

Emilie Cecilia LeBel

## **Blue of the Distance**

for two sopranos and piano

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Duration: ~15 minutes

Commissioned by: Women on the Verge (Elizabeth McDonald, soprano; Emily Martin-Moberly, soprano; Kathryn Tremills, piano).

With support from the Canada Council for the Arts

*"The world is blue at its edges and in its depths. This blue is the light that got lost."*

- Rebecca Solnit

What we hide and what is hidden from us is concealed, secreted from view. I am drawn to the hidden narrative of women's history; and overshadowed or concealed stories of women in present day. I am interested in alluding conventions within my art form, which commonly avoid depicting the experiences of women; or portray women in a negative light.

*Blue of the Distance* explores themes of migration, displacement, and the experience of women caught in this turmoil. To create the text for this work, I began by collecting 142 recent news articles describing events of displacement. In particular, I focused on news coverage describing the Syrian refugee crisis. I found and collected repeatedly and commonly found words in these texts, particularly seeking out words and phrases that were frequently used to depict women in these stories. I then mapped these "found" words onto an essay by Rebecca Solnit, *Blue of the Distance*. Using erasure techniques on her text, I used this as a shell to organize these found words to create both the text and a structure for this composition.

Syrian refugees are citizens and permanent residents of Syrian Arab Republic, who have fled from their country since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. They have sought asylum in other parts of the world. In 2016, the United Nations identified 13.5 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance. Six million are internally displaced within Syria, and around five million are refugees outside of Syria.

I do not wish, nor am I qualified, to speak on behalf of women who have experienced difficult situations of displacement, but I do wish to bring attention to the topic and how women are portrayed, through the framing words that are frequently used in news articles.

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**Disperses**

moved

this scattered light

far edge

that colour of horizons

anything far

away

desire  
is full of endless distances

longing

a tremendous yearning  
distances you never arrive in

**This distance**

each other are not separated

though I do not live there  
the far seeps  
desire

desire is for  
longing  
look across the distance

this distance

each other separated

the far seeps

**Perspective**

giving depth

dimension

toward the horizon

that extends beyond

incongruously

pulling  
is the near

**Blue horizon at the back**  
more distant than another

most distant  
atmosphere  
edges into something

persisted

distance  
far becomes

not

the same place

**Floated**  
floating

reflection

miles and miles  
reflection

find another way forward

**Sometimes**

sometimes

sometimes

sometimes

pressed away

lost  
dislocation

everything else falls away  
sometimes  
sometimes

how

far away  
lost

moorings of time  
staring back, staring back

lost

sometimes

fade crumble disappear

losing  
things cannot be moved

scatters

my memory

**Forces**

grown fainter with time

life of memory  
smaller

smaller

more and more, more and more

distant

more and more  
faded  
going back

only faraway in time and space

**No distance**

absent

comes with time  
texture of longing

sorrow

closer and closer

usual state is far away  
dissolved

far

lost

lost, far away  
seemed great distance away  
but near  
some things are not lost

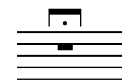
only so long as they are distant.

**Supplies for bowed piano (provided by composer):**

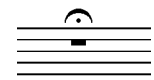
- Fishing line and rosin

**General performance notes:**

- While there are loud dynamics indicated in the score, these should be played within the context of a gentle and subtle sound world
- This piece seeks a free and blurry sound world, particularly in the second half of the composition
- All moving lines should be played with “soloistic rubato”
- Accidentals apply to the whole bar
- All grace notes fall before the beat. They can be treated in a very free and ornamental manner, and are not to be rushed.
- Long pause



- Shorter pause



**Voice performance notes:**

- The opening section of the piece should be performed with a mostly flat tone/little vibrato. Fuller vibrato can be added in as the piece progresses, starting by using vibrato sparingly, as an ornament or for momentary expressive gestures. The final section (rehearsal mark F) of the piece should be performed with a mostly flat tone/little vibrato.
- There are 3 piano pitches that will be played with fishing wire bows on the piano. This will be cooperatively performed by the singers. The same bowed part is contained on each soprano part – the singers can decide how to best split up this task.
- “x” note heads indicate sing-speech, or an elongated consonance. The corresponding lyrics/text should make it evident what is desired at each instance.

**Piano notes:**

- 3 pitches will be bowed on the piano, by the singers, using fishing wire. Prepare these in advance of performance.



- Pedal markings may be adjusted, as desired. However, keep in mind that the intended result is a blurry sound world; and pitches creating harmony as the result of long sustains of the pedal.
- The pianist is asked to hum/sing single pitches during the latter half of the piece. A harmonica is possible (and also sounds beautiful!), if humming is not comfortable.