

SHADOW AND LIGHT

AN ALZHEIMER'S JOURNEY
by Joan Szymko

Saturday, April 12, 2025 at 7:00 pm
Sunday, April 13, 2025 at 2:30 pm
Soreng Theater, Hult Center for the Performing Arts
Arwen Myers, soprano Ágnes Vojtkó, mezzo-soprano
Brendan Tuohy, tenor Lexy Wellman, speaker
Eugene Vocal Arts
Eugene Concert Orchestra
Diane Retallack, Conductor

PROGRAM

PART I

THE CLOUD OF FORGETTING

No.	VOICING	LYRICIST	
1.	I Felt a Cleaving	Ágnes Vojtkó, Chorus	Emily Dickinson
2.	Tangled Tango	Ágnes Vojtkó, Chorus	Joan Szymko
3.	Memory Aids	Ágnes Vojtkó	Gail White
4.	This is What We Fear	Ágnes Vojtkó, Lexy Wellman, Doug Worley, Chorus	Joan Szymko, Philip Larkin

PART II

UNCONTAINABLE NIGHT

5.	By Night	Arwen Myers	Song of Solomon
6.	Sundowning	Brendan Tuohy, Arwen Myers, Chorus	Sean Nevin
7.	A Choice	Lexy Wellman, Chorus	Sarah Leavitt
8.	Lead Kindly Light	Arwen Myers, Brendan Tuohy, Ágnes Vojtkó, Chorus	John Henry Newman
9.	Take Me Home	Lexy Wellman, Ágnes Vojtkó, Chorus voices - Amanda Hammond, Christina Sjöblom, Denita Strietelmeier	Joan Szymko
10.	In This Uncontainable Night	Chorus	R.M. Rilke, A. Barrows, Joanna Macy

PART III

I AND THOU

11.	Regret	Brendan Tuohy, Chorus	Sharon Munson
12.	Why Am I in this Place?	Ágnes Vojtkó	Holle Abee
13.	Remembering	Chorus (treble)	Joan Szymko
14.	Hold Hands	Chorus	Forrest Hainline
15.	I Sing to You	Chorus	Linda Austin, Jimmie Davis
16.	Love Bears All Things	Arwen Myers, Brendan Tuohy, Ágnes Vojtkó, Chorus	1 Corinthians

SHADOW AND LIGHT

LIBRETTO CONCEIVED AND DEVELOPED BY JOAN SZYMKO

*Loss and possession, death and life are one,
There falls no shadow where there shines no sun.*

- Hillaire Belloc

PART I: THE CLOUD OF FORGETTING

No. 1 I Felt A Cleaving

I felt a cleaving in my mind
As if my brain had split;
I tried to match it, seam by seam,
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before,
But sequence unravelled out of reach
Like balls upon a floor.

No. 2 Tangled Tango

I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THE NAMES OF THREE OBJECTS:
SHOE, TREE, CAR —
CAN YOU REPEAT THOSE THREE WORDS?

SHH shoe... TRAIN... I can't remember the other one

OKAY THEN, PLEASE REPEAT THIS PHRASE:
NO IFS ANDS OR BUTS

No— no ifs.... no... nothing fits...

OKAY, CAN YOU PLEASE SPELL THE WORD,
"WORLD" BACKWARD?

D... D R — O — W...
My world is backward, upside down and inside out
My world is backward, upside down and turned about
No ifs ands or buts about it

My words and thoughts get tangled deep inside my
brain
I worry all the time about my lapses and I feel ashamed
No ifs ands or buts about it
No ifs ands or buts about it

And just the other day I lost my way on my way home
My heart beat raced as panic swept into my very bones
No ifs ands or buts about it — No ifs ands or buts about
it
My world is backward, upside down and inside out

YOU HAVE DEMENTIA, PROBABLY OF THE ALZHEIMERS
TYPE.

No. 3 Memory Aids

This is the paper that gives the date.
This is the kettle to boil the water.
This is a china breakfast plate.
This is a note to call my daughter.

This is coffee, I drink it black.
This is toast, I eat it plain.
These are the thoughts I keep on track
To hurry them through my daughter's brain.

These are things I need to say
To sound as usual on the phone.
The longer I keep my child at bay,
The longer my life is still my own.

No. 4 This is What We Fear

THOSE THREE WORDS I GAVE YOU EARLIER,
CAN YOU RECALL THEM?

SHAME, STIGMA, FEAR

*I'm afraid of being dependent—of being a burden.
I'm afraid of losing control; of being out of control.
I'm afraid of being abandoned, a burden—pitied.
I'm afraid of life without memories, without meaning.
I have reached a point of where I know I don't know—
I just don't know when I don't know
The living unknown frightens me more than death*

This is what we fear
No sight, no sound
No taste or touch or smell
Nothing to think with
Nothing to love or link with.

PART II UNCONTAINABLE NIGHT

No. 5 By Night

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him but I found him not

*Tonight, I just want to look into your eyes and see
sixty beautiful years of my life looking back at me.*

No. 6 Sundowning

1.
This white.
That yellow. This blue.
No matter what color pill
I crush into the applesauce, this blue bowl,
to feed you and myself, one
full night of sleep, one night
without this wandering. That weeping.
Without the long rattle of doors.

2.
Each evening that same urge to slip
this lumbering form, to step from its wreckage as from a robe
dropped to the floor.
Each evening the struggle to ditch the feeble disguise
of body, this skin, this jerry-built cage
of bones that holds you, like the rescued starling, disconsolate
and thrashing against its cardboard box.

3.
Each evening that blue persistence,
that voice, telling you to keep an appointment,
to catch the bus, to report to a job
lost fifteen years ago, to keep your word,
to collect the debt, to make things square.
Each evening the struggle to take off your coat, to sit,
rest, lie back, to be still.
To sleep one night without this broken clock
that is you, still chiming
in this still-blue hour of evening,
telling you, you are late, overdue.
You are expected somewhere important hours ago.
Years. And you rise, rise
like bad clockwork. Like I have forgotten.
Like I don't understand.
Like I never understand
the living-room drapes are engulfed in flame.
Like the whole damn house of mind
is burning down around you, and the walls
are all swallowing their doors.

No. 7 A Choice

I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THREE MORE WORDS TO REMEMBER:
HEARTBREAK, STRESS, RESILIENCE

There are moments when you have a choice:
fall apart, or take a deep breath and
just do what needs to be done.
Feel a new loneliness.
And a new strength.

No. 8 Lead, Kindly Light

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

No.9 Take Me Home

*I want to go home, my friend's mother says over and over,
even though this is the house she's lived in for fifty-some years.*

Are we going home?
Are we going home now?
Take me home.
I want to go home.
When are we going home?

No.10 In This Uncontainable Night

Quiet friend who has come so far
Feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
And you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

PART III: I AND THOU

No.11 Regret

She refuses to get out of the Honda,
grabs the steering wheel from the passenger side
hangs on, knuckles white—

kicks at her daughter
waiting patiently by the open car door,
spits at the young aide assigned to help,
pinches the arm of the duty nurse reaching in.

On this bitterly cold morning in March
she hisses words never before out of her mouth
digs in her heels, stays put.

understands in some corner of her brain
if she gets out of the car
and walks through the large double doors
she will never leave.

No.12 Why Am I In this Place?

You come to see me every day
(Why am I in this place?)
I sometimes can't recall your name
But I do recall the face.

I know you're someone who I love –
My daughter, or maybe my mother.
And that man with you –
Is that your husband or your brother?

Your husband? Are you old enough?
He seems very nice.
(Help me to remember –
Wasn't I married —twice?)

REFRAIN:

Why am I here, and what did I do
To deserve this wretched end?
I'm surrounded by many strangers.
(Or maybe they're my friends?)

My room is cozy and comfortable –
I must admit it's nice.
(But someone's stealing my underwear!
Really! It's happened twice!)

They really treat me well here,
I'm as happy as can be.
(See that man in the red sweater?
He wants to marry me.)

Did I ever have a husband?
Did I ever have a home?
Did I have a family,
Or did I live alone?

(no. 12 cont.)

Oh, I remember my husband now,
But I can't recall his face.
Where is he? Does he come to visit?
Did HE put me in this place?

REFRAIN: Why am I here...

You need to tell the attendant
This door is always locked.
I can't go out when I want to.
I've knocked and knocked and knocked.

No.13 Remembering

Do you know lonely?
Sit strapped into a chair
No choice, keep breathing
Do you know lonely?
Words are spoke' as if I'm not there
Here inside I'm alive
Still feeling beauty; kind eyes, warm smile
Please, please, please
I'm still here inside.
Wonder if you see inside
Lonely lonely me remembering beauty

No.14 Hold Hands

I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THREE NEW WORDS:
BE — HERE — NOW

You know you love me
but you can't recall my name
so we just hold hands

No.15 I Sing to You

I sing to you
songs you taught me when I was small
not knowing the words would someday hold
more meaning than we could ever imagine
I sing, I sing to you— You are my sunshine,
my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey
You'll never know dear, how much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away

No.16 Love Bears All Things

Love bears all things
believes all things
hopes all things
endures all things
love never fails