

**Two Songs**  
**to poems of Gwendolyn Brooks**

*from "Backyard Songs"*

*for soprano, flute, and piano*

Don Freund

# Two Songs

to poems of Gwendolyn Brooks

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transcribed in 1993

(a song in the front yard)

for soprano, flute, and piano

from "Backyard Songs" (1990)

4/♭ 1♩ = 80

Flute (doubles alto flute)

Soprano

Piano

*mf*

*mf*

3/♭

4/♭

I've stayed in the front yard all

5

*mf*

of my life. I want a peek at the

*sfz*

8va - - 1

8

6/♭

back, the back where it's rough and un - tend - ed

*f*

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

11

4/♭

5/♭

4/♭

and hun - gry weed

*f*

*mf*

*mp*

(Sing a major third below the played tones just to dirty up the sound a bit; alternative effect: flutter tongue)

14

grows. A girl gets

*f* (*flutter*) *mf*

16

sick of a rose. I want to go in the

*f* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*8va* *breath accents*

21

back yard now And may-be down the al-ley, To where the

*mf*

24

char-i-ty chil-dren play. I want a good time to -

*f* *mf*

7

26

day. *f* *mf* They do some

*8ba* *ffz* *ffz* *mf* *ffz*

28

won-der - ful things. They have some won-der - ful fun. My mother sneers, but

*b(4)* *f* *mf* *(4)*

32

I say it's fine How they don't have to go in at quar-ter to nine.

*f* *mf* *(4)*

36

*f* *mf* *5* *mf* *5* My mo-ther, she tells me that John - nie Mae Will

*mp*

39 *bend G* *bend F#*

grow up to be a bad wo-man. That George-ll be ta-ken to jail

42 *bend Db*

soon or late (On ac-count of last win-ter he

44 *mp* *bend Db* *f* *f*

sold our back gate). But

47 *mf*

I say it's fine. Hon-est, I do. And I'd like to be a bad

50

wo-man, too. I've stayed in the

*f* *f* *f*

*mf*

*P.*

53

front yard all of my life.

*mf*

56

I want a peek at the back, the back— And

*f* *mf*

59

wear the brave stock - ings of night - black

*f*

61 *mf*

lace And strut down the

64

streets with paint on my

67

face. A girl gets sick

70 *sfz p* *f* *pp*

of a rose.

Alto Flute  
(concert pitch)

74

♩ = ca. 72, very free

*p melancholy*

*p melancholy*

ah - di - ah - doo - ah

80

ah - di - ah - doo - ah ah - di - ah - doo - wah zah - doo bi - dah wah - zah - oh - bi - ah - doo

84

doo - wah - doo - wah - zhi doo - bi - ah - doo - ah doo - ah doo - ah oo wah - oo

88 ♩ = 66

*m*

*mf* 3

He was born in Al-a-bam - a. He was bred in Il-li-nois. He was

♩ = 66

*mf*



92

noth - ing but a plain black boy. Swing low

*mp*

95

swing low sweet sweet char - i - ot.

*mf*

98

Noth - ing but a plain black boy.

*mf*

100

Drive him past the Pool Hall. Drive him past the Show.

*f* *cresc.*

Musical score for measures 103-105. The system includes a vocal line, a piano accompaniment, and lyrics. The vocal line starts with a *p* dynamic and a *dark* marking. The piano accompaniment starts with a *p* dynamic. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Blind with - in his cas-ket, but may - be he will know." There are triplets in the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 106-108. The system includes a vocal line, a piano accompaniment, and lyrics. The vocal line starts with a *mp* dynamic. The piano accompaniment starts with a *mp* dynamic. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Down through For-ty-sev-enth Street: Un-der-neath the L, And North-west Cor-ner, Prai-rie," There are triplets in the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 109-110. The system includes a vocal line, a piano accompaniment, and lyrics. The vocal line starts with a *mf* dynamic. The piano accompaniment starts with a *f* dynamic. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "That he loved so well. Don't for - get the Dance Halls—". There are triplets in the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

Musical score for measures 111-112. The system includes a vocal line, a piano accompaniment, and lyrics. The vocal line starts with a *mf* dynamic. The piano accompaniment starts with a *f* dynamic. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/4. The lyrics are: "War-wick and Sa - voy, Where he picked his wom - en, where He drank". There are triplets and a quintuplet in the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

113

his li- quid joy. Born in Al - a - bam - a.

*mf*

115

Bred in Il - li - nois. He was noth - ing but a plain black

*mf*

117

boy. Drive him past the Pool Hall.

*mf* *f*

119

Drive him past the Show. Blind Blind with - in his cas - ket, but

*sempre f*

121

may - be                      may - be                      may - be he will know.

123

Down through For - ty - sev - enth Street:                      Un - der-neath the L,                      And

125

North-west Cor - ner,                      Prai - rie,                      That he loved                      That he

127

loved                      so well.                      Don't for - get the Dance Halls—

129

for-get the Dance Halls— War - wick and Sa-voy, Where he picked his wom - en,

131

where He drank his li - quid drank his li- quid joy. He was

133

born in Al - a - bam - a. He was bred in Il - li - nois. He was noth - ing but a plain black

136

boy. Swing low

138

swing swing low sweet sweet char - i -

140

ot. Noth - ing but a plain black

*sempre ff*

142

black boy. Swing low swing low

*ff* *ff (let loose)*

144

swing swing low sweet sweet sweet

*sempre ff*

146

sweet char - i - ot. Noth - ing but a

148

plain black plain black boy.

*ff wail!* *menof* *p*

4/♩ = 138

151

ah-di-ah-doo - ah a - doo - bi - dah-wah - m

*p* *pp*

♩ = 66 4/♩ = 138 3/♩ ♩ = 66

(This last phrase may be sung an 8ve lower.)

Don Freund:

## **Backyard Songs**

Three Poems by Gwendolyn Brooks  
for Soprano, Flute, and Harp

*Backyard Songs* emulates the carefree virtuosity heard in the jazz singing of Ella Fitzgerald and the raw emotional power communicated by Memphis blues singer Ruby Wilson. The voice-dominated "songs" — settings of poems by Pulitzer Prize-winning Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks — are introduced and linked by "scat" sections in which the voice is instrumentally integrated to create a real mixed-trio texture. Dramatically, the set moves from the whimsical naughtiness of "a song in the front yard," through the threatening suppressed violence of the up-tempo "We Real Cool," and concludes with the wrenching, cathartic blues-cortege "of DeWitt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery."

*Backyard Songs* was commissioned by the Jubal Trio.

### **a song in the front yard**

I've stayed in the front yard all of my life.  
I want a peek at the back  
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.  
A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now  
And maybe down the alley,  
To where the charity children play.  
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.  
They have some wonderful fun.  
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine  
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.  
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae  
Will grow up to be a bad woman.  
That George'll be taken to jail soon or late  
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate).  
But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.  
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,  
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace  
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

### **WE REAL COOL**

The Pool Players.  
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

### **of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery**

He was born in Alabama.  
He was bred in Illinois.  
He was nothing but a  
Plain black boy.

Swing low swing low sweet sweet chariot.  
Nothing but a plain black boy.

Drive him past the Pool Hall.  
Drive him past the Show.  
Blind within his casket,  
But maybe he will know.

Down through Forty-seventh Street:  
Underneath the L,  
And Northwest Corner, Prairie,  
That he loved so well.

Don't forget the Dance Halls—  
Warwick and Savoy,  
Where he picked his women, where  
He drank his liquid joy.

Born in Alabama.  
Bred in Illinois.  
He was nothing but a  
Plain black boy.

Swing low swing low sweet sweet chariot.  
Nothing but a plain black boy.

"a song in the front yard," "WE REAL COOL," "of DeWitt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery,"  
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