

Jessica Rudman

To Viola Desmond, 1946

for Voice and Piano

with Text by Carolyn Nakagawa

2019

ca. 5:00

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Vocal Range

Eb3-Gb5 (ossia G3-Gb5)

Program Notes

To Viola Desmond, 1946 is a setting of Carolyn Nakagawa's poem "In the Dark." Subtitled "Olivia de Havilland to Viola Desmond, 1946," the poem presents a fantastical take on a vignette from Canadian civil rights history. In 1946 Viola Desmond, a black businesswoman, was dragged from a movie theater for refusing to leave a seat in an area designated for whites. She was then convicted of tax evasion for the one-cent difference in ticket price for that seat. The conviction stood throughout Desmond's life, though she eventually was pardoned more than fifty years after her death.

Nakagawa's poem focuses on the moments surrounding Desmond's arrest at the theater. She imagines the reactions of Olivia de Havilland—the star of the movie Desmond was watching—as her on-screen image witnessed the fateful event. The singer takes on de Havilland's role, addressing Desmond with empathy as she is removed from the theater.

Text

In the Dark

Olivia de Havilland to Viola Desmond, 1946

You are weary in the front row
as I stride through silver frames
for my beloved audience, similar in the dark. So you can dream,
until they change your role – quietly, as if a shadow could be

a star, my alter ego, leading
such a different scene. What could I say? The soundtrack still plays,
you are dragged off-screen –
beyond my flattened view –

Beloved audience, hidden in your shame.
Don't be weary, my star, don't let them see
there's a place in you they cannot reach – quietly,
keep watching your own dream.

Performance Notes

- Grace notes should be played before the beat.
- Rolled chords should start on the beat.

Note on Interpretation

The text and the music are intentionally ambiguous at times, leaving the performers room to interpret the work in different ways. Because of the high level of ambiguity, my personal interpretation of the characters and story is given below, in case that is helpful to the performers. This should not be taken as the only valid interpretation, however.

I see the narrator (Olivia onscreen) as a benevolent, larger-than-life personality. She is dramatic (even melodramatic) and somewhat self-involved but motherly and compassionate to her audience, particularly Viola. Most of the song is addressing Viola, but some lines could be addressed to the rest of the audience as well.

In the beginning, Olivia sees Viola and speaks to her, first conversationally and then moving in a lullaby-like feeling as Viola is transported into the imagined world of the cinema. At the line “until they change your role,” something begins to change. Perhaps an audience member complains that Viola is in the whites-only section or a staff member approaches her. Olivia recognizes that Viola is becoming the focus of attention, but doesn’t quite know why yet. She gradually realizes that something is very wrong, culminating in Viola being dragged out of the theater. She reacts in horror to that moment, and cries out “Beloved audience, hidden in your shame.” That line could refer to Viola, who Olivia can no longer see, or to the audience sitting in the dark doing nothing to aid Viola. I have interpreted the line in the latter way, though it may be possible to perform it the former. At the line “Don’t be weary,” Olivia returns to addressing Viola, though she is no longer present in the theater.

Contact Information

Jessica Rudman

Email: jessica@jessicarudman.com

Website: www.jessicarudman.com

Carolyn Nakagawa

Email: nakagawacy@gmail.com

Written for Lynne McMurtry and Alison d'Amato
To Viola Desmond, 1946

Carolyn Nakagawa

Jessica Rudman (b. 1982)

In the Style of Old Hollywood ♩=52

Contralto

Piano

pp *p* *pp*

8^{va} 6

Ped.

3

mp gracefully

You

p *mp*

8^{va} 6

5

are wear - y in the front row

3

6

poco accel.

expansive *mf*

7 as I stride through sil - ver frames

poco accel.

mf *f*

8^{vb} 6

f **poco rit.**

9 for my be - lov - ed au - di - ence,

f **poco rit.**

mf *f*

8^{vb} 6

mf *mp* *p*

11 si-mi-lar in the dark. So

mp *p*

8^{vb} 6

14 *pp* like a lullaby

you can dream, oo

p *pp*

18 *p* *pp*

oo oo

p

22

un - til they change your role—

pp

26 *p* *accel.*

qui-et-ly, _____ as if a sha-dow could be a star, _____

accel.

30 *mp* warmly *♩=72*

my al-ter e-go, _____ lead-ing

♩=72

Red.

32 *mf* *accel.* *♩=92* *frustrated* *f*

such _____ a diff'-rent scene. What could I say? The

accel. *♩=92* *mf* *f*

increasingly horrified

35

sound - track still plays, You _____

mf

Ped.

37

_____ are dragged _____ are

f

39

dragged _____ are _____ dragged, _____

gliss.

41 ***ff***

You are dragged off -

43

screen— be - yond my flat - tened

45

Suddenly broad ♩=80 **poco rit.**

with righteous anger

view— Be - lov - ed au - di - ence,

Suddenly broad ♩=80 **poco rit.**

ff

8^{vb} 6

47 $\text{♩}=60$ **molto rit.**

hid - den in your shame:

49 **a tempo** ($\text{♩}=60$) *mp* compassionately

Don't be wear - y, my star,

a tempo ($\text{♩}=60$)

p *mp*

6

8^{vb}

51 *mf*

don't let them see

mf

6

8^{vb}

53 *f encouragingly*

there's a place in you they can - not

f

7

8^{vb} 6

poco rit.

55 *ff*

reach—

poco rit.

ff

8^{vb} 6

Still ♩=52 ossia: perform from here to end one octave higher

57 *p intimately, like an extreme close-up*

qui - et - ly, —

Still ♩=52

pp

6

8^{vb}

59

Musical score for measures 59-60. The vocal line (treble clef) is in B-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. It contains the lyrics "qui - et - ly, keep". The piano accompaniment (grand staff) features a sustained bass note in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. Measure 60 includes a 5/4 time signature change and a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an '8vb' (octave below) marking.

61

rit. al fine**(very long)**

Musical score for measures 61-63. The vocal line (treble clef) is in B-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. It contains the lyrics "watch - ing your own dream." and ends with a long note marked "(very long)". The piano accompaniment (grand staff) features a sustained bass note in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. Measure 63 includes a 5/4 time signature change and a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' and an '8vb' (octave below) marking.