

A Million Ways

program notes

A Million Ways is a trio for clarinet, bass clarinet, and piano based on poetry by Cheryl Seely Savage (a living woman poet and a dear friend of mine.) Each of the poems that are the framework for these movements come from Ms. Savage's third beautiful edition of poetry titled "We Have Time." The first poem of the collection is *A Million Ways*.

A Million Ways

I have learned a million ways
To love you and
Found a million ways
To show you and
Amongst these galaxies of wonder are
A million reasons I adore you

Let me count them
One by one (by one by one)

We Have Time

This trio is a celebration of love in its many stages: new love, the love one dreams of and hopes for, luscious love, and reflections on a life full of love. I would like to express my appreciation to clarinetists Stefanie and Joshua Gardner, the commissioners of this trio, for the opportunity to write for two truly exceptional and absolutely inspiring musicians!

I. *Butterflies*: This movement is an homage to a first love. In fact, the movement's title comes from Ms. Savage's poem, *First Love*, and the first several lines of the poem are as follows:

So familiar, it begins with the first look and then
you're hooked and you can't stop looking

again and again and again across the
band room, butterflies erupting when he

catches you staring at him until you are
brave enough not to look away and he smiles

at how red your face becomes

II. *In Dreams* paints a picture of a love dreamt of and wished for.

In Dreams

Before you kissed me
I had dreamt it
In blues and grays
Vignettes fading before
Sunrise
I would long for sleep to
Seek your face, your embrace
Strain through the shadows and
Dissipating mist-
I knew the curve of your smile
I knew the warmth of your gaze
And when you kissed me
It was fulfillment, all
Ethereal

III. *Longing* is a slow jazz waltz based on the following poem:

Longing

If I could kiss you
All my gathered questions would
Answer to your touch

IV. *Singing Skyward* is a reflection of a life spent loving someone, and continuing to love that someone beyond this earthly life, into forever. The words “sing skyward” come from Ms. Savage’s poem *I Gave My Life to Love*.

I Gave My Life to Love

I gave my youth to love
A daring prospect, a promise facing
Mountains but
Our love existed before
Long before
Before our hearts pooled
With life-blood
Before the ethereal echo of music
Formed us into an eternal embrace...
Our love Ambrosia clarity encased by
Purposeful passionate calm

I gave my middle-age to love
A constant tether
How wildly ferocious Life
Pulled forward, held back
Our love continued
Foraging along pathways unkempt,
Unexplored; grand forests, glass-encased
Streams seeping down crags
Cliff-face clouds applauding as

Our love continued
It caught us dancing with the wind
Sobbing into the night, admiring
Our determined desire to capture
Starlight embracing the dawn...
And we kept on

I gave my last years to love
Hand holding hand, the remnants
Of life well-lived, well-loved slipping away
And still our love never dies
Love never dies
Never dies
It pulsates in every whisper
Groans within the blazing sun
Rides upon torrential rain can
You feel it? I study the mercy of
My heart, the tenderness of my God
And I feel the sigh of love
I hear the sound of love
I taste the fruit of love
And beckon, once more, for glorious
Laughter to dance from my memory
And sing skyward, toward you

More information on Cheryl Seely Savage's complete collection can be found here: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/103433044-we-have-time>