan's poetry and the intimacy of Hageman's music.

Hageman published 69 songs, representing the texts of 51 different writers. From this broad range of authors, two names feature most frequently in his songs: the Bengali Nobel Laureate in Literature Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Robert Nathan. Tagore's poetry features four times in Hageman's output with the setting of "Do Not Go, My Love" (1917) likely to be the best-known, as discussed previously in this journal.<sup>3</sup> Nathan's work is associated with eleven Hageman songs between 1944 and 1960, straddling Hageman's Hollywood and Late Periods. In these songs, Nathan is represented either as the author of five original poems or as the translator of various German and French texts. Hageman's settings of the original Nathan poems were published as separate songs and should therefore be considered as five selections from Nathan's poetry rather than a pre-conceived group or cycle of songs.

In the late-1950s, Nathan provided Hageman with six lyric translations of texts by Theodor Storm, Conrad F. Meyer, Julius Rodenberg, Hélène Vacaresco, and Jean Moréas, which accompanied Hageman's settings of these poets' verse in their original languages.<sup>4</sup> At the time, publishers often included lyric translations for songs in foreign languages in order to broaden their marketability. However, in these instances Nathan's translations are often either inaccurate or confusing and therefore it is suggested that these songs are most effective when performed in the original.

<sup>1</sup> "Music Hall Books 'Can Timberlane'," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 19, 1947, accessed January 1, 2023, Newspaper Archive Online.

<sup>2</sup> "Richard Hageman, 80, Honored at Big Party," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1962, accessed August 4, 2019, Proquest. Hageman was actually 81, but at some point subsequent to the error on his naturalization application in 1919, citing his birth date as 1882 not 1881, Hageman began using the 1882 date himself. See Nico de Villiers, Kathryn Kalinak, Asing Walthaus, *Richard Hageman: From Holland to Hollywood* (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), 55.

<sup>3</sup> "Do Not Go, My Love" (1917), "May Night" (1917) and "At the Well" (1919) are settings of poems from Tagore's collection *The Gardener* (1913) while "The Summons" (1949) is a setting of a text from Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1910). See Nico de Villiers, "Singing the Songs of Rabindranath Tagore: Richard Hageman's Settings from *The Gardener*" *VOICEPrints, Journal of the New York Singing Teachers Association* 19, no. 4 (March-April 2022): 48-58, NYSTA.

<sup>4</sup> These songs include "Am Himmelstor" (Conrad F. Meyer, 1958), "Bettlerliebe" (Theodor Storm, 1958), "Die Stadt" (Theodor Storm, 1958), "O Welt, du bist so wunderschön!" (Julius Rodenberg, 1958), "Il Passa" (Hélène Vacaresco, 1960), and "Nocturne" (Jean Moréas, 1960).

In this article, I introduce Nathan as a poet and explore how and why Hageman was drawn to his poetry, through an analysis of Hageman's settings of five of Nathan's original poems. Ultimately, these songs can be celebrated as some of the best within Hageman's *oeuvre*.

## A Poet In Disguise

Nathan was a prolific writer, publishing over 40 novels, several screenplays and radio plays, children's stories, and various collections of poems. He was celebrated for his writing that sensitively merged the realistic with the supernatural. Five of his novels were turned into films of which *The Bishop's Wife* (1947) and *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) are part of the canon of classical Hollywood cinema.<sup>5</sup>

Nathan's work has been discussed not only within different literary genres but also with other art forms such as painting and music. In 1930, before Nathan's success in Hollywood, the American poet and anthologist Louis Untermeyer described Nathan's "delicately tinted prose" to be "interpolated [with] rhymes," concluding that Nathan was "a poet in disguise."<sup>6</sup> Literary critic Henry A. Lappin likened Nathan's writing to eighteenth-century French painting when he considered the "Watteau-like delicacy" through which Nathan balances "suppleness and fluid felicity" with "swift and shining vehemence."<sup>7</sup>

Beyond cross-referencing literature and the visual arts, Untermeyer was charmed by the musicality in Nathan's poetry. He referred to these poems as "lyrics" that are "manifestly the work of one who is a composer as well as an author."<sup>8</sup> Nathan himself echoed Untermeyer's notion of the presence of musical elements in his own writing. Of his poetry, Nathan said: "I was often musical; and easy to read...What I wanted to do was to write some poems that people would love."<sup>9</sup> Herein lies the essence that most likely caused Hageman to find an artistic kindred spirit in Nathan. Hageman himself wanted to create music that his audience would find attractive, rather than causing "the musical pundits...to throw their hats in the air and dance in the streets over it."<sup>10</sup>

As far as creative movements are concerned, Untermeyer conceded in 1930 that, despite the 36-year old Nathan's "comparative youth," Nathan was no "modernist." Instead of experimenting and departing from the norm, Untermeyer thought instead that Nathan's work was more traditional and that it contained "a little sadness, a little shrugging whimsicality, and not a little wisdom."<sup>11</sup>

In the same decade, music critics were certainly less considerate when reviewing Hageman's only opera *Capon-sacchi* (1931). When Herbert F. Peyser of the *New York Times*



Richard Hageman (1881-1966)

<sup>5</sup> *The Bishop's Wife* (1947) was remade as *The Preacher's Wife* in 1996, starring Denzel Washington, Whitney Houston and Courtney B. Vance.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 684.

<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Lappin, "Robert Nathan Is Described As A Minor American Master," *Buffalo Evening News*, June 18, 1938, accessed November 9, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 685.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Nathan, *The Green Leaf: The Collected Poems of Robert Nathan*. New York: AA Knopf, 1950, Preface, viii.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Gilbert, "Hageman Sure His Opera Won't Set the Town Afire," *New York World Telegram*, April 27, 1936, Richard Hageman clippings, Met Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 685.

reviewed the opera's Viennese premiere, he was outspoken. He opined that although Hageman had "at his command a stock of devices and formulae for the modern lyric drama which he exploit[ed] adroitly," his opera was ultimately "derivative."<sup>12</sup> In anticipation of the opera's premiere in New York, Hageman responded by explaining that he was never a "champion of the ultra-modern school."<sup>13</sup> Following the Metropolitan Opera premiere, the *New York Daily News'* Danton Walker considered *Caponsacchi* to be "in fact, old-fashioned; paradoxically, not old-fashioned enough."<sup>14</sup> With such mixed feelings, critics' attitudes towards the opera's "derivative" and "old-fashioned" style subsequently led to Hageman's concert music, particularly his songs, being overlooked in the 1940s while his film scores were discussed more frequently. Where reviews of his songs were frequent whenever Hageman published a new song in the 1910s and 1920s, they dwindled in the 1930s and 1940s until journal discussions of his songs all but disappeared. This led to only a handful of Hageman songs remaining in the repertoire with "Do Not Go, My Love," "At The Well" (1919), and "Miranda" (1940) recurring on recital programs and recordings.

## The Songs

It is not known what Nathan thought of Hageman's music in general or of these particular settings of his poetry. What becomes clear in these songs is that Hageman found in Nathan's words a subtlety of nuance that resonated with his own wistfulness. His five Nathan settings were published separately between 1944 and 1960. The first three of these—"Fear Not The Night" (Carl Fischer, 1944), "Hush" (Galaxy Music Corporation, 1951), "Is It You?" (Galaxy Music Corporation, 1951)—were published while Hageman was still active as a film composer and actor in Hollywood. The other two—"A Lover's Song" (Galaxy Music Corporation, 1955) and "So Love Returns" (Ricordi, 1960)—were published during his retirement in Beverly Hills.

Hageman was always sensitive to the texts he set, and his songs often seem to have been created spontaneously. What sets his five Nathan songs apart from the rest of his song *oeuvre* is the sophisticated way in which they reveal tenderness and self-reflection. Various compositional traits that recur throughout Hageman's output can be identified in these songs, too. Although none of these musical mannerisms were new when Hageman set Nathan's poems, the way in which he utilizes them makes these songs the crowning of his song output.

While Hageman's writing for voice and piano remains idiomatic in his Nathan songs, the interaction between the two parts becomes more sophisticated and the writing

<sup>12</sup> Herbert F. Peyser, "Vienna Applauds American's Opera," *New York Times*, March 20, 1935, Richard Hageman clippings, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Guilbert, "Hageman Sure His Opera Won't Set the Town Afire," *New York World Telegram*, April 27, 1936, Richard Hageman clippings, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Danton Walker, "Caponsacchi Has Premiere at Met Opera," *New York Daily News*, February 6, 1937, accessed January 19, 2019, Ancestry Historical Newspaper Archive Online.



Robert Nathan (1984-1985)

more intertwined. Even his approach to tone painting becomes more complex, though never to the point of seeming over-wrought in the piano or impossible for the voice. At the same time, in some of the songs Hageman relishes in stripping back his typically luscious sound world in exchange for a more intimate atmosphere created within a simpler frame. Rather than considering the songs in chronological order of their publication, the following discussion will explore these songs according to the echoes of other composers in them, examples of the intricate interaction between voice and piano, and Hageman's use of simplicity to portray intimacy.

## Echoing Voices

In his Nathan songs, Hageman alludes to other composers at several points. Hageman echoes composers he respected throughout his *oeuvre*, but he rarely quotes them directly. Instead, these echoes are often quick ways to create an emotion or transmit an atmosphere most effectively. Such allusions to other composers occur in some of his earliest songs, in *Caponsacchi*, as well as in several of his film scores.<sup>15</sup> Hageman might have used cross references as a hook for an audience that might have been unfamiliar with his music earlier in his career but by the time he wrote his Nathan settings, these echoes of others seem more deliberate and often symbolically motivated, as is often the case in his film scores.

Hageman's earliest critics drew parallels between his songs and songs by composers such as Piotr Tchaikovsky and Henri Duparc.<sup>16</sup> I have previously illustrated similarities between Hageman's earliest Tagore settings and some Tchaikovsky songs.<sup>17</sup> Hageman himself mentioned that Richard Strauss was an influence when composing *Caponsacchi*, especially how Strauss uses the music to illustrate sentiments conveyed in the text.<sup>18</sup> In the Nathan settings, one can notice clear allusions to Strauss in Hageman's delicate interweaving of different melodic layers. Suggestions of Duparc bubble just under the surface in moments where the piano's broadening swells to near orchestral writing, while passing thoughts in tender moments reference Robert Schumann's subtle word painting.

Four of Hageman's Nathan settings are sonnets, an extended poetic form that usually follows a particular structure: fourteen lines in total where two groups of five lines are subsequently summed up by a four-lined *envoi*. The rhyme schemes of "Fear Not The Night," "Is It You?" and "So Love Returns" all roughly share this poetic structure, which results in the more epic nature of Hageman's settings. Although "A Lover's Song" shares this same poetic form, its setting is simpler and more reserved.

<sup>15</sup> Nico de Villiers, "Singing the Songs of Rabindranath Tagore: Richard Hageman's Settings from *The Gardener*" *VOICEPrints, Journal of the New York Singing Teachers Association* 19, no. 4 (March-April 2022): 48-58, NYSTA.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Walter Kramer, "New Music, Vocal and Instrumental," *Musical America* 26, no. 15 (August 11, 1917): 20, accessed February 28, 2015, HathiTrust.

<sup>17</sup> Nico de Villiers, "Singing the Songs of Rabindranath Tagore: Richard Hageman's Settings from *The Gardener*" *VOICEPrints, Journal of the New York Singing Teachers Association* 19, no. 4 (March-April 2022): 48-58, NYSTA.

<sup>18</sup> Pitts Sanborn, "Caponsacchi," *Metropolitan Opera Program Notes* (1937), 8, Met Archives.

Nathan first published his poem “Fear Not The Night” in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1937, later including it in his collection *A Winter Tide* (1940).<sup>19</sup> When Carl Fischer Music published Hageman’s song with the same title in 1944, Hageman dedicated it to that generation’s doyenne of art song, soprano Lotte Lehmann.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear whether Lehmann selected the text, whether Nathan suggested it to Hageman, or whether Hageman chose it spontaneously. Nevertheless, this song connects these three artists in a particular way. Nathan and Lehmann were friends and he gifted her volumes of poetry, often inscribed with an admiring tribute.<sup>21</sup> In 1932, when Hageman had moved back to Europe to complete and promote his opera, Lehmann was still based in Vienna and at this point she started including Hageman songs on her recital programs. Although Hageman’s “Fear Not The Night” was published in 1944, concert programs evidence that Lehmann had already performed the song in November 1943, most likely from manuscript.<sup>22</sup> Lehmann continued to add Hageman songs to her repertoire until the 1950s.<sup>23</sup> Although Hageman never conducted Lehmann in an opera or performed with her in recital, through their individual activities in opera and song, they had a lot in common artistically. In subtly referencing Schumann songs in “Fear Not The Night,” Hageman seems to honor his and Lehmann’s common artistic ground.

While musical parallels might be easy to hear, Hageman’s motivation behind drawing such parallels is not always obvious. Nathan’s poem opens with “Be not afraid because the sun goes down.” The sense of passing time and the reassuring message that sometimes darkness is needed for new life at dawn tangentially echoes “Mondnacht” (Moonlight) by Joseph von Eichendorff. This poem begins with a similar sense of calm: “Es war als hätte der Mond die Erde still geküsst” (It was as if the moon had kissed the earth quietly). Nathan’s text anticipates the evening, and the poem aims to offer comfort by explaining the purpose of the night. In Eichendorff’s poem it is already nighttime, and the poem describes a beautiful moonlit night and the homesickness the scene evokes. But at face value, these two poems would not necessarily be linked. Rather, it is due to Hageman’s musical allusion to one of Schumann’s most celebrated nocturnes, “Mondnacht” (op. 39 no. 5), that any echoes of Eichendorff become noticeable in Nathan’s poem. Schumann’s “Mondnacht” was in Lehmann’s repertoire and thus by drawing Eichendorff and Nathan closer in his musical setting, Hageman honored his dedication to Lehmann.

The piano introduction to “Fear Not The Night” creates the most noticeable allusion to Schumann’s song. Although shorter than that of “Mondnacht,” Hageman’s introduction broadly matches the contour of Schumann’s. “Fear Not The

<sup>19</sup> “Fear Not The Night, A Sonnet by Robert Nathan,” *Atlantic Monthly* 160, no. 2 (1937): 162, accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Lotte Lehmann League, URL: [http://lottelehmannleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Chron-1916-1937-1.2014 edition.pdf](http://lottelehmannleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Chron-1916-1937-1.2014%20edition.pdf) (First accessed 10 April 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Nathan gifted a copy of his poetry cycle *A Winter Tide* (1940) to Lehmann with a dedication to her inscribed in the front, “For Lotte Lehmann, whose voice so often filled my heart with beauty.” The book was accompanied by a letter inviting Lehmann to dinner. Neither the inscription nor the letter is dated, so it is difficult to know exactly when this exchange took place. Both the book and letter dedicated to Lehmann are kept in the Richard Hageman Society Archives in Manchester, England.

<sup>22</sup> See Lotte Lehmann League, URL: <http://lottelehmannleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Chronology-1937-1951-2014.pdf> (First accessed 10 April 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Based on the concert programs documented by the Lotte Lehmann League, the Hageman songs Lehmann performed between 1932 and 1945 were “Do Not Go, My Love” (1917), “At The Well” (1919), “The Cunnin’ Little Thing” (1918), “The Night Has A Thousand Eyes” (1935), “Music I Heard With You” (1938), “Fear Not The Night” (1944), and “Velvet Shoes” (1954). See Lotte Lehmann League, URL: <http://lottelehmannleague.org/about-lottelehmann/ll-roles-repertoire/> (First accessed 10 April 2017).

Night” opens with brief, gentle upward gestures within a larger descending curve, creating an atmosphere of hesitant anticipation. Conversely, Schumann’s introduction, sculpted over two phrases with the second phrase repeated an octave lower, creates suspended peacefulness. Schumann establishes the song’s mood and describes Eichendorff’s moonlight over an extended period of time by starting the introduction in a higher, more brittle register, whereas Hageman depicts Nathan’s setting sun via the warmer middle register in the piano introduction.

Zart, heimlich                      2                      3                      4                      5

Example 1a: Robert Schumann, “Mondnacht,” op. 39 no. 5, bars 1-5.

Andante tranquillo                      2                      3                      4

Example 1b: Richard Hageman, “Fear Not The Night” (1944), bars 1-4

Beyond the introduction and towards the middle of the “Fear Not The Night,” Hageman again alludes to Schumann, this time also referencing “Widmung” (Dedication) from *Myrthen* (*Myrtle*, op. 25 no. 1), another song from Lehmann’s repertoire. The undulating triplets in “Fear Not The Night” create a lulling piano part which supports the lyrical vocal line. Hageman changes this triplet underlay briefly at “The little tree grows taller in the wood,” the line which encapsulates the importance of the night. The preceding arpeggiated triplets are now replaced with repeated triplet chords, vaguely echoing the suspended effect of the continuous repeated chords in “Mondnacht.” The change in the piano texture at this moment more closely alludes to the line “Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden” (You are rest, you are peace) from Schumann’s “Widmung.” Through this allusion, Hageman modulates Schumann’s motif for peacefulness to a depiction of nurturing growth.



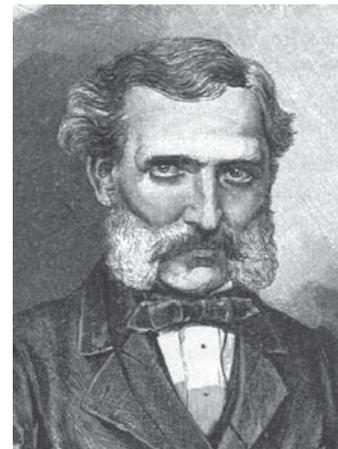
Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857)

Example 2a: Robert Schumann, “Widmung,” op. 25 no. 1, bars 14-17.

Example 2b: Richard Hageman, “Fear Not The Night” (1944), bars 43-48

“So Love Returns,” dedicated to soprano Nan Merriman, a *protégée* of Arturo Toscanini and Lehmann’s student, also reveals how Hageman channels his background in German art song. More overt parallels can be drawn between German poetry and Nathan’s poem “Now blue October, smoky in the sun” from the collection *Darkening Meadows* (1945). Considering Hageman’s background in performing and teaching art song, Nathan’s line “Give me your hand once more/Before the night” must have stood out to Hageman. It seems to be a clear echo of Hermann von Gilm’s line “Gib mir die Hand, dass ich sie heimlich drücke.../Wie einst im Mai” (Give me your hand that I can press it secretly.../As once in May) from von Gilm’s “Allerseelen” (All Soul’s Day) from *Die letzten Blätter* (*The Last Pages* or *The Last Leaves*, 1864).

Both Von Gilm’s and Nathan’s poems have the transience of human encounter at their core, and Nathan’s poetic borrowing obviously struck a chord with Hageman. In “So Love Returns,” Hageman often alludes to Strauss’s *Vier letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*), op. posth. through swooping gestures in the piano treble. Compared to the peripheral suggestions to Schumann in “Fear Not The Night,” Hageman’s allusions here exploit clear parallels between “So Love Returns” and Strauss’s Von Gilm setting, “Allerseelen,” op. 10 no. 8. As before, Hageman establishes his reference to Strauss in the piano introduction in “So Love Returns.” The introduction, albeit truncated, is similar to that of Strauss’s “Allerseelen”: the ascending arpeggio figure in the left hand supports the descending line in the right hand, which rhythmically resembles Strauss’s melody.



Hermann von Gilm (1812-1864)



Example 3a: Richard Strauss, "Allerseelen," Op. 10 no. 8, bars 1-4 .



Example 3b: Richard Hageman, "So Love Returns" (1960), bars 1-3.

Beyond establishing an atmosphere, the piano introduction of "Allerseelen" also plays an important symbolic role later in the song. Hageman replicates this idea in "So Love Returns." In "Allerseelen," the introductory music is repeated at "Es blüht und duftet heut' auf jedem Grabe" (Today every grave is abundant in blooms and fragrance). The subsequent line, "Ein Tag im Jahr is ja den Toten frei" (One day per year is kept free to remember the dead), is the most important in the poem as it explains the title "All Soul's Day." Similarly, in Hageman's song the introductory music recurs at the line "Give me your hand once more before the night," the very line which most closely connects Hageman's song with Strauss and Von Gilm. This line elucidates Hageman's song title the most clearly: following the generally conversational tone of the text, the suggestion of physical contact at "give me your hand *once more*" (my italics), highlights the return of this particular loved one.

While allusions to other composers are not uncommon for Hageman, in this song he interestingly reaches across the desk to another part of Nathan's literary output. In 1958, Nathan published his twentieth novel, *So Love Returns*. Based on a medieval mystic that love "has the power to reincarnate itself in response to the need and desire of those bereaved," the fantasy novel narrates the story of a widower and his children who is looked after by a nymph who resembles his late wife and the children's mother.<sup>24</sup> In the 1945 poem "Now blue October, smoky in the sun," there is a poignant line: "Beauty is only altered, never lost." This sentiment suggests that the poem in ways preempts the central theme of Nathan's 1958 novel *So Love Returns*, and Hageman highlights this connection by calling his musical setting of

<sup>24</sup> Claude Florry, "So Love Returns" *The English Journal* 48, no. 1 (1959): 47-49, accessed January 1, 2023, JSTOR.

Nathan's poem by the same name. While a more prosaic interpretation of the evidence might be that Hageman (or his publisher Ricordi) wanted to potentially ride the coattails of Nathan's latest novel, it is unlikely that Hageman would have needed to rely on Nathan for his own success.

## One-sided Conversations

Both "Hush" and "Is It You?," published in 1951, give the impression that they are one-sided conversations, where the singer voices all the emotions and the piano utters the responses. As a result, these two songs have a conversational quality both in the vocal writing and its interaction with the intertwining piano part. Although these two songs share thematic motifs in their poetry and some ideas in their musical setting, they are greatly contrasted in their architecture due to their different poetic forms.

Hageman sculpts "Hush," an eight-line couplet with a predictable rhyme at the end of each, into an intimate vignette. In contrast, "Is It You?" is a sonnet and as a result more extensive. It has a more flowing rhythm due to Nathan's use of enjambment—where consecutive poetic phrases flow beyond the end of a poetic line into the next—which often obscures the predictable rhythm of the poem's cross-rhyming scheme. Hageman matches this sense of continuity with his epic, through-composed musical narrative over long, lyrical phrases.

Compared to "Fear Not The Night" and "So Love Returns," the musical form in which Hageman fashioned "Is It You?" is unique. This is the fourth of seven songs that Hageman dedicated to his third wife, soprano Eleanor Rogers, and the musical setting is an exaltation of their relationship, unlike any of the other dedications to her. As with "Fear Not The Night" and "So Love Returns," "Is It You?" is also through-composed. Rather than preempting a pivotal point in the poetry in the piano's introduction or by alluding to other composers, Hageman mirrors the dramatic arch of Nathan's poem to his musical setting through original means. Indeed, compared to the other two songs, "Is It You?" is the one poem that most clearly portrays existentialism, and Hageman reacts by broadening the musical canvas.

As the text in "Is It You?" gives the impression of a one-sided conversation, the unspoken part is suggested through the conversational interjections and responses in the piano. Following an introduction drawn over a single line, the voice answers in a conversational tone ("Is it indeed your voice that whispers here/ Or my heart's own?"). The recitative-like vocal line in the beginning, while lyrical, is generally straightforward and supported mainly with chords in the piano. Nathan again uses enjambment to add to the conversational tone. As the conversation unfolds by flowing from one poetic line to the next ("or in the soundless, clear/

Meadows of night by beauty visited), Hageman gradually teases out a richer color spectrum in the piano as brief motifs subtly echo the vocal line and become more and more explorative. At the moment where all questions are asked and the singer offers everything gained from this love to the listener (“Take them for yours, since you have made them so”), the vocal and piano parts richly intertwine as the music underscores the climax of the text (“for what are worth/  
Laughter and tears and all the life of man,/ But this?—that two who love shall be as one,/ Till life and death and time itself are done”). By using a sequential, staggered motif towards the climax, Hageman creates momentum to describe perpetual love.

Although it is not unusual for Hageman to change or omit parts of poems, he only changed Nathan’s text once. Hageman altered the final two lines of the original text of “Hush” for it to suit his musical setting better.<sup>25</sup> In Nathan’s original, the last two lines seem forced and do not sustain the atmosphere of the rest of the poem. Hageman solves this problem by repeating the poem’s first two lines at the end of the song, which creates a cyclical effect that encapsulates the spellbinding atmosphere sustained throughout.

This two-page song is one of Hageman’s most delicate creations. When he was composing it, Hageman was on the brink of his eighth decade, and Nathan’s text inspired a self-reflective musical setting. The vocal line is generally lyrical and straightforward, while the piano paces the transition from one emotional episode to the next. Regardless of the condensed scale of the song, an array of textures in the piano maintains a balance between intensity and mesmerizing charm. Although the short episodes generally change every three or four bars, the song never feels rushed or overwrought. These episodes range from an intimate single line that branches out into wide open-scored chords as the vocal line intertwines the narrative over the piano (“Hush, thou, beside my cheek/ And do not speak”). Warm, syncopated chords, often a motif for the fear of unrequited or lost love elsewhere in Hageman’s output, here underscore the dedication of love instead (“Love is not all, but let no other word/ Than love be heard”). A lulling ostinato that introduces this love as mature (“For as we older grow”) seamlessly shifts into an otherworldly harmonic landscape that balances life experience (“Wide wanders wisdom”) with the frailty of old age (“but the heart beats slow”). The juxtaposition of these short episodes in the piano might seem to render the song potentially incoherent. But Hageman gently negotiates the relationship between all these different textures and links the one episode to the next, creating a homogeneity which highlights his skill to illuminate the “Watteau-like delicacy,” to echo Lappin, of Nathan’s text in a striking miniature of 24 bars.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Nathan (1935) *Mountain Interval, Collected Poems of Robert Nathan*, London New York:

A. A. Knopf. In his song Hageman omits the final two lines of the original poem and repeats the opening couplet. Nathan’s original poem reads as follows:

Hush, thou, beside my cheek,  
And do not speak.  
Love is not all, but let no other word  
Than love be heard,  
For as we older grow,  
Wide wanders wisdom,  
But the heart beats slow,  
Cheek beside cheek  
Hush, now, nor speak.

## A Simpler Portrait

Compared to Hageman’s more epic settings of other Nathan sonnets, “A Lover’s Song,” also dedicated to his wife Eleanor, is more straightforward both textually and musically. The song’s simplicity might even conjure up domestic scenes of Eleanor singing with Hageman accompanying her at the piano. The subtlety of the song’s delicate piano writing supports a quasi-improvised vocal line, and the spontaneous interaction between the two parts gives the impression that the song is created in the moment.

Hageman balances sophistication with delicate simplicity in this exquisite setting of Nathan’s playful and intimate text. This song is the simplest of all Hageman’s Nathan settings. Rather than through-compose, Hageman uses a strophic approach which, due to its musical predictability, adds to the intimacy of the song. That being said, Hageman’s musical treatment of this text is not to be underestimated. For instance, the motif of the twittering thrush is approached differently here than when Nathan’s text mentions a similar bird-motif in “So Love Returns.” In that song, Hageman uses an interlude to suggest the thrush’s call before the voice refers to it (“Listen how lovely—there’s the thrush we heard/ When June was full of roses”). Instead in “A Lover’s Song,” the birdsong is seamlessly interwoven into playful figurations in the piano treble at the same time as the voice exclaims that “The thrush at evening does not sing as sweet.” This subtle difference is significant, as it indicates Hageman’s sensitive alternative reading of a repeated literary motif based on the context in which it appears in the text. While the singer reflects on hearing the thrush’s call and reminisces of a bygone summer in “So Love Returns,” in “A Lover’s Song” the “true love” is constantly put above any of the beautiful things described. Therefore, as the vocal line here gains priority over tone painting, it highlights the esteem in which this “true love” is held.

Example 4a: Thrush bird-motif, Richard Hageman, “So Love Returns,” (1960), bars 14-17.

Example 4b: Thrush bird-motif, Richard Hageman, “A Lover’s Song” (1955), bars 20-24.



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## Conclusion

The inherent musicality in Nathan's poetry offered Hageman the opportunity to create some of his best songs. Hageman's approach to the vocal line, extensive piano writing, and integration of these two parts, either in his voice or through allusions to others, all exhibit a sophistication in his *oeuvre*, which these five Nathan settings facilitate. Hageman takes poetic license not only by editing Nathan's text to suit his composition, or by echoing another Nathan work in the title of one of his songs to illuminate a thematic refrain. Rather, Hageman harnesses the echoes of other poets in Nathan's poems by intertwining the voices of other composers with his own, conveying subtleties in Nathan's writing which otherwise could easily be overlooked. As a result, these Nathan songs do not only show Hageman at the peak of his song composition but they also reveal him as a poetic innovator, albeit through others' words.

In a letter to fellow French composer Henri Sauguet, Francis Poulenc wrote, "It is more courageous to grow just as one is than to force-feed one's flowers with the fertilizer of fashion."<sup>26</sup> Hageman similarly did not follow fashion in order to appeal to the "musical pundits."<sup>27</sup> Instead, he created works which would be appealing to his audience and is likely to have brought respite, even on the smaller scale of song, to an audience perhaps overwhelmed by the cacophony of the Modern age. In setting to music Nathan's reflective voice by tuning his own to composers he respected, Hageman celebrated the way in which he and Nathan remained true to what some might view as their nostalgia, rather than following the vanguard of the changing times in which they lived.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Poulenc to Henri Sauguet. See Sidney Buckland (trans. and ed.), *Francis Poulenc: "Echo and Source," Selected Correspondence 1915-1963*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1991), 93.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Gilbert, "Hageman Sure His Opera Won't Set the Town Afire," *New York World Telegram*, April 27, 1936, Richard Hageman clippings, Met Archives.