

# QUILT SONGS



*Quilt Songs* was commissioned in 2015 for VocalEssence by Mike McCarthy to honor his wife Kay. Each composer hand selected a quilt and poem inspired by the quilt. The five quilts chosen for *Quilt Songs* all include bold color and design. The techniques range from intricate piecing to graceful, curved appliqué.

## THIS IS THE GARDEN

*Alice Parker*

this is the garden: colours come and go,  
frail azures fluttering from night's outer wing  
strong silent greens serenely lingering,  
absolute lights like baths of golden snow.  
This is the garden: pursed lips do blow  
upon cool flutes within wide glooms, and sing  
(of harps celestial to the quivering string)  
invisible faces hauntingly and slow.

This is the garden. Time shall surely reap  
and on Death's blade lie many a flower curled,  
in other lands where other songs be sung;  
yet stand They here enraptured, as among  
the slow deep trees perpetual of sleep  
some silver-fingered fountain steals the world.

*E. E. Cummings*

### Composer Note

When I was in college I acquired a complete collection of E. E. Cummings, and he has been one of my favorite poets ever since. And in all those years since I have been amassing folders full of poems that have caught my ear—this one, copied out, among them. Every time I receive a commission for a new work, I page through this collection, pausing at those which leap off the page.

So when I saw that dark quilt, with its shadowy colors and air of mystery, this poem came instantly to mind. When I sat down to work at it, the music simply flowed—because I had known and loved the poem for so long. It was all waiting to come out—and the quilt enabled that transformation into sound. It wrote itself.



### Midnight Garden

Artist: Kay McCarthy  
27" x 56" 2004

These beautiful flowers were appliquéd by hand. The black background makes them light up. Another design by Linda Hohag.  
Photo credit: Mike Krivit

## THE CHILDREN'S ORCHARD

*Libby Larsen*

In the full sun. In the fruitfall season.  
Against my knees the earth and the bucket, and the soft blue prunes  
echoing red echoing purple echo in the silver bucket  
sun, and over the flames of the earth the sun flies down.

Over my head the little trees tremble alive in their black branches  
and bare ribbed boys golden and shouting stoop here to gather the  
blue,  
the wild-red, the dark. Colors of ripeness in the fruitfall season.  
I will remember the last light on the lowest branch.

Will see these trees as they were in spring, wild black rooted in light,  
Root-deep in noon, the piercing yellow noon of mustard blossom.  
Sun breathing on us the scent of heat, richness of air where my  
hands know  
blue, full summer, strong sun. I tell you harvest.

*Muriel Rukeyser*

### Composer Note

To me, Kay McCarthy's Garden Glory quilt exudes joy, generosity, and wisdom. Her vibrant, colorful flowers float on a burnished, warm background. The quilt reminded me of one of my favorite poems, *The Children's Orchard*, by one of my favorite poets, Muriel Rukeyser. "In the full sun. In the fruitfall season" the poem begins, as the poet muses on two "bare-ribbed boys golden and shouting" collecting plums. Like Kay's flowers, captured in color, these boys, captured in poetry exist in the same, ancient cycle of life.



**Garden Glory** | Artist: Kay McCarthy, 65" x 82" 2000

The only colors in this quilt are green, purple, red, and gold, but many different fabrics were used. The appliqué was done by hand over a two-year period. Photo credit: Mike Krivit

## SUN QUILT

*Gabriela Lena Frank*

The sun has such a pretty quilt  
Each night he goes to bed,  
It's made of lavender and gold,  
With great long stripes of red.  
And bordered by the softest tints  
Of all the shades of gray.  
It's put together by the sky,  
And quilted by the day.

*Laura Coates Reed*

### Composer Note

Quilts are frequently wordless yet communicate abundantly in tradition and beauty. In Sun Quilt for SATB choir, rising and falling lines of wordless singing/humming is used to convey the mesmerizing pieces of fabric that interweave together in the most skilled quilter's hands. When words do come into play in this piece, they draw on the poetry of Laura Coates Reed, a 19th-century American poetess whose work is featured in historical anthologies of women's poetry. Sensitive to the issues and artistic expressions of women of the day, her own sweet words equate the artistry of quilting to the artistry of nature.



**Starburst** | Artist: Kay McCarthy, 62" x 62" 2003

A technique called "paper piecing" was used in this quilt. Each piece is cut and sewn individually onto a separate diamond shaped paper pattern. There are over 600 different fabrics and 1400 pieces. It hangs over the fireplace in our guest cabin on the North Shore.

Photo credit: Mike Krivit

## NEARLY INSANE

*Ysaÿe Barnwell*

Jumbled diamonds halved and quartered  
turned and sorted, smallest angles  
all the same.

Does this cutting, folding, stitching,  
piecing, pairing, splice of planes  
drive me crazy or keep me sane?

Count the sunbursts, crosses, stars.  
Count the prisms, ladders, bars. Lock  
their union in your eye.

Does this cutting, folding, stitching,  
piecing, pairing, splice of planes  
drive you crazy or keep you sane?

Thirty-two panels, thirty-two worlds  
thirty-two ways to measure our days  
our days, our days.

Every diamond bright and cut  
every point aligned.  
Peace in pattern's harmony  
the chaos of the world contained  
made shining in my hands  
where peace has kept me sane.

*Mary Moore Easter*

### Composer Note

At the end of her description of the quilt titled "NEARLY INSANE", Kay McCarthy asks "Was I nearly insane to make this quilt?" This question really resonated with me musically, but I couldn't put the pieces together as a lyric. I asked poet Mary Moore Easter if she could work on a text, and what she created worked perfectly for me. Her phrases became pieces/patterns of the quilt that I could weave, overlap and stitch together musically. This 'piece' may drive you nearly insane unless you simply listen to the whole in the way that you might first see the quilt at a distance.



**Nearly insane** | Artist: Kay McCarthy, 41" x 50" 2013

These 32 different sampler blocks, some of them with very tiny pieces, are sewn together in a diagonal setting. Was I nearly insane to make this quilt? Photo credit: Mike Krivit

## MOST HOLY NIGHT

*Carol Barnett*

Most holy Night, that still dost keep  
The keys of all the doors of sleep,  
To me when my tired eyelids close  
Give thou repose.

And let the far lament of them  
That chaunt the dead day's requiem  
Make in my ears, who wakeful lie,  
Soft lullaby.

Let them that guard the sacred moon  
By my bedside their memories croon;  
So shall I have strange dreams and blest  
In my brief rest.

Fold your great wings about my face,  
Hide day-dawn from my resting-place,  
And cheat me with your false delight,  
Most holy Night.  
*Hilaire Belloc*

## Composer Note

Myriad tiny triangles  
assembled into Northwind  
blocks  
to make a quilt;  
dark grey, midnight blue,  
a bit of lilac and russet  
shot through with white:  
Moon River.

Mysterious guardian of  
sleep,  
transformer of the day's  
complaints,  
conjurer of dreams,  
The Night embraces us  
with velvet wings.

Inspired by such loveliness  
from quilter and poet,  
who can resist responding:  
Most Holy Night.



**Moon River** | Artist: Kay McCarthy, 56" x 60" 1993

Moonlight shines vertically through dark water in an illusion created through the repeated use of a single block called Northwind. From the collection of Bob and Ilah Sutphen. **Photo credit: Mike Krivit**

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Carol Barnett** creates audacious and engaging music, both for traditional instrumentation, and for cross-pollinations such as a mass accompanied by a bluegrass band or a duet for steel pan and organ. A force in the Minnesota music scene since 1970, her work has been funded by multiple regional and national organizations, and published through major houses. Carol is a charter member of the American Composers Forum and a graduate of the University of Minnesota. <http://www.carolbarnett.net/>

**Dr. Ysaÿe M. Barnwell**, a native New Yorker now living in Washington, D.C., is the only child and perfect blend of her mother, a registered nurse, and her father, a classical violinist. She studied music and speech pathology, and was a key member in Sweet Honey In The Rock® for 34 years. Ysaÿe has been a commissioned composer on numerous choral, film, video, dance and theatrical projects including Sesame Street, and recently received presidential nomination to the National Council on the Arts. <http://www.ymbarnwell.com/>

Identity has always been at the center of **Gabriela Lena Frank's** music. Born in Berkeley, California, to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Gabriela explores her multicultural heritage most ardently through her compositions. Inspired by the works of Bela Bartók and Alberto Ginastera, Gabriela's pieces reflect and refract her studies of Latin-American folklore, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a western classical framework that is uniquely her own.

**Libby Larsen** is one of America's most performed living composers. She has created a catalogue of over 400 works spanning virtually every genre from intimate vocal and chamber music to massive orchestral works and over twelve operas. Grammy Award winning and widely recorded, including over fifty CDs of her work, she is constantly sought after for commissions and premieres by major artists, ensembles, and orchestras around the world, and has established a permanent place for her works in the concert repertoire. <https://libbylarsen.com/>

A native of Minnesota, **Kay McCarthy** grew up in St. Louis Park and attended Macalester College. She began quilting in the late '80s after careers as a lawyer and a German, algebra, and geometry high school teacher. Quilting became a passion, and since that time she has made more than 300 quilts, which have been exhibited both locally and nationally. Kay and her husband Mike live in Excelsior, Minnesota. They enjoy traveling and spending time with their children and grandchildren.

The life-work of **Alice Parker** has been in choral and vocal music, combining composing, conducting, and teaching in a creative balance. Alice graduated from Smith College with a major in music performance and composition, then received her master's degree from the Juilliard School where she studied choral conducting with Robert Shaw. Her arrangements with Robert Shaw of folksongs, hymns, and spirituals form an enduring repertoire for choruses all around the world. <http://melodiousaccord.org/>