

“The View of Sandburg’s Timeless Prairie...from a field of laughing corn”

The connection of music and verse evident in the work of American poet, Carl Sandburg is a topic that has received inadequate attention. Much preexisting research has focused on Sandburg’s work with *The American Songbag* anthology, however little has been written about music composer’s settings of his verse. This paper makes a connection between the work of the 20th century prairie poet and a current, 21st century American composer’s musical setting of Sandburg’s verse. Both artists are connected not only geographically, but also in their approach to an accessible art form for their audience.

Negating current compositional trends and using text from Sandburg’s poetry collections, *Chicago Poems* and *Cornhuskers*, Wharton melds the text into his evocative, imagistic musical language in his song cycle, *The Prairie Sings*. Using examples from the second song of the five movements of the cycle, the author shows the dependent relationship of verse and music. An analysis of both poetry and music is contained in the paper, as well as the dynamic interplay between the two speakers of the cycle, the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The aspect of a creation of a regional American “sound”, reminiscent of trends of nationalism in the 19th and 20th century in art, literature and music, is also highlighted.

This paper and performance seeks to introduce listeners to a world that is all too quickly disappearing from our American landscape: the small family farm. The words of the poem, “Laughing Corn” center on a soon to be harvested crop that is the lifeblood for the family it supports. This story and song is close to the performer’s heart because it is her unique song and tells of her own history. The life and times of her generational farm family in the “heartland” of our country is a song that is being silenced in the midst of our country’s dependence on outsourcing of goods and urbanism.