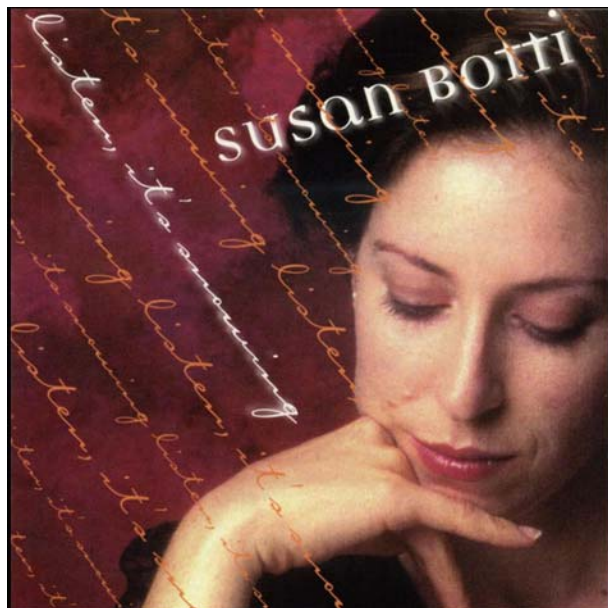


Susan Botti

Listen, It's Snowing



Telaio: Desdemona (1995) (40:08)

1. I – Recit: “O gentle Desdemona”
(Shakespeare) (6:30)
2. I – Aria: “Chi può contra il Mio felice stato”
(Stampa) (3:04)
3. II – Recit: “How got she out?”
(Shakespeare) (4:16)
4. II – Aria: “Guarda che bel serèn”
(canto popolare/arr: Botti) (5:50)

5. III – Recit: “A business of some heat”
(Shakespeare) (7:50)
 6. III – Aria: “L’empio tuo strale, Amore”
(Stampa) (3:15)
 7. IV – Recit: “It is the very error of the moon”
(Shakespeare) (3:15)
 8. IV – Aria: “Mesta e puntita de’ miei gravi
errori” (Stampa) (7:15)
- Susan Botti, soprano; Susan Jolles, harp;
Daniel Kirk-Foster, piano; Michael Lipsey,
percussion; Renée Jolles, violin; Martha
Caplin, violin; Liuh-wen ting, viola; Dorothy
Lawson, cello

3 Poèmes de Jaccottet (Phillippe Jaccottet) (1997) ... (7:35)

9. “Je ne veux plus me poser” (1:46)
 10. “Là où la terre s’achève” (2:29)
 11. “La Veillée Funèbre” (3:20)
- Susan Botti, soprano; Daniel Kirk-Foster,
piano

12. *Jabberwocky* (Lewis Carroll) (1990) (12:28)

Susan Botti, soprano; Paul Guerguerian,
percussion

13. *Listen, It's Snowing* (e.e. cummings) (1990) (4:45)

Susan Botti, soprano; Daniel Kirk-Foster, piano

Total Playing Time: 65:12

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Notes

I am both a composer and a singer. Though music has always been a major part of my life, my first love was theater. Through that training, I began to use my voice and eventually began to study the craft of singing — all kinds of singing — from classical to R&B to world folk styles. As a performer, I am particularly drawn to new works. This orientation led to my developing my own work and study of composition. With pieces like *Telaio: Desdemona* and *Jabberwocky* — I feel my interests in both theater and music coming together.

Telaio: Desdemona is an operatic soliloquy — a character study of Desdemona from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, the tragic story of jealousy and betrayal. Set in Venice and on the island of Cyprus, the play depicts the intense love between the exotic Moor, Othello, and the Venetian lady, Desdemona, their subsequent elopement, and finally the unraveling of their love through the manipulations of Othello’s standard-bearer, Iago. Unable to tolerate Iago’s insinuations about Desdemona’s fidelity, Othello strangles his wife despite her protestations of innocence.

I had always been intrigued by the character of Desdemona, particularly because more is said about her than by her in the play. In my own work, I exploited this aspect by creating two “roles”: the narrator and Desdemona. The narrator, in recitatives, describes Desdemona through a collage of texts

from *Othello* which are second-hand descriptions of her personality, words, and/or actions (originally spoken by other characters in the play). In her arias, my Desdemona speaks through the poetry of an Italian Renaissance woman, Gaspara Stampa, and traditional Italian folk song.

For the recitatives, the music is driven by the words and the instrumentation focuses on the piano, harp, and percussion. In contrast, the arias are more emotional and lyrical and are accompanied by the string ensemble. Together the recitatives of the narrator and the arias of Desdemona present a portrait.

The Italian word “telaio” literally means “frame,” as in the frame of a loom used for weaving. *Telaio: Desdemona* explores this image in several ways. First, the entire piece serves as a frame within which threads of the character of Desdemona are woven, and out of which her portrait emerges. Secondly, I have used the traditional forms of recitative and aria to serve as a series of smaller frames within the overall structure. Lastly, the word “telaio” is a pun — for in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Desdemona is in essence “framed” by Iago.

Telaio: Desdemona was commissioned by the American Artists Series of Detroit which requested that I create a piece for members of their ensemble with myself as soloist. The commission was supported by a grant from the National

Endowment for the Arts. The work was premiered in the 1994–95 season.

Jabberwocky began as an exploration of Lewis Carroll’s magical nonsense text. While this poem is still clearly a story to be told, the words themselves led me to explore new vocal sounds. My version of this piece stems more from improvisational theater than from a traditional setting of the text.

Originally, I experimented with the poem *a capella*, until I had a shape and a sense of how to tell the story. Then I decided to work with the extraordinary percussionist, Paul Guerguerian (who joins me on this recording) with whom I have performed many times. I later incorporated *Jabberwocky* into my chamber opera, *Wonderglass*, a dream-like journey through the world of Lewis Carroll’s “Alice” stories.

In performances of *Jabberwocky*, the stage is in complete darkness and only my mouth and hands are illuminated. While isolating the audience’s “exterior” visual dimension, this lighting frees the audience to explore their own “interior” visual interpretation and allows each individual imagination the space in which to complete its own pictures. *Jabberwocky* was premiered at the Seattle Festival for Contemporary Music in 1990.

Poetry which captures emotions and characters in words is an inspiration to me in my work as both composer and performer. My goal is not simply to underscore the poetry, but to surround it in an evocative world, bringing out its myriad possibilities.

Philippe Jaccottet’s poetry (*3 Poèmes de Jaccottet*) is powerful in its profound simplicity. He expresses complex emotional worlds with the purest of gestures.

Listen, it’s snowing (an excerpt from the e. e. cummings play *Him*) is a delicate stream of consciousness which, for me, eloquently conveys love and loss and beauty.

Text:

Telaio: Desdemona

1. I: Recitative: “O gentle Desdemona” (Shakespeare)

O gentle Desdemona

...a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation
Would ever have, t’incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight!

...her delicate youth

A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blushed at herself...
...It is a judgement maimed and most imperfect
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
To find out practices of cunning hell
Why this should be.

She’s full of most blessèd condition.

virtuous Desdemona

O gentle Desdemona

As both a composer and a singer, **Susan Botti** has been recognized as “one of the fresher, more imaginative voices on the New York new-music scene.” When her chamber opera *Wonderglass* received its premiere in NYC, the New York Times also wrote: “...it was hard to know what to admire most: her music, her singing, or the theatrical flair and imagination she brought to both.” In the spring of 1999 in Santa Fe, Botti will revive *Telaio: Desdemona* which Opera Magazine called “striking emotional music.” Among her other recent commissions are *Pig Dreams* (Scenes from *The Life of Sylvia*) written for the Jubal Trio, and a Meet The Composer commission from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra for a work to be premiered at Carnegie Hall.

Botti is also known for performing works of her composer colleagues and especially for her collaborations with composer/conductor Tan Dun who created for her the role of “Water” in his internationally renowned opera *Marco Polo*. Together they premiered his *Red Forecast for soprano and orchestra* with the BBC Scottish Symphony at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and with the American Composers Orchestra in Carnegie Hall. She performs his *Silk Road* on the CRI recording “Snow In June” (CD 655). Botti has also performed music by Cage, Gubaidulina, Hosokawa, and Partch, among others in appearances at numerous international festivals of music and theater.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Botti began her studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Cleveland Playhouse. She received her BMA from the Berklee School of Music and her masters in music composition at the Manhattan School of Music where she was awarded the Jon Woolley Merit Award for “outstanding achievement in composition.” She lives in New York City with her husband, composer/performer, Roland Vazquez, and their daughter Isabel.

2. I: Aria: "chi può contar il mio felice stato"* (Stampa)

Chi può contar il mio felice stato,
l'alta mia gioia e gli miei dilette?
O un di que' del ciel angeli eletti,
o altro amante, che l'abbia provato.
Io mi sto sempre al mio signor a lato,
godo il lampo degli occhi e 'l suon dei detti,
vivomi de' divini alti concetti,
ch'escon da tanto ingegno e sí pregiato.
Io mi miro sovente il suo bel viso,
e mirando mi par veder insieme
tutta la gloria e 'l ben del paradiso.
Quel che sol turba in parte la mia speme,
è 'l timor che da me non sia diviso;
ché 'l vorrei meco fin a l'ore estreme.

Who can describe how happy is my state,
Exalted joy and all my rare delights?
Either an angel in the courts of heaven,
Or any lover who has felt the same.
Now I live always with my lord beside me,
Revel in his bright eyes, his lovely speech;
I feed upon his high and godlike thoughts
Issuing from his noble, lofty mind.
I often gaze upon his handsome face
And as I look I seem to find combined
The glory and the joy of paradise.
The only thing that can perturb my hope
Is fear that he must part from me some day:
I want him near me till my final hour.

3. II: Recitative: "How got she out?" (Shakespeare)

How got she out?
...she, in spite of nature,
of years, of country, credit, everything,
to fall in love with what she feared to look on!
O unhappy girl!
O treason of the blood!
She is abused, stol'n...and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so prepost'rously to err—
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense—
Sans witchcraft could not.
She had eyes and chose
She swore, in faith: 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.
She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man.

4. II: Aria: "Guarda che bel serèn"*** (canto popolare)

Guarda che bel serèn se non se nuvla
che bela note de rubar le done
chi ruba done non si chiaman ladri
si chiaman giovinoti innamorati
In mez al mer a gh'è un alberèin
c' tot i ann al prodüs di già fiurèin
toti el zòuvni el gàrden al colore
e quisti i en i fiurèin de l'amore
S'a füs na rundanèna per un'ora
vurìa vuler indov al mio bèin lavora
gli vurìa der un bagio in dla buchèna
vurìa bèin dir c'è stà la rundanèna
L'è pur al bel serèin se non s'anuvla
o pur un bel mouròus se non mi burla
l' pur al bel serèin se non si guasta
o pur un bel mouròus se non mi làsia

Oh what a calm sky if it doesn't get cloudy
what a beautiful night to steal women
those who steal shouldn't be called thieves
but should instead be called youth in love
In the midst of the sea grows a small tree
which every year produces beautiful florets
the youth stand transfixed by the color
it's these that are the flowers of love
If I could be a little swallow for an hour
I would fly towards where my love works
I would want to give her a kiss on her little mouth
and I would like to say
that it was the little swallow
And yet, calm is the sky if it doesn't get cloudy
as beautiful is a lover if I am not deceived
and yet, calm is the sky if the weather
doesn't change
as beautiful is a lover if I am not deserted

5. III: Recitative: "A business of some heat" (Shakespeare)

She's a most exquisite lady

And, I'll warrant her, full of game.

Indeed, she's a most fresh and delicate creature.

What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation.

An inviting eye, and yet methinks right modest.

And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love?

She is indeed perfection.

A business of some heat.

Love is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will...

It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue

her love to the Moor... nor he his to her. It was a violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration...

she must change for youth.

When she is sated with his body she will find the error of her choice.

A business of some heat.

Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor

but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. And will she love him still for prating?...

Her eye must be fed.

A business of some heat.

And what delight shall she have to look on the devil?... Now, for want of... required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor...

The wine she drinks is made of grapes.

If she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor.

6. III: Aria: "L'empio tuo strale, Amore"* (Stampa)

L'empio tuo strale, Amore,
è piú crudo e piú forte
assai che quel di Morte;
ché per Morte una volta sol si more,
e tu col tuo colpire
uccidi mille, e non si può morire.
Dunque, Amore, è men male
La morte che 'l tuo strale.

Your cruel arrow, Love,
Is sharper and more dire
Even than Death's own dart
Because through Death one simply dies one time,
While you, when you attack
Can strike a thousand times, yet never slay.
So, Love, your piercing dart,
Is deadlier than Death.

7. IV: Recitative: "It is the very error of the moon." (Shakespeare)

sweet Desdemona

It is the very error of the moon.

She comes more nearer earth than she was wont

And makes men mad.

If she be false, heaven mocks itself.

... This is a subtle whore,

A closet lock and key of villainous secrets.

And yet she'll kneel and pray.

Devil!

sweet Desdemona

It is the very error of the moon.

She comes more nearer earth than she was wont

And makes men mad.

Her name, that was as fresh

As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black.

8. IV: Aria: "Mesta e pentita de' miei gravi errori"* (Stampa)

Mesta e pentita de' miei gravi errori.
e del mio vaneggiar tanto e sí lieve,
e d'aver speso questo tempo breve
de la vita fugace in vani amori,
(dolce Signor, non mi lasciar perire)
a te, Signor, ch'intenerisci i cori,
e rendi calda la gelata neve,
e fai soave ogn'aspro peso e greve
a chiunque accendi di tuoi santi ardori,
(dolce Signor, non mi lasciar perire)
ricorro; e prego che mi porghi mano
a trarmi fuor del pelago, onde uscire,
s'io tentassi da me, sarebbe vano.
(dolce Signor, non mi lasciar perire)
Tu volesti per noi, Signor, morire,
tu ricomprasti tutto il seme umano;
dolce Signor, non mi lasciar perire!

Sad and repenting of my grievous errors
And of my frivolous and hollow straying,
Having misspent the little time allowed
For this brief life of ours, in empty loves,
(O my dear Lord, I pray, let me not perish)
To you, O lord, who soften hardened hearts
And warm the coldest of the ice-bound snows
And sweeten every rash and heavy burden
For those who will receive Your sacred fires,
(O my dear Lord, I pray, let me not perish)
I run, and pray You to extend Your hand
To draw me from this perilous sea, where I
Could never free myself, for all my striving.
(O my dear Lord, I pray, let me not perish)
You did for us poor mortals freely die,
You did redeem the entire human race.
O my dear Lord, I pray, let me not perish!

12. *Jabberwocky*

Lewis Carroll
Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!
He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.
And as in uffish thought he stood
The Jabberwock with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgy wood,
And burbled as it came!
One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.
And hast thou slain the Jabberwock
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!
He chortled in his joy.
Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

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Production Notes

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Executive Producer: Joseph Ridings Dalton.

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