

***The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* Program Information**

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat

Edward Lear (1812 – 1888)

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea
 In a beautiful pea green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
 Wrapped up in a five pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
 And sang to a small guitar,
‘O lovely Pussy! O Pussy my love,
 What a beautiful Pussy you are,
 You are,
 You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!’

Pussy said to the Owl, ‘You elegant fowl!
 How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long have we tarried:
 But what shall we do for a ring?’
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
 To the land where the Bong-tree grows
And there in the wood a Piggy-wig stood
 With a ring at the end of his nose,
 His nose,
 His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

‘Dear pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
 Your ring?’ Said the Piggy, ‘I will.’
So they took it away, and were married next day
 By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
 Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
 They dance by the light of the moon,
 The moon,
 The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Instrumentation

Soprano
Tenor
Piano

Performance Notes

Performance time: approximately 4:00.

Program Notes

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat (2010) was commissioned by Karen Zander for the thirty-fourth anniversary of her union with Bernhard Metzger, in conjunction with a benefit concert for the New Philharmonia Orchestra of Newton, MA. The English poet Edward Lear (1812 – 1888) was also an artist, illustrator, and author who was well known for his literary nonsense and his limericks, in particular. In *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat*, perhaps Lear's most famous nonsense poem, two unlikely lovers share adventures, get married, and end up dancing by the light of the moon. My vision for the cat in this story is one who is full of energy, irresistibly playful, and constantly running and jumping up and down the keyboard.

The harmonic scheme for this work is based on a sequence of minor and major keys that are related by minor thirds. The movement from key to key is a musical representation of the journey that the two lovers take during the unfolding of the poem so that, both harmonically and poetically, they end up in a very different place from where their journey began. Musically, this is called progressive tonality. The final major/minor pair of keys are the same ones used by Chopin in his *Préludes*, Op. 28, No. 15. This establishes the tonality for a direct quotation of what is perhaps the world's most famous piece of music related to moonlight as the story comes to a close and the lovers dance. As in the Chopin, the major key returns at the end and the cat gets in the last word.

John M. Tarrh