

## ***The AIDS Quilt Songbook***

Featuring the CSUSB Opera Theatre Ensemble and CSUSB Theatre Arts directing students

And special guests Kevin Blickfeldt and Joel Brown, baritones

Stacey Fraser, Director  
Guillermo Aviles-Rodriguez, Guest Director  
Alastair Edmonstone, Music Director  
Terrill Corletto, Choreographer  
Cat Erickson, Costume Design  
Jevon Stewart, Lighting Design  
Allie Morones, Stage Manager  
Cash Tijerina and Andrew Yanez, Technical Directors  
Angeles Medina Morales, Lobby Display Coordinator

### CSUSB Opera Theatre Ensemble

Nicholas Flores, baritone  
David Henry, baritone  
Gabriel Orozco, tenor  
Nathan Parsons, baritone  
Cassandra Perez, soprano  
Christian Quevedo, tenor

### CSUSB Theatre Arts Directing Students

Megean Carter  
Maddox Martinez  
Angelica Ochoa-Garcia

## Director's Note

I first learned about the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* as a young artist at the Tanglewood Music Center in 1994. A baritone and fellow young artist also chosen to participate in the 8-week Phyllis Curtain Seminar for Singers, excitedly told me that he was counting down the days for his new score to arrive. He planned to sing a selection of the songs on one of our afternoon recitals and would be accompanied by the great teaching artist, pianist, and coach, Dr. Alan Smith. At the time, I didn't understand the significance of the songs or the collection. AIDS was a concern for all of us in the early-mid 90s, but it was still portrayed in the media as a disease primarily affecting gay men. We were, of course, all encouraged to practice safe sex, no matter what our sexual preferences were, there was indeed a fear, for all of us, especially those of us living in big cities like Toronto (in my case), San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, to name just a few. But a whole collection of songs talking about AIDS? That seemed a bit outrageous to me as a young person; there was still significant shame and confusion surrounding the cause of the disease and who was affected by it.

It turns out that my cousin was greatly affected by it, although he never contracted the virus himself, he sadly lost his partner, Olympic figure skater Rob McCall, to AIDS-related brain cancer. This has stuck with me over the decades, and I remember feeling so greatly relieved when drugs finally became available that would allow a person to survive. Not all survived, so many died, and many continue to be affected by the virus.

The original *AIDS Quilt Songbook* was commissioned by HIV-infected baritone William Parker, who wanted to raise money and bring awareness to the disease. He felt that the classical community was not doing enough, and this prompted him to take on the enormous task of engaging prominent composers and poets to write music and text that would directly address the horrors of the disease. The collection was intended to be a companion project to the Memorial Quilt organized by the NAMES Project Foundation. Just as a new square continued to be added to the quilt itself, Parker hoped that new songs would continue to be added to the songbook.

There were 18 songs commissioned by Parker, songs written by famous contemporary classical composers including William Bolcom, Ned Rorem, Chris DeBlasio, Lee Hoiby, Ricky Ian Gordon, and John Musto. The original 18 songs were performed in Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center in 1992 and later published by Boosey and Hawkes. A recording was scheduled for the next morning after the premiere, but Parker was too ill to sing. He died just a year later in 1993.

Tonight we present newly composed additions to the songbook, several of which premiered on the 25th Anniversary Concert at National Sawdust in Brooklyn, NY on December 3rd, 2017 curated by pianist/composers Gordon Beeferman and Thomas Bagwell. We have also retained a couple of songs from the original songbook including *Fury* and *Walt Whitman in 1989* as well as four of the original poems, which will be performed by our CSUSB theatre

arts directing students under the mentoring of my colleague Dr. Guillermo Aviles-Rodriguez.

It has been my great pleasure to have been directly in contact with several of the composers whose works we feature tonight, including Gordan Beeferman, Herschel Garfein, Eric Reda and Rachel Peters. I am overwhelmed by their generosity in sharing these songs with us as well as their incredible support for our original staging.

We hope these songs will touch you as much as they have touched us in our weeks of preparation for this performance. We are honored and humbled to present this glorious songbook to you.

Stacey Fraser, Director

## Program

*Fury* (1993)

text by Susan Snively  
music by Donald Wheelock

*In Bed Together* (2013)

text by Kenny Fries  
music by Michael Djupstrom

*You Bring Out the Doctor in Me* (2013)

text by Rafael Campo  
music by Andrea Clearfield

*You and Your Big Mouth* (2017)

text by Mark Campbell  
music by Kevin Puts

*For Richard* (1989)

text by Eve Ensler *Poets for Life*

*Atripla* (2017)

text and music by Eric Reda  
arranged by Thomas Bagwell

*Ode to and NYC Condom* (2014)

text by Charlotte Jackson  
music by Gordon Beeferman

*\*No Giggly Time* (2012)

text and music by Herschel Garfein

### **Author's Note**

*In many countries, heterosexual intercourse is the main mode of HIV transmission and HIV/AIDS infections have reached epidemic levels among prostitutes and other sex workers. Epidemiologists refer to the clients of sex workers as a "bridge" population: one that transmits the disease from a high-risk group to the general population. Therefore, preventing HIV infections among those involved in the sex trade has become a cornerstone of many countries' AIDS policies.*

*Despite their greatly elevated risk of incurring the infection, sex workers are often poorly informed about the disease and reluctant to visit health facilities, due to the illegal and stigmatized nature of their work. Still, numerous studies have shown that they are one of the groups most likely to respond to effective prevention campaigns.*

*In response, a number of grass-roots organization formed by sex workers themselves have sprung up around the world to lead outreach, prevention and care programs targeted specifically at their peers. These organizations send current and former sex workers (often HIV positive themselves) into towns and urban centers to distribute condoms, discuss safe-sex practices and promote testing among active sex workers. Organizations such as Aboya in Senegal, SWOP in Kenya, Naripokkho in Bangladesh, Sonagachi and Avahan in India have had striking successes in reducing the rates of new infections among sex workers through the use of peer education.*

*No Giggly Time imagines one such moment of peer education.*

*Unfortunately, under a United States policy instituted in 2003 , no program run by sex workers for their peers was eligible for U.S. government support. U.S. policy was to deny overseas aid to any HIV/AIDS programs that did not “explicitly oppose” prostitution.*

*In 2005, the National AIDS Council of Brazil declined \$40 million in aid from the U.S. government, because of a stipulation that no funds could be spent on treating or educating prostitutes.*

*Under the Obama administration, in 2011, the anti-sex worker policy was reversed by a Federal appeals court.*

*Significant progress was made when US global policy changed to strongly support safe-sex education and the distribution of condoms around the world. However, in 2017, the Trump administration’s expansion of the anti-abortion “global gag rule” has been a severe setback, de-funding all overseas medical and social institutions that even mention abortion as an option for women. The impact on HIV/AIDS prevention will be devastating, among sex workers and all global populations.*

*More than ever, brave women like the protagonist of No Giggly Time will need to step forward and be a forcefor enlightenment and change.*

*For more information, visit:*

*[www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org) [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org) [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org) [www.genderhealth.org/](http://www.genderhealth.org/)*

*A Dream of Nightingales (1992)*

text by David Bergman

*Why I’m Here (2017)*

text and music by Michael R. Jackson

*Her Final Show (2012)*

text by Rafael Campo  
music by Drew Hemenger

*The Second Law (1992)*

text by Stephen Sandy, from *Thanksgiving Over Water*

*Another Day (2017)*

text by Barbara Hammond  
music by Martin Hennessy

*Piccolo Mondo* (2017)

text by Rachel Peters  
music by Sam Davis

*The Enticing Lane* (1992)

text by Christopher Hewitt

*Walt Whitman in 1989* (1990)

text by Perry Brass  
music by Chris DeBlasio

*Tearing St. Vincent's Down* (2014)

text and music by Rachel J. Peters

*Ordinary* (2013)

text by Herschel Garfein  
music by Fred Hersch

## **Guest Artist Bios**

**Guillermo Avilés-Rodríguez** holds a Ph.D. from UCLA and is an assistant professor in the Theatre Arts department at California State University, San Bernardino. His academic articles include: "Theatre and Transit: A Transit-Oriented Site-Specific Triptych" in Theatre Forum; "Darning *Zoot Suit* for the Next Generation" in Aztlán; "Ethics and Site-Based Theatre: A Curated Discussion" in Theatre History Studies; "Part Time Bodies: Day Laborers Inside and Out of Art" for the Routledge Companion of Latinx Theatre and Performance and "Playing Hopscotch in Traffic" in the Cambridge Opera Journal. He is also the 2021 co-winner of the Lowrider Studies Scholar-Activist of the Year Award and was a member of the Young Scholars Symposium Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. In 2021 and 2022, he participated in the Mellon School for Theater & Performance Research at Harvard University. For more information:

<https://csun.academia.edu/GuillermoAvilesRodriguez>

**Kevin Blickfeldt** continues to make an indelible impression upon North America's operatic and crossover music scenes. On the concert stage, Kevin has given recitals at the La Fortuna Palacio de las Pampas Festival in Argentina, at the Oper im Park Festival in Austria, and multiple appearances with the Palm Springs Opera Guild of the Desert.

Kevin made his debut with the Los Angeles Opera under the baton of Music Director James Conlon in performances of *Prodigal Son* as part of the centennial celebration of composer Benjamin Britten. Other career highlights include three seasons as an Artist-in-Residence at the Ohio Light Opera, Dr. Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* at the Oper im Park Festival in Austria, the title role in *Owen Wingrave* (West Coast premiere) with USC Thornton Opera, *Il*

*barbiere di Siviglia* with Pacific Opera Project, and the West Coast premiere of the piano-and-percussion version of Kurt Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*, under the direction by Stacey Fraser.

### **Joel Brown**

Since 2002, Joel has anchored his talent in the historic and contemporary music of African Americans. Joel toured European concert halls and the USA with the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers as a chorister and soloist. He sang for such artists as Barry Manilow, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Audra McDonald, Wayne Brady, and Gustavo Dudamel (as a chorister). In 2010, Joel served as the tenor soloist in Puccini's *Messa Di Gloria*. In 2011, He completed a critically acclaimed run of *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* with Long Beach Opera. In 2012 and 2016, he sang for Kathleen Battle as part of the Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers. In 2013, Joel produced and headlined "Songs That Give Us Strength" (a benefit concert to raise funds for his participation in AIDS Walk LA). In 2013 and 2014, Joel debuted with Los Angeles' South East Symphony as soloist for Handel's *Messiah*.

### **Catherine Erickson**

Catherine received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Arts from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (1999) where she studied costume design and all-around theatre practice. She earned her Master of Fine Arts in Design in 2001 from the University of Southern California where she further refined her skills as a Costume Designer. Since 2005, Catherine has been the Costume Shop Manager for the California State University, San Bernardino Theatre Arts Department, and has worked as a freelance designer in the Inland Empire since 2002. In 2010 she earned the title "Miss Cat" as she began working with The Valverde School of Performing Arts as their resident Costume Designer and has enjoyed collaborating on numerous youth and adult theatre and dance productions.

**THE CSUSB OPERA THEATRE** is an auditioned ensemble that stages a major opera production on campus every year. The innovative, modern, and zany adaptations of both standard operatic repertoire and new operatic works that have been produced by the CSUSB Opera Theatre have led to sold-out performances, as well as rave reviews across the Inland Empire community. Past productions include Offenbach's *Monsieur Choufleuri*, Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, Mozart's *Impresario* and *Così fan Tutte*, *Maria de Buenos Aires* by Astor Piazzolla, *Monkey See Monkey Do*, *Tango*, Concert Suite from *Frida*, *La Curandera* by Robert Xavier Rodriguez and their acclaimed Quentin Tarantino-inspired production of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. CSUSB Opera Theatre produced the first abridged university production of Philip Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* featuring an all-Hispanic cast. Recent productions include a film adaptation of Missy Mazzoli's *Song from the Uproar*, an original staging of John Adams' *I was looking at the ceiling and then I saw the sky* and *Book of Longing* by Leonard Cohen and Philip Glass. Collaborators of the CSUSB Opera Theatre have included dancer/choreographer Faith

Jensen-Ismay of the critically acclaimed San Diego-based dance company Mojalet Dance Collective, Brightwork newmusic, GRAMMY-winning pianist Nadia Shpachenko, the lotusflower new music project, Southern California-based conductors John Mario, Anthony Parnter and Kosta Popovich, Emmy-winning designer Jacqueline Saint-Anne as well as several CSUSB faculty and alumni. The CSUSB Opera Theatre is a proud seven-time recipient of the City of San Bernardino Fine Arts Commission grant and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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For song texts and additional notes, please click on the QR code



## Song and Poem Texts

### *Fury*

I have a poisoned hand,  
I have a bitter voice.  
I look death in the face.  
I have no choice.  
And when death looks on me,  
its hollow eye and frown  
makes light leap in my eye  
to stare him down.  
Then I may reach and touch  
so many faces,  
All with eyes made bright with grief.  
We beat the wall,  
engraved our anger there,  
the fury of many fists.  
No longer secret war  
cries out. Resist.  
Before it is too late,  
before the privileged men  
find reasons to deny  
what we have been,  
open your minds and see,  
open your souls and know  
the message that our eyes  
can't help but show:  
these are your eyes, unveiled,  
these are your quickening years,  
unransomed by your pain,  
unbought by tears.

-Susan Snively

*In Bed Together*

In bed together watching the TV news,  
flipping through the entertainment section

I notice Leontyne Price will be singing  
somewhere outside the city. *We better go,*

*you tell me, might be the last time we get  
to see her.* Are you saying this will be

her last appearance here? Or we may not  
see her again together?

Or you at all. I don't ask  
but think: What is love without plans?  
Without a future?  
How will those high notes sound without you?

- Kenny Fries

*You Bring Out the Doctor in Me*

You bring out the doctor in me  
The smart perfume of antiseptics  
The possibly unsound heart through the stethoscope  
The naked under this paper drape in me.

You bring out the... this won't hurt a bit in me  
The scrubs that look like pajamas  
The crude anatomical diagrams  
The skin is the largest organ in me.

I'd let you draw my blood  
The sting of my own needles.  
The cold metal of fact in me.  
Test it for secret love, for HIV.  
I'd die for you, to have you in me.  
Just you. No latex.  
Just you and me.

You bring out the healthcare proxy in me.  
Do not resuscitate  
Do not incubate me.  
You bring out the chaplain praying in me.  
The IV bag hanging, glassy fluids in me.  
The nurse in white sneakers toileting me.  
The morphine drip, the dream of you dreaming me.  
Maybe I'm dying. Maybe.

You bring out the helplessness in me  
The limits of knowledge in me  
The inability to cry in me.  
You bring out the doctor in me.  
You can't cure me: adore me.  
Let me show you. Love  
The only way I know how.

- Rafael Campo

*You and Your Big Mouth*

Your voice,  
Your voice,  
never pretty,  
often painful.  
Your voice,  
Your voice,  
shrill and nasal,  
adenoidal,  
part Peewee Herman,  
part Ethel Merman.  
That said...  
that said...  
that said...  
Your voice,  
Your voice,  
unrelenting,  
always venting  
Your voice,  
Your voice,  
spurred a movement,  
stirred resistance  
Your voice,  
Your voice,  
rattled powers,  
toppled towers rankled the ranks,  
and... saved lives,  
saved many lives,  
saved many good lives...  
And now...  
and now...  
and now...  
Your voice,  
your voice,  
slips between a whisper and a wheeze.  
Your voice,  
your voice does not rise with ease.  
Distant, broken, unsteady  
An echo of itself.  
We lean in to listen when we once recoiled.  
We cup our ears when we once covered them.  
We ask, "What did you say?" when we once cried, "Enough, already."  
And as your voice,

your voice,  
dwindles down,  
fades away to nearly nothing.  
And then... nothing.  
We know.  
We know.  
We know.  
Your voice  
your voice will never be silenced.  
Will never be silenced.  
We will never be silenced.

-Mark Campbell

*For Richard*

Your tears come to you now  
at once  
like hungry dogs. The world's on fire.  
They keep taking away your future like your driver's license  
They don't want you back on the road. Statistics: live barbed wire  
around your genitals.  
And you, who no longer separate  
the red heart  
from the  
breaking one, you, whose living they can't explain  
you grow  
unmistakably solidly round like Buddha.

-Eve Ensler  
Poets for Life (Crown, 1989)

## *Atripla*

Atripla!

A prescription medication

Used alone as a complete regiment

Or with other medications to treat HIV

One infection in adults.

ATRIPLA does not cure HIV

and has not been shown to prevent the passing of HIV to others.

Atripla may cause serious side effects:

Dizziness, drowsiness, stomach, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, gas

Light-colored stool, dark-colored urine, your skin or the whites of your eyes turning yellow.

trouble concentrating, unusual muscle pain, abnormal weakness

(These may be signs of lactic acidosis)

If you have HIV and hepatitis,

Your liver disease may become more excited.

If you stop taking Atripla:

strange thoughts, trouble with kidneys, trouble with sleeping, Angry behavior!

Getting a mild rash is somewhat common but in some patients it can be a problem

So if you do please call your doctor.

Changes in body fat, the causes and long-term effects are not known.

Severe depression...

Skin spots and freckles may also occur.

The strangest dream.

Do not use Atripla with the following medications:

la la la la la

This list is not complete.

Ask your doctor if Atripla is right for you.

Individual results may vary.

-Eric Reda

*Ode To An NYC Condom*

O thou still unravished bride of safety;  
Thou foster child of sexed and wet dream;  
In whose pocket nestled?  
In what dark nightstand awaiting, like a promise, vow, or charm?  
O Humble Condom, so much reviled!  
Wallflower at the bareback rodeo!  
Though once a come hither, flashed like a smile...  
So strange to recall the days of our youth!  
When Trojans were sexy, because they spelled sex,  
a teen badge of action, rubber-clad proof!  
Ah still, I shiver at the crinkling sound when likely lad tears the virgin foil;  
And savor that scent of talc and violet,  
our fingers bedewed like un Holy Oil;  
Then doing the honors!  
Rolling it south!  
Or geisha-like, tricking it on with your mouth,  
hands a tremble, breaths catching with suspense  
Behold his Manhood,  
amber now or touched rich and strange,  
like deep sea phosphorescence...  
And after, poor Blob, Scumbag, thing off-cast!  
We'll spy your yellowed husk upon the floor,  
and feel a twinge of pleasure past.  
So brothers, slip inside your second skin,  
If you'd plunge head long into this stranger,  
Just a veil that rutting nearly seems to melt between blood and seed, desire and danger.  
Just sheath your fine and public part  
I'll take you in my naked heart.

-Charlotte Jackson



*No Giggly Time*

Come in, come in, sit down girls.  
Come sit, sit, sit.  
There's a small foil packet on your seat, missies:  
Pick it up, open it!

*[To a girl in the audience who is not paying attention.]*

Hello... Hi.  
What is it that's so funny, miss?  
Please tell us all why you laugh at this.

It is no giggly time, no giggly, giggly time.  
No giggly, giggly time.  
No giggly time.

There are three plastic penises coming round.  
Yes take, take, take.  
Now unroll your condom from the pack.  
Leave a little room at the top for slack.

*[In alarm]* Oh ah! Oh ah! ha! Gentle, gentle I meant.

Always go easy, be sexy;  
The condom is not punishment.

And it's no giggly time, no giggly, giggly time.  
No laughing time.  
No giggly time, no giggly, jiggly giggly time.  
No giggly time.

Now, listen! Listen! Now, Listen!  
Girls... I'm telling you only what I wish someone had told me.  
I want you to make a living, stay strong, go back home healthy,  
Marry your boyfriend,  
Have healthy babies. Yes.

But you have to do this for yourselves.  
I won't be there to help you.  
So you must keep my words.  
Carry them in your hearts

And here's what you must say...

It's simple it's simple it's simple it's simple it's simple it's simple it's simple it's simple:  
"Let a condom go onto you before you ever go into me."  
All right? Hm? Again.  
"Let a condom go onto you before you ever go into me."

*[Encouraging them to sing along]* Kar-a-o-ke! Ka-ra-o-ke!

"Let a condom go onto you before you ever go into me."  
Again! Let a let a condom, let a let a condom,  
Before you ever, ever, ever go...

And when a big American sex tourist say,  
"For unprotected sex I pay double."  
Just say it again! Say it then!

"Let a condom go onto you before you ever go into me."

My youth and beauty are worth double pay  
but no one takes my health away!"

And it's no giggly time, no giggly, giggly time. No laughing time.  
No *ah ha ha ah!* giggly, ah ha ha ah jiggly, giggly time.  
No *ah ha ha ha time.* No *ah ha ha ha ah!*

-Herschel Garfein

*A Dream of Nightingales*

In memory of Jerry Thompson

The Friday before your funeral  
I taught Keats to my sophomore class.  
Little did they care for the truth of beauty or the grace of truth,  
but his being "half in love with easeful death"  
penetrated through the smugness of their youth,  
and I thought of you drawing me to the rear window  
one early spring to hear in rapture a bird hidden among the flowering pear.

You held your cat tight so that he could not scare  
off such music as hadn't been heard all winter.  
When you flew south to escape the arctic blast  
and home again heard that dark-winged creature sing,  
tell me, did he then reveal himself at last  
as you believed he'd be —pure and beckoning?

- David Bergman

## *Why I'm Here*

I came here to talk about black, queer men who HIV AIDS has shattered...  
I came here to talk about black, queer men whose lives haven't always mattered...  
Cause I got word a friend of mine had died...  
which sent up red flags and set off alarm bells inside...  
Cause he's not the face that's been painted for me...  
by Truvada campaigns or by the CDC...  
I came here to talk about black, queer men who lack proper health resources...  
I came here to talk about black, queer men who face such oppressive forces...  
But I'm still sad AIDS took away my friend...  
and brought him to such a quick, untimely end...  
And so many folks are shaken to their core...  
They keep blaming themselves and wishing that they'd done more...  
It was a shock...  
He had the means...  
And cause nobody dies from AIDS in twenty seventeen...  
And he was talented...  
And he was smart...  
And he was known...  
And he was loved...  
with a legacy that's sure to be preserved...  
Cause he was special...  
and he could write...  
And because it must be said...  
cause he was while...  
I came here to talk about black, queer men like me...  
Cause all the statistics say I should have HIV...  
And even in my pro-blackness I shed a tear...  
Because of a white man who is no longer here...  
Is that empathy?  
Or white supremacy?  
I don't know...  
But the inconsistency...  
and inequality...  
has to go...  
All lives matter All lives are precious All lives are dear...  
Yeah, all lives matter...  
but all lives aren't why I'm here...

-Michael R. Jackson

*Her Final Show*

She said it was a better way to die  
Than most; she seemed relieved, almost at peace,  
The stench of her infected Kaposi's  
Made bearable by the Opium applied  
So daintily behind her ears: "I know  
It costs a lot, but dear, I'm nearly gone."  
Her shade of eyeshadow was emerald green;  
She clutched her favorite stones. Her final show  
She'd worn them all, sixteen necklaces of pearls,  
Ten strings of beads. She said they gave her hope.  
Together, heavy as a gallows rope,  
The gifts of drag queens dead of AIDS. "Those girls,  
They gave me so much strength," she whispered as  
I turned the morphine up. She hid her leg  
Beneath smoothed sheets. I straightened her red wig  
Before pronouncing her to no applause.

-Rafael Campo

*The Second Law*

Beside the bed I watch  
    His hindered face  
The dented cheeks lifting  
    And falling,  
Scarcely perceived, with the stocking,  
    The curbed

Breathing. I hold a mug of black  
    Coffee fresh  
From the nurse's station, heat  
    is working its  
Arduous way through the glazed  
    China wall

To my cold hand. Soon  
    It is too hot  
To hold; I put it down  
    And I take  
The colder hand in mine.  
    And I wonder

If it is taking any warmth  
    From mine  
Or if his chill alone  
    Is oozing  
Through the wall of our grip, our  
    Holding on. I

Stand outside the bars through which  
    The gaze clings;  
And the stubble crowning the sheet;  
    And the jailed  
knowing, letting him, letting him  
    Go.

-Stephen Sandy, from *Thanksgiving Over Water* published by  
Alfred A. Knopf, 1992

*Another Day*

I wake up every morning,  
make the coffee,  
feed the cat.  
Make a mental tally,  
Recall Justin, Ron, and Matt.  
Shave and face the mirror;  
stretch my arms above my head  
and wonder why the hell I'm not dead.  
New York City, San Francisco, Chicago and Des Moines.  
Each place unfamiliar;  
no place left that feels like mine.  
I'd like to think I've made the most of the years I've been given,  
In some ways I have won;  
in others I broke even.  
Everyone I knew,  
all my lovers all my friends.  
I owe them each the life I got that they would never have.  
The guy who cut my hair;  
the one who ate the chips in bed.  
Every one of them is gone but I'm not dead.  
Just cranky, old and overfed!  
Every one of them is gone.  
I'm lost but I'm holding on.  
Another day I skated through,  
all by myself:  
I feed the cat  
Another day I made it through.  
I hate myself:  
I can't say that.  
I take my pills,  
brush and floss,  
lie back up-on my bed.  
Is it just luck that I survived when all is done and said?  
Another day of me instead.  
Every one of them is gone  
I'm lost and yet I carry on  
for another day.

-Barbara Hammond

*Piccolo Mondo*

Valparaiso.

Nineteen ninety.

Piccolo Mondo.

A sixty-minute drive to that tiny disco dive  
where everyone from everywhere,  
and anyone who loved anyone,  
could truly, for an evening, feel alive.

We danced La Cueca Brava.

We vogue'd until we dropped.

We couldn't tell the roosters from the hens.

Nothing was forbidden.

The pleasure never stopped.

A little world turned strangers into friends.

At the dawning of democracy in Chile,

during Pinochet's last days,

The policemen came and broke into our disco.

They arrested all the gays.

They tested every one of us for HIV.

They did it for the sake of the community.

But only two were positive.

They had to set the other hundreds free.

I told myself, we shouldn't have to stand for this injustice.

I told myself, we shouldn't have to spend our lives in fear.

We need to have a place where these results are confidential,  
where people who are hurting find a sympathetic ear.

I'll talk about the tests and help them make their own decisions.

I'll hold their hands and make them feel a little less alone.

No government officials care enough to do it for us.

I'm not a nurse or doctor, but I'll start it on my own.

We fought for funding.

We fought for our rights.

We held a drag show to keep on the lights.

Through a tangled web of politics at clinics and at hospitals,

I saw as many patients as I could.

Over all of South America,

I gave them back their dignity.

I gave each minute to the greater good.

So many thrived, but others left defeated.

Some ailments of the spirit can't be treated.

Valparaiso.

Decades later.



Piccolo Mondo.  
No efforts to revive that tiny disco dive of anyone from anyone where,  
of anyone who loved anyone.  
Just two men from that evening still alive.  
No waiters serving cocktails.  
No voguing on the floor.  
“Pink cancer” took the roosters and the hens.  
The subject is forbidden, like atrocities of war.  
A silent generation of my friends.  
By counseling you learn that any day could be your last one,  
so when I lost Ramon, I feared it might be my time too.  
I scaled the Andes mountains,  
and I sailed the South Pacific.  
I knew that leaving Chile was the only thing to do.  
Like all gay men who lived back then,  
I started my life over,  
got hired by a clinic in my home-town U.S.A.  
The cure still isn’t found,  
I may not be around to see it.  
Retiring, I delivered these last test results...your test results today.  
New York City.  
August second.  
Piccolo Mondo.  
You’re terrified and shaking.  
You’re only twenty-two.  
You wonder what the envelope will hold.  
You think you’re Captain Marvel, years and years ahead of you.  
Your little world’s still waiting to unfold.  
All these medical advances in my lifetime,  
all that work to pave the way.  
Still, no one is immune to senseless danger.  
we must fight it every day.  
So ask yourself,  
Beyond the threat of HIV,  
are you prepared to stand with your community?  
Whether negative or positive, it’s up to us to set each other free.

-Rachel Peters

*The Enticing Lane*

If I should be told,  
suddenly and quite unceremoniously,  
that I too had  
The Disease and would be taken  
from all this,  
I would think over the years,  
I had complained too much-  
the phone's ringing constantly (lucky I was to have  
so many friends),  
the hours of my job  
(fortunate I was to have  
a job I liked),  
the lover leaving  
(ah, but he was here,  
wasn't he,  
in my arms for so long?).  
I should have lived  
in the moment, kept a secret  
corner for myself to breathe in,  
allowed my life to blossom  
at last-each leaf uncurling  
wet with secrecy to dry  
in the spring air.  
I should have taken more risks-  
old stick-in-the-mud  
that I am-  
a balloon trip over the estuary;  
speaking up on behalf of the  
deaf-mute man at the bank who  
was so rudely abused by the teller;  
that antique bowl with red  
peonies on it that I could  
have bought in a shop in England.  
But I let myself be dissuaded  
by sensible people.  
I should have sought more balance-  
silence/laughter  
cool shadow/hot rain,  
nights drunk on someone/nights  
alone with the dark's quiet watching.  
I should have followed intuition  
to the Nth degree and trusted it,

kept to the singular path, the enticing  
lane with plush hedges, ripe fruit  
and wafting scents that is always there  
in the heart's eye and I could have  
walked it, always prepared,  
even into Death's Unknown and  
still have been content, peaceful  
as a child dawndreaming by open windows  
before the others are up and everyone,  
even the child, is wrenched into the world's  
bombardment, the maelstrom of appointments  
which constitutes a life.

- Christopher Hewitt

*Walt Whitman In 1989*

Walt Whitman has come down  
today to the hospital room;  
he rocks back and forth in the crisis;

he says it's good we haven't lost  
our closeness, and cries  
as each one is taken.

He has written many lines  
about these years: the disfigurement  
of young men and the wars

of hard tongues and closed minds.  
The body in pain will bear such nobility,  
but words have the edge

of poison when spoken bitterly.  
Now he takes a dying man  
in his arms and tells him

how deeply flows the River  
that takes the old man and his friends  
this evening. It is the River

of dusk and lamentation.  
"Flow," Walt says, "dear River,  
I will carry this young man

to your bank. I'll put him myself  
on one of your strong, flat boats,  
and we'll sail together all the way  
through evening."

-Perry Brass  
September 18, 1989  
Orangeburg, New York;  
(from *Sex-charge*, Belhue Press)

## *Tearing St. Vincent's Down*

They're tearing St. Vincent's down to put up fancy high-rise condos.  
Amenities include vinyasa yoga and aroma therapy  
In the place of my old nurses' station  
Now you get a feng shui consultation  
There's indoor golfing where we used to do the MRIs  
They don't deliver babies but the pool's Olympic size  
Go have your hemorrhage and your heart attack uptown  
No more doctors in the Village  
They're tearing St. Vincent's down  
They're tearing St. Vincent's down  
They say the neighborhood's evolving  
So Jesse's coffee shop is now a Starbucks and a mega drug store chain  
Right next door, your gourmet froyo's ready  
Down the street, the perfect manipedi  
That umpteenth story penthouse left three thousand unemployed  
They told us it's a situation no one could avoid  
Abandoned ship and left the rest of us to drown  
Cause the starlets need their juice cleanse  
They're tearing down St. Vincent's down  
I was here before the sickness had a name  
Men came in with sores we'd never seen  
We were frightened  
Still we took them all in like St. Vincent would have done  
But we couldn't make it stop  
Hundreds turned to thousand overnight  
We ran out of beds  
Some slept in the hall  
Too often the meds did nothing at all  
Oh, those beautiful boys who died in my arms  
Where our ward used to be,  
I can see them  
All the sequins and glitter  
And homemade cannoli  
And singing and dancing  
And laughing and crying and love  
So much love  
Now it's gone  
They're tearing St. Vincent's down because this city has amnesia  
There's no such thing as dignity or honor when the dragons must be fed.  
While you're at it, might as well take Stonewall  
Bet your wallet someone made that phone call  
May you choke on farm to table pumpernickel bread

May you all forevermore be haunted by the dead  
You sold our history to the highest paying clown  
Let it all be on your conscience  
For tearing St. Vincent's down

-Rachel J. Peters

## *Ordinary*

Sixteen pills in the morning  
fourteen pills at night.  
Thirty pills each day combined.  
In magic ways still undefined.  
Give me an ordinary life.  
They can be shaped like a diamond or a depth charge,  
hieroglyphs and runes inscribed,  
in colors bright like evergreens,  
and robin's egg and tangerine  
My recipe for ordinary life.  
One ordinary morning in gratitude and gloom  
(you were still sleeping in the other room.)  
I took my pills and bottles down,  
sat on the floor and circled them around me.  
Soon, and without warning, I was reciting all their names:  
Raltefravir,  
Efavirenz,  
Zividudine,  
Maraviroc,  
A pharmaceutical rosary,  
quite ad hoc.  
Soon, and without warning, I was reciting all their names,  
And begging for the blessing they convey:  
To let me stay with you forever,  
to let us both grow old together,  
Until I die in some ordinary way.

-Herschel Garfein