

# Reclaiming “Romantic”: The Art Songs of Tom Cipullo

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[The audio examples referenced by the author can be accessed online at [nats.org/JOSmedia](http://nats.org/JOSmedia).]

## INTRODUCTION

**B**ORN IN 1956, AMERICAN COMPOSER TOM CIPULLO has written more than 100 art songs with music that is complex and challenging, yet firmly rooted in tonality and Romantic lyricism. He has received many significant awards and commissions for his vocal works. In 2006, he won the Phyllis Wattis Prize for song composition from the San Francisco Song Festival for *Drifts & Shadows*. His 2008 NATS Art Song Composition Award for the cycle *Of a Certain Age* was followed by a Guggenheim Fellowship (2012), a Sylvia Goldstein Award from Copland House (2013), and an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award (2013). His full-length opera in two acts, *Glory Denied* (2006), was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, and his chamber opera, *After Life* (2015), was commissioned by Music of Remembrance as part of their mission to remember the Holocaust through new music. The present author corresponded and conducted interviews with Tom Cipullo, interviewed singers and pianists, coached the songs with the composer, and performed with him on several occasions. Additionally, the author created the title role of Cipullo’s chamber opera in a single scene, *Lucy* (2009), which she premiered at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall with baritone Michael Anthony McGee and pianist Noby Ishida.<sup>1</sup>

## BIOGRAPHY

Tom Cipullo was legally named “Tommy” after the late Tommy Dorsey, who had been a friend of Cipullo’s father, Ray, a jazz musician who performed under the name “Ray Carle.” Ray built bars and restaurants so that he could have a place to showcase the music he wanted to hear and play. He stopped playing bass professionally at the age of 85 because of the inconvenience of transporting the amplifier. The Cipullos had a music room in their home in Westbury, Long Island, which held a Lester piano with only 68 keys. Tom taught himself to play on this instrument using jazz fake books. His earliest musical influences include George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Frank Loesser. Cipullo’s formative perception of song associated complex tonal harmonies with accessible vocal melodies. One of his first piano teachers was Graham Forbes, who had been an accompanist for Frank Sinatra, and was well versed in the genres of jazz and show tunes. Cipullo studied with Forbes until age 14, when he began to study classical piano with Frank Launi.

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Cipullo was first in his family to attend college, graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Hofstra University, *magna cum laude* in music. At Hofstra, he studied composition with Albert Tepper (1921–2010) and Elie Siegmeister (1909–1991). Because he had not formally studied composition before college, Cipullo felt he was behind and was anxious to catch up by composing rapidly and prolifically. Siegmeister instilled in his student a great respect for technique and counterpoint, and Cipullo cites his direct and somewhat severe approach as very helpful.<sup>2</sup> At that time, serialism and atonality dominated compositional aesthetics in academia; however, Cipullo was interested in composing tonal music. Fortunately for him, Siegmeister was not a fan of the *avant-garde* movement, which he described in a 1971 radio interview: “I think we have all been victims of a gigantic musical snow job. A group of intellectual flimflam men have tried to sell us the idea that the most important thing about a piece of music is that it prove an esthetic theory, or that it make interesting designs on paper.”<sup>3</sup>

Cipullo completed a minor in literature at Hofstra and had a particular interest in poetry. This naturally spilled over into his composition, and he began to take an active interest in composing song. While still a student, he sensed that vocal music gave rise to tonal music; it was as if having a melody and a text gave permission to compose in a tonal style.<sup>4</sup> In order to properly study the song genre, Siegmeister required Cipullo to bring four new songs to every lesson: one each by Brahms, Debussy, Schumann (or Schubert), and Ives, as composers representing the best of harmony, text declamation, melody, and innovation in song. Himself a prolific song composer, with an output of over 200 songs, Siegmeister instilled in Cipullo the concept that the piano should have its own identity and character while never overshadowing the voice.

In 1981, Cipullo enrolled in a master’s degree program at Boston University where he studied with David Del Tredici, a staunch advocate of tonality. Del Tredici had just received the Pulitzer Prize for *In Memory of a Summer Day* (1980), and many aspiring composers eagerly wanted to study with him. Cipullo recalls the first day of his orchestration class, wherein Del Tredici found “too many” students (there were approximately 12). He decided to audition them all by requesting them to sight-read the orchestral score of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth



Tom Cipullo

Symphony. Serendipitously, this was one of Cipullo’s favorite pieces. He passed the audition, was allowed to remain in the class, and at the same time made a favorable first impression on Del Tredici.<sup>5</sup>

Del Tredici’s style was born in the atonal realm of the late 1950s, but by the late 1960s it was becoming increasingly more tonal. He described serialism as “structural autopsies being passed off as fully realized music.”<sup>6</sup> After years of struggling to compose and “sitting joylessly at the piano,” he decided that he would never compose again without “pleasure.”<sup>7</sup> According to Cipullo, having fun while composing was “the opposite of what most of us had been hearing our whole lives.”<sup>8</sup> Del Tredici taught with humor and wit, and he was known for wearing a T-shirt stating “Tonality Lives.” For Cipullo, one of the most memorable aspects of Del Tredici’s teaching was his concept of harmonic motion. Cipullo describes it as an “innate sense of when certain harmonies change, when they need to change, and how they ought to change.”<sup>9</sup>

Del Tredici was a tremendously positive influence on Cipullo, and he supported Cipullo’s commitment to tonal composition. Cipullo enrolled as a doctoral student at the City University of New York Graduate Center so that he could continue to study with Del Tredici. During the 1980s, he composed the extant but unpublished cycles, *Birds of North America* (1983) and *Turning Away* (1988). He made a conscious decision to become “known” for writing songs.<sup>10</sup> Cipullo successfully completed all of his doctoral coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation proposal. The document was to focus on William Flanagan (1923–1969), a song composer, music critic, and con-

temporary of Virgil Thomson and Ned Rorem. Cipullo was drawn to Flanagan’s music because it was tonal, yet complex, much like his own compositional style. But the years during which he needed to write the dissertation coincided with some of his first significant song commissions, so he never completed it. Despite not having earned a doctorate, he became a professor of music at Bronx Community College, where he still teaches.

In the 1990s, large commissions allowed Cipullo to emerge as a song specialist. Benefactors included Paul Sperry, a tenor and avid supporter of American art song, and Tobé Malawista, a soprano and founding member of the Mirror Visions Ensemble.<sup>11</sup> Sperry commissioned *The Land of Nod* (1994) and “Crickets,” which later became the first of three songs which comprise *Late Summer* (2001). Sperry premiered, performed, promoted, and recorded other works by Cipullo, including “Rain” (1992), *Long Island Songs* (1992), *The Land of Nod* (1994), and *Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House* (2000). Malawista commissioned Cipullo to write his first large cycle: *A Visit with Emily* (1998), a 21-movement “genre-bender” for soprano, two baritones, and piano.<sup>12</sup> The work includes solos, duets, and trios fashioned from poems and letters by Emily Dickinson and T. W. Higginson. Cipullo explains that through composing this piece, he came to understand that a composer cannot illustrate poets’ sentiments, but can only show an intuitive reaction to their words through notes and rhythms.<sup>13</sup> Through the Mirror Visions Ensemble, Malawista commissioned several more unpublished songs, including “Aubade” (1996) and “The Cove” (1996), as well as the larger cycle *Secrets* (2002, revised 2003). *Drifts and Shadows* is a set of five songs for baritone that were excerpted from *Secrets* and published in 2005. Between 1992 and 2008, Cipullo published 77 songs, which are listed in the Appendix. Since 2008, his attention has focused more on opera, though not exclusively. More songs have been composed, and some have been recorded, but as of this study remain unpublished.

## MUSICAL STYLE

Cipullo’s musical style continues in the aesthetic tradition of Italian and Italian American Romantic composers, such as Giacomo Puccini and Gian Carlo Menotti. In

a 2009 master class, Cipullo explains that he works in “a certain tradition . . . I’m an Italian-American, and try as I may to escape it, I have this blend of influences that comes from Italian opera like Puccini, and Frank Sinatra.”<sup>14</sup> Cipullo considers himself to be a “Romantic” composer, rather than “Neo-Romantic,” because his music never was anything other than Romantic in influence and style. However, it is important to note the increasing use of dissonance in twentieth and twenty-first century Romanticism. One tonal contemporary is Lori Laitman, whose style is described as “spinning lyrical neo-romantic vocal lines over shifting post-modern sonorities,” allowing the songs to “retain individuality and surprise without sacrificing accessibility.”<sup>15</sup> This would describe the songs of Tom Cipullo too, as well as those by Ned Rorem, Richard Hundley, and Ricky Ian Gordon.

Cipullo’s songs are at times rhapsodic and poignant, and at other times deeply wry and witty. He understands the joy of singing a lyric vocal melody and often sings his songs when coaching singers. Baritone Andrew Garland, for whom (along with pianist Donna Loewy) Cipullo composed *America 1968*, describes Cipullo’s singing as “that Frank Sinatra *rubato* style.”<sup>16</sup> Cipullo writes for the advanced technical voice that must have a large range and broad expressive palette in order to execute the detailed expressive markings found in his scores. At times, he calls for a nonsinging execution of text, such as speech, mouthing words, yelling, or even barking (as illustrated in Example 3, p. 259). Cipullo enjoys harmonic colors that evoke a strong sense of tonality combined with simultaneous dissonance. He believes that a melody is easy to make, but harmony is the most important aspect of a song because it will “break your heart or make you laugh.”<sup>17</sup> The heartache within Cipullo’s songs is equally matched by his clever sense of humor. He uses musical quotes frequently, often to great comedic effect. His choices in text favor those with “a quirky look on life,”<sup>18</sup> and include both prominent and lesser known poets. In order to accommodate the irregular prosody of the English language, his songs are rhythmically complex. He frequently changes meter and employs *hemiola* to emphasize particular portions of text. His piano parts are not easy to sight-read, but he maintains an ideal balance between voice and piano.

One finds a wonderfully lyric approach to melody and a deep understanding of the human voice in Cipullo’s

songs. In a performance review, he is described as “one of the rare emerging composers who can set texts with the utmost sensitivity and grace the human voice with exquisitely lyrical lines.”<sup>19</sup> Cipullo sang in choirs throughout high school and college but has never formally trained as a singer; he credits Puccini and Sinatra for teaching him how to shape a melodic vocal phrase. Cipullo writes for the well trained, *ideal* voice, with extremes of range and dynamics. For example, he will often compose an unusually high baritone *tessitura*, as in the cycles *A Visit with Emily*, *Drifts and Shadows*, and *America 1968*. Additionally, he expects very low notes from sopranos and tenors, yet in the same song, will write a floating *pp* (or even *pppp*) sustained note at the top of the range. He recognizes that his music is technically difficult to execute but maintains his high standards. Cipullo will only include an *ossia* pitch at the utmost extremes of range, and where they are indicated, he will always favor the original pitch.<sup>20</sup>

The song “The Garden,” from which Example 1 is taken, requires a range of A<sub>3</sub> to F<sup>#</sup><sub>5</sub>, as well as extreme dynamics and long phrases. This excerpt exhibits an extraordinary sense of melody as he spins out long phrases, joining lines of text through “no breath” markings and indicating where one should instead take place, while maintaining a seamless flow of expressive sound. Cipullo prefers that the beauty of voice be remembered, rather than the composer.<sup>21</sup> The simple and homophonic nature of the piano part suggests a hymn. He intended to let the vocal line reign above all in this piece, with the poetry and the emotion in the foreground. Cipullo cites the influence of Robert Schumann in this song, particularly “Seit ich ihn gesehen” from *Frauenliebe und -leben*, which he describes as “so simple yet imaginative and sensational.”<sup>22</sup> The postlude of “The Garden” sounds a little like “Sure on this shining night” by Samuel Barber, with its repeated quarter note chords leading to a much desired chord change in the next measure. Any similarity to Barber’s song, however, was unintentional; Cipullo does not believe there is any connection between the two songs, “except perhaps, that both songs are tied together by very expressive harmony and a certain lyricism.”<sup>23</sup>

Cipullo’s songs are filled with meticulous and detailed expressive markings for both singer and pianist, including *–issississimo* dynamics, breath marks, “no breath” marks, style instructions, and emotional indications.

In typical Romantic style, Cipullo uses extreme *rubato*; however, he adds an emotionally driven element with markings such as *dolce*, *a piacere*, *semplice*, and *espressivo sempre*. Example 2, “Crickets,” features detailed expressive markings driven by a strong emotional response to the nostalgic poetry. The song covers a range of more than two octaves (A<sub>3</sub>–C<sub>6</sub>) and demands consistent breath management and extreme dynamic capabilities throughout the entire vocal range. The opening unaccompanied note (C<sub>4</sub>) is indicated *a piacere*. Cipullo desires a very long fermata here, with a definitive shift in mood before the repeated “Evenings” in m. 2. The lyric phrase, “Where lawns are not sprayed with poisons,” should be nostalgically *dolce* (as indicated) until the word “poisons,” which could have a suddenly bitter or angry timbre.<sup>24</sup> Even more interpretive indications occur later in the score, including *sdegnante* (harshly) in m. 12, *accelerando* (*passione*) in m. 29, *angry* (mm. 34–36), and *entreating* (m. 37).

In both serious and humorous songs, Cipullo often asks for spoken, whispered, mouthed words, or *parlando*-style vocalization. While it is clear that this influence comes from music theater, Cipullo does not identify as a “crossover” composer, explaining that he has “no interest in crossover music.”<sup>25</sup> Example 3 is taken from the comic song, “Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House,” wherein Cipullo calls for barking. When he first wrote this song, Cipullo showed it to a singer with “some trepidation,” and the singer did not appreciate the humor. Recognizing that there is a fine line “between humorous and stupid,” Cipullo put away the set for a few years.<sup>26</sup> He later showed the same song to tenor Paul Sperry, who thought it was hilarious and encouraged Cipullo to revisit the cycle. Steven Blier of the New York Festival of Song calls this one of “our best titles for modern American song; who could resist a piece called ‘Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House?’”<sup>27</sup>

This song (which marvelously quotes all of Beethoven’s odd-numbered symphonies) describes an attempt to drown out the neighbor’s barking dog by listening to a Beethoven symphony “full blast.” The text (“arf”) was added by Cipullo, and not included in the original poem by Billy Collins.<sup>28</sup> Each singer is encouraged to find a unique bark sound. Sopranos will often use a high “yip” sound, baritones may prefer a longer “ruff” sound, and tenors may enjoy a prolonged “aaaarrrrrf” in

30 *pppp doloroso* *no breath*

noth - ing ev - er chan - ges; the heav - y

*sempre pppp*

34 *a piacere* *pppp floating*

fruit can-not pull the branch-es a - ny clo - ser

*colla voce*

*pppp*

38 *morendo*

to the ground.

*pppp*

42

*ppppp*

Example 1. "The Garden," from *Of a Certain Age*, mm. 30–41, words by Lisel Mueller and Judith Baumele. Music © Oxford University Press Inc, 2009. Assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Text by Lisel Mueller. Text extract reproduced by permission from Louisiana State University Press. From *Alive Together: New and Selected Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 160. (Listen to this recording here ).

Slow, very expressive (♩ = ca. 54)

Voice

Piano

una corda

3 dolce poco poco riten. a tempo mp (9) pp

lawns - are not sprayed with poi - sons, you can still - - - hear the crick - ets,

dolce ppp semplice ppp poco riten. p a tempo espressivo fast roll p poco

tre corde

6 mp poco f riten. p a tempo pp gently mp

you can still see light - ning bugs sig - nal - ing, look, - - - a

espr. sempre mp poco f p a tempo pp gently

Example 2. "Crickets," from *Late Summer*, mm. 1-8, © Tom Cipullo, 2001. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Published by Classical Vocal Reprints. Text by William Heyen. Text extract reprinted by permission from William Heyen. From *Pterodactyl Rose: Poems of Ecology* (Saint Louis: Time Being Books, 1991), 61. (Listen to this recording here .)

the high range. The song is dedicated to Rocky, Cipullo's childhood cocker spaniel.

In spite of the fact that Cipullo is a tonal composer, he does not use key signatures in his compositions. In a letter to Richard Lalli, another founding member of the

Mirror Visions Ensemble, he explains, "I hear individual texts in certain keys," and emphasizes that his "main musical interest is always in the harmony."<sup>29</sup> Cipullo uses harmonic colors that evoke a strong sense of tonality, but he includes dissonance as a critical ingredient. One

135 *f* barking

2:55

**Example 3.** “Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House,” from *Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House*, mm. 135–140, © Oxford University Press Inc, 2004. Assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Text extract (“arf”) by Tom Cipullo. Text extract reproduced by permission of Tom Cipullo. (Listen to this recording here .)

37 *f* *passionato* *poco riten.* *Tempo I* *pp* with tenderness

And when the Sun go down, Her voice a - mong the Aisles

*passionato* *f* *pp* *poco*

**Example 4.** “Epilogue,” from *A Visit with Emily*, mm. 37–43, words based on the writings of Emily Dickinson and T. W. Higginson. Music © Oxford University Press Inc, 2003. Assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Text by Emily Dickinson, “Nature the gentlest mother is,” public domain. (Listen to this recording here .)

sees in Example 4 an illustration of this juxtaposition of consonance and dissonance. On the downbeat of m. 39, the composite sound suggests F major with the use of the tonic triad. At the same time, however, the dissonance of the diads G–A and B<sup>b</sup>–C adds complexity. Tenor Paul Sperry asserts that Cipullo successfully “treats major seconds as a *consonance*.”<sup>30</sup>

Cipullo uses musical quotations “with enough frequency to emerge as a defining aspect of his style,” and often to great comic effect.<sup>31</sup> His choice of poet is almost always American, and often “witty,” such as Alice Wirth Gray (*The Land of Nod*), resulting in some of his best humorous songs. “A Death in the Family” (*The Land of Nod*) has been called “a model of black humor.”<sup>32</sup> The

dark, but “tongue-in-cheek” matricidal fantasy is cleverly linked to musical quotes ranging from *Star Wars* to *La traviata*.<sup>33</sup> At its premiere, the opening spoken line “I dreamed last night I murdered Mother”<sup>34</sup> made the audience audibly groan, but by the end of the song there were “genuine smiles” and heartfelt laughter.<sup>35</sup> The influence of music theater on Cipullo’s style is prominent in this song, as the vocal part requires varied timbres and several lines of spoken text.

In Example 5, themes from the films *Jaws* (mm. 41–42), *Halloween* (mm. 43–44), *Star Wars* (mm. 45–46), and *Psycho* (mm. 47–48) are quoted to underline the mother’s unpleasant qualities, which are listed by the singer. Later, the song cleverly quotes excerpts from

4

40 **Meno mosso** (♩ = 120) *f*

Tenor

so (snarl - ing, snarl - ing,

Pno.

*ff*

43 **Tempo primo** (♩ = 172) *sotto voce* *pp* **Maestoso** (♩ = 132)

Tenor

twist - ed, twist - ed,

Pno.

*pp* *poco poco poco poco sim* *ff* **Maestoso** (♩ = 132)

(8).1

46 *(like James Earl Jones)* **Tempo primo** (♩ = 172) *f* *(wobbly sound)* *(almost screaming!)* *f*

Tenor

jeal - ous, plain mean.) two cups on the

Pno.

*ff* *(a Psycho moment!)* *mf*

Example 5. "A Death in the Family," from *The Land of Nod*, mm. 40–48, © Tom Cipullo, 2005. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Published by Classical Vocal Reprints. Text by Alice Wirth Gray. Text extract reproduced by permission of Cleveland State University Press. From *What the Poor Eat* (Cleveland: Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 1993), 101. (Listen to this recording here ).



Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” after the mother finally dies, Giuseppe Verdi’s “Brindisi” (*La traviata*) describing the possibility of getting drunk and confessing to the crime, Giacomo Puccini’s “E lucevan le stelle” (*Tosca*) in fear of spending time in jail, and Gaetano Donizetti’s “Mad Scene” (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) while trying to resist going crazy as a result of keeping the murder a secret. At the premiere, composer Ben Yarmolinsky told Cipullo, “it’s not the quote itself that is funny, but how you get in and out of it.”<sup>36</sup>

Many of Cipullo’s songs feature an almost constant changing of meter in order to accommodate the natural prosody of the English language. On the page, the music will appear very complex, but the song will sound “completely natural” to an audience.<sup>37</sup> Cipullo begins the composition process by selecting a text, then goes to the piano to find something that will evoke the text. He expects singers to have a sense of rhythm equal to that of any pianist, yet the singer must perform from memory. This remarkable rhythmic complexity is one of the greatest challenges for singers attempting to perform Cipullo’s songs. Through the use of simple, compound, irregular, and improvisatory meters, “he excels by pulling off the conjuror’s trick mastered by all the great writers of poem-based song from Schubert forward—the blurring of the demarcation between where the word ends and the music begins.”<sup>38</sup>

Cipullo met poet Marilyn Kallet while they were both in residence at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in 1994. Hearing her read from a volume of poems, he immediately recognized Kallet’s work as “the types of poems composers dream of . . . surprising, sexy, funny, expressive, and direct.”<sup>39</sup> “Why I Wear My Hair Long” describes two people in the sexual act, with the climax beginning to build in m. 20 (“until we ride”), and reaching its apex in m. 30 (“& my flag / unfurls”). Cipullo calls this song “the anthem of a diva-siren” (Example 6).<sup>40</sup> In this example, the song changes meter every single measure for 12 measures, yet the resulting sound “never works against the natural rhythm of a text. It just falls out of your mouth.”<sup>41</sup> Kallet’s poem has frequent line breaks that build intensity, and Cipullo’s meter changes also serve to honor the poem’s inherent rhythm: “. . . like a silk shirt / button it / slowly, / carefully, / facing you / let the fringes / tickle your hips / until we ride . . .”<sup>42</sup> The frequently changing meter can present

some memorization challenges for the singer. Soprano Melanie Mitrano, who recorded the set on Capstone Records, suggests listening for the “aggregate” rather than memorizing counts.<sup>43</sup>

Rhythmic complexity is also exhibited through Cipullo’s frequent use of *hemiola*. One of his earliest memories of being “fixated” on a song was after hearing “Standing on the corner,” from Frank Loesser’s *The Most Happy Fella* (1956). He recalls playing the song by ear at the piano and unraveling the shift of rhythmic pulse on “watchin’ all the girls, watchin’ all the girls, watchin’ all the girls.”<sup>44</sup> The song is primarily in duple meter but shifts the pulse to triple in this phrase. This discovery was seminal for Cipullo. He was awestruck by the idea that a popular song could “change” meter. He describes his reaction, “Wow! You can do that? You can be accessible and tuneful but unpredictable and expressive. You can go where people don’t expect, but you can still invite them in.”<sup>45</sup>

Cipullo frequently uses *hemiola* to highlight a given word or phrase, which increases drama and builds expressive emphasis. Both change of meter and *hemiola*, as well as quotation of a popular song style (tango), can be found in: “Embrace.” The *hemiola* in m. 29–31 emphasizes the “silliness” of the grin. Cipullo gives license for the singer to slide during “grin” in mm. 30–31, which, in combination with the *hemiola* effect, might illustrate being spun around and around and around, to the point of dizziness (Example 7).<sup>46</sup>

Cipullo was attracted to the “musical” nature of the poems of Billy Collins (b. 1941), who has published several volumes of poetry and was the U.S. Poet Laureate from 2001–2003. In a letter to the author, Collins describes his reaction to Cipullo’s settings of his poems: “I happily agreed to allow Mr. Cipullo to set some poems of mine to music. And as always, I added the caveat that the poems had already been set to music . . . by me. In other words, I write with my ear as well as my head and heart, and I am very devoted to making my poems sound right.”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, Cipullo’s setting of “Embrace” includes a deviation from Collins’s original text. Collins’s text reads “screwy grin” (line 9) while Cipullo’s score reads “silly grin” (mm. 28–30). Because Cipullo is extremely attentive to text, this deviation was likely unintentional (Example 7). The Paul Sperry

2

11 *P* *mp* *poco f* *p* *no breath* *non poco*

Soprano  
like a silk shirt but-ton it slow - ly care-ful-ly,

Pno. *p* *mp* *poco f* *p*

17 *poco f* *mp* *p* *playfully* *poco f*


Soprano  
fac - ing you let the frin - ges tick-le your hips

Pno. *colla voce* *poco f* *mp* *p* *playfully* *mp*

21 *allarg. . . . molto* *gradually retake tempo* *no breath*

Soprano  
*mp teneramente* un- til we ride

Pno. *allarg. . . . molto* *gradually retake tempo* *poco f* *p*


Example 6. "Why I Wear My Hair Long," from *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, mm. 11–23, © Tom Cipullo, 2005. Musical extract reproduced by permission. Published by Classical Vocal Reprints. Text by Marilyn Kallet. Text extract reproduced by permission. From *How to Get Heat Without Fire* (Knoxville: New Messenger Books, 1996), 19. (Listen to this recording here )

27 lone, your crossed elbows and

30 sil - ly grin.

33

36 You could be wait - ing for a

Example 7. "Embrace," from *Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House*, mm. 27–38, © Oxford University Press Inc, 2004. Assigned to Oxford University Press 2010. Musical extract reproduced by permission. All rights reserved. Text by Billy Collins. Text extract reproduced by permission from University of Arkansas Press. From *The Apple That Astonished Paris* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 52. (Listen to this recording here )

68

S. *(emphatic)* *p* *f*

life's this beau-ti-ful. Noth-ing else in my life's this beau-ti-ful.

Pno. *f* *p*

*singing emphatically looking at audience*

Flu-id It-al-ian suede.

72

S. *f* *ff*

To keep it I would have to buy

Pno. *f* *f* *poco f*

Flu-id It-al-ian suede.

Example 8. "The Pocketbook," from *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, mm. 68–75 © Tom Cipullo, 2005. Musical extract reproduced by permission. Published by Classical Vocal Reprints. Text by Marilyn Kallet. Text extract reproduced by permission from Marilyn Kallet. From *How to Get Heat Without Fire* (Knoxville: New Messenger Books, 1996), 59. (Listen to this recording here ).

recording, with Cipullo at the piano, uses Collins’s original text: “screwy.”<sup>48</sup>

As he learned from Elie Siegmeister, Cipullo gives his piano parts their own personality and integrity but does not overshadow the singer.<sup>49</sup> In Example 7, the piano establishes a strong identity with the repetitive tango motive played at *fortissimo* during the interlude (mm. 32–36), but decrescendos to *piano* when the voice enters again in m. 37. This allows the piano and the singer to have their own separate profiles in perfect balance.

Another example of balance between pianist and singer is unconventionally displayed in “The Pocketbook,” wherein the pianist actually sings. Soprano Meagan Miller, who premiered the piece in 2000, describes the pianist as “the devil in *Faust*,”<sup>50</sup> trying to lure the singer into a deeper state of shopping bliss. When Cipullo performs this piece, he faces the audience and waggles his eyebrows smugly during his singing. As indicated in the score, the pianist must face the audience directly when singing, but Cipullo is adamant that the singer should not overtly react or turn to look at the pianist.<sup>51</sup> The pianist briefly becomes a dramatic vocal partner, but he does not want actual dramatic partnering to occur (Example 8).

During the pianist’s singing (mm. 69 and 72), Cipullo provides a simple piano part in parallel octaves. However, immediately following the execution of singing in m. 69, the pianist must jump several octaves in both hands and achieve an abrupt dynamic shift from *forte* to *piano*. This “jumping” tactic is the main reason that pianists describe Cipullo’s music as challenging to sight-read.<sup>52</sup> One notes in this example several positional jumps in the piano part with very little time to achieve them.

“The Pocketbook” includes elements of music theater, including spoken sections and over-the-top acting. This is a passionate love song about a *purse*! When well rehearsed by both singer and pianist, this song makes a fantastic encore, stand-alone, pops, or fundraising performance. The more over-the-top the interpretation, the more hilarious the piece becomes. When it is not possible to program all four songs in *How to Get Heat Without Fire*, Cipullo fully approves excerpting and combining “The Pocketbook” with any of his other songs to form a mixed set.

## CONCLUSION

While noting that Tom Cipullo has an extremely distinctive style, it is possible to identify the influences of jazz, music theater, and Romantic-era composers within his songs. Cipullo composes in the Romantic style, committed to lyric melody, tonal harmony (with colorful dissonances), and communication with the audience. His appreciation of the extremes of expression within the human voice and intense reverence for poetry yield songs that rank him among the best in contemporary American art song. Humor and heartache are treated with equal brilliance, a gift for singers who are “thirsty for vocally-friendly music with interesting texts.”<sup>53</sup> In order to realize the songs as written, adhering to every detailed indication in the score, an advanced singer must be partnered with a bold and expressive pianist. However, ambitious student singers of any voice type may explore *Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House* (Oxford), which includes some intermediate level songs, and provides an excellent introduction to the hallmarks of Cipullo’s compositional style.

## APPENDIX A

### Cycles Published for Solo Voice(s) and Piano

*Long Island Songs* (Heyen), T (S), 1992, rev. 2005, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*The Land of Nod* (Gray), T (S), 1994, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House* (Collins), 1996, rev. 2000, Oxford.

*A Visit with Emily* (Dickinson, Higginson), S, T, Bar, piano, 1998, rev. 2001, Oxford.

*How to Get Heat Without Fire* (Kallet), S, 2000, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Climbing: 7 Songs on 8 Poems by African-Americans* (Various), M-S (Bar), 2000, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Late Summer* (Heyen, Dickinson, Kunitz), S (M-S), 2001, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*glances* (A. Tuszyńska), M-S (Bar), 2002, Classical Vocal Reprints.

“A white rose” (Boyle O’Reilly), M-S, 2003, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Drifts and Shadows* (Pastan), Bar, 2005, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Of a Certain Age* (Mueller, Baumel), S, 2007, Oxford.

*America 1968* (Hayden), Bar, 2008, Classical Vocal Reprints.

"I hear America Singing" (Whitman), Bar, 2008, Classical Vocal Reprints.

### Songs Published for Voice(s) and Instrumental Ensemble

*The Husbands* (Carpenter), S (or M-S), Bar, flute, viola, piano, 1993, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*The Ecuadorian Sailors* (Carpenter), M-S, flute, viola, harp, 1994, Classical Vocal Reprints.

*Landscape with Figures* (Carpenter), Boy-Soprano, Bass-Bar, violin, piano, 1997, Classical Vocal Reprints.

## APPENDIX B

### Cipullo Discography

Cipullo, Tom. *After Life*. Music of Remembrance, Stilian Kirov, conductor. Naxos 8.669036, February 5, 2016.

*America 1968*. Andrew Garland, baritone, and Donna Loewy, piano. From *American Portraits*. GPR Records, February 5, 2013.

*Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House*. Paul Sperry, tenor, and Tom Cipullo, piano. From *New American Song Cycles*. Albany Records TROY-654, April 1, 2004.

"Deer in Mist and Almonds" (*The Land of Nod*). Thomas Bogdan, tenor, and Harry Huff, piano. From *For your delight*. CRI 901, originally released 2002, re-released April 21, 2017.

*Drifts and Shadows*. Elem Eley, baritone, and J. J. Penna, piano. Albany Records TROY-1050, September 1, 2008.

*The Ecuadorian Sailors*. Mary Ann Hart, Sheryl Henze, Tina Pelikan, and Margery Fitts. From *Landscape with Figures: Vocal Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1145, November 1, 2009.

*glances*. Naomi Louisa O'Connell, mezzo soprano, and Brent Funderburk, piano. From *The Garden: Songs & Vocal Chamber Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1703, February 1, 2018.

*Glory Denied*. Fort Worth Opera Festival, Tyson Deaton, conductor. Albany Records TROY-1433, August 1, 2013.

*Going*. Monica Harte and Tom Cipullo. From *Landscape with Figures: Vocal Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1145, November 1, 2009.

*How to Get Heat Without Fire*. Melanie Mitrano, soprano, and Tom Cipullo, piano. From *Songs in Transit: An American Expedition*. Capstone Records CPS-8756, April 25, 2006.

*The Husbands*. Naomi Louisa O'Connell, mezzo soprano, Michael Anthony McGee, baritone, Stephanie Kwak, flute, Edward Klorman, viola, and Liza Stepanova, piano. From *The Garden: Songs & Vocal Chamber Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1703, February 1, 2018.

*Insomnia*. Laura Strickling, soprano, Jennifer Beattie, mezzo soprano, Ian McEuen, tenor, Steven Eddy, baritone, and Liza Stepanova, piano. From *The Garden: Songs & Vocal Chamber Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1703, February 1, 2018.

*The Land of Nod*. Paul Sperry and Colette Valentine. From *Landscape with Figures: Vocal Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1145, November 1, 2009.

"The land of Nod," "A death in the family," "Epilogue," "The pocketbook." Meagan Miller, soprano, and Brian Zeger, piano. From *The Marilyn Horne Foundation presents On wings of song. Recital No. 6*. Marilyn Horne Foundation. Live audio recording. New York City: Kosciuszko Foundation, 12 March 2000.

*Landscape with Figures*. Robert Osborne, Benjamin Ungar, Jorge Ávila, and Tom Cipullo. From *Landscape with Figures: Vocal Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1145, November 1, 2009.

*Late Summer*. Marcía Porter, soprano, and Valerie Trujillo, piano. From *Open Thine Heart*. Albany Records TROY-1431, September 1, 2013.

*Long Island Songs*. Kerry Jennings, tenor, and Amanda Asplund Hopson, piano. From *In my Memory: American Songs and Song Cycles*. Centaur Records 3296, January 28, 2014.

*Long Island Songs*. Monica Harte, soprano, and Tom Cipullo, piano. MSR Classics, December 20, 2010.

"Marches." Steven Eddy, baritone, and Liza Stepanova, piano. From *The Garden: Songs & Vocal Chamber Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1703, February 1, 2018.

*Of a Certain Age*. Laura Strickling, soprano, and Liza Stepanova, piano. From *The Garden: Songs & Vocal Chamber Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1703, February 1, 2018.

"Rain." Paul Sperry, Pittsburg New Music Ensemble, and David Stock. From *Landscape with Figures: Vocal Music of Tom Cipullo*. Albany Records TROY-1145, November 1, 2009.

*The Shadows Around the House*. I Cantori di New York, Mark Shapiro, conductor. From *Echoes and Shadows: Romantic Choral Music of Twentieth Century American Composers*. Pro Gloria Musicae PGM-401, October 7, 1997.

*Secrets*. The Mirror Visions Ensemble. Albany Records TROY-720, December 28, 2004.

*Sparkler*. Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra, Jerzy Swoboda, conductor. From *MMC Orchestra Miniatures: Volume 1*. MMC Records MMC2022, January 14, 1997.

*Two Meditations and Water Lilies*. Jeanne Golan, piano. From *American Handstands*. Albany Records TROY-1154, November 1, 2009.

*A Visit with Emily*. Mirror Visions Ensemble. From *Mirror Visions Ensemble: The Three-Paneled Mirror*. Centaur Records 3381/2, May 12, 2015.

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