

Quilt Songs

All quilts made by Kay McCarthy
photographed by Mike Krivit



Midnight Garden (2004)

27" x 56"

Composer: Alice Parker, *this is the garden*

These beautiful flowers were appliquéd by hand. The black background makes them light up. Another design by Linda Hohag.



Garden Glory (2003)

62" x 62"

Composer: Libby Larsen,
The Children's Orchard

The only colors in this quilt are green, purple, red, and gold, but many different fabrics were used. The appliqué was done by hand over a two-year period.



Starburst (2003)

62" x 62"

Composer: Gabriela Lena Frank,
Sun Quilt

A technique called "paper piecing" was used in this quilt. Each piece is cut and sewn individually onto a separate diamond-shaped paper pattern. There are over 600 different fabrics and 1400 pieces. It hangs over the fireplace in our guest cabin on the North Shore.



Nearly Insane (2013)

41" x 50"

Composer: Ysaÿe Barnwell, *Nearly Insane*

These 32 different sampler blocks, some of them with very tiny pieces, are sewn together in a diagonal setting. Was I nearly insane to make this quilt?



Moon River (1993)

56" x 60"

Composer: Carol Barnett, *Most Holy Night*

Moonlight shines vertically through dark water in an illusion created through the repeated use of a single block called Northwind. From the collection of Bob and Ilah Sutphen.

Quilt Songs

Quilt Songs was commissioned in 2015 for VocalEssence by Mike McCarthy to honor his wife, Kay. Each composer selected a quilt made by Kay and poem inspired by the quilt. The five quilts chosen for *Quilt Songs* all include bold color and design. The techniques range from intricate piecing to graceful, curved appliqué.

A native of Minnesota, **Kay McCarthy** grew up in St. Louis Park and attended Macalester College. She began quilting in the late '80s after careers as a lawyer and a high school teacher of German, algebra, and geometry. Quilting became a passion, and since that time she has made more than 300 quilts, which have been exhibited both locally and nationally. Kay and her husband Mike live in Excelsior, Minnesota. They enjoy traveling and spending time with their children and grandchildren.

Alice Parker: this is the garden

Quilt: Midnight Garden

Alice Parker (b. 1925) is an American composer, arranger, and conductor, and the primary arranger for the Robert Shaw Chorale for 20 years. Although many of her arrangements were jointly credited with Shaw, it is widely understood that Parker was the dominant artist. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Parker attended Smith College and Conservatory of Music at The Juilliard School. She has composed over 500 pieces of music, including operas, song cycles, cantatas, choral suites, and anthems. She served on the Board of Directors of Chorus America, and was their first Director Laureate. She appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1947. In addition to her prolific composition career, Parker raised five children as a single parent after her husband died unexpectedly in 1976. Among her many awards, Parker has received the Distinguished Composer of the Year in 2000 by the American Guild of Organists, the 2014 Brock Commission from the American Choral Directors Association, the Harvard Glee Club Foundation Medal in 2015, six honorary doctorates, and the Smith College Medal. To celebrate Parker's 90th birthday in 2015, choral groups worldwide, including Sacred and Profane, posted performances of her work on YouTube as part of a project called "Alice Is 90." Sacred and Profane performed her arrangement of the traditional American tune *Wondrous Love* in our March 2019 concert and we are delighted to present her music a second time this season.

Composer's Note:

When I was in college I acquired a complete collection of e.e. cummings, and he has been one of my favorite poets ever since. And in all those years since I have been amassing folders full of poems that have caught my ear — this one, copied out, among them. Every time I receive a commission for a new work, I page through this collection, pausing at those which leap off the page. So when I saw that dark quilt, with its shadowy colors and air of mystery, this poem came instantly to mind. When I sat down to work at it, the music simply flowed — because I had known and loved the poem for so long. It was all waiting to come out — and the quilt enabled that transformation into sound. It wrote itself.

Text: e.e. cummings

this is the garden: colours come and go,
frail azures fluttering from night's outer wing
strong silent greens serenely lingering,
absolute lights like baths of golden snow.

This is the garden: pursed lips do blow
upon cool flutes within wide glooms, and sing
(of harps celestial to the quivering string)
invisible faces hauntingly and slow.

This is the garden. Time shall surely reap
and on Death's blade lie many a flower curled,
in other lands where other songs be sung;
yet stand They here enraptured, as among
the slow deep trees perpetual of sleep
some silver-fingered fountain steals the world.

Libby Larsen: The Children's Orchard

Quilt: Garden Glory

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) is one of America's most performed living composers. She has created a catalogue of over 400 works spanning virtually every genre from intimate vocal and chamber music to massive orchestral works and over twelve operas. Grammy-Award winning and widely recorded, including over fifty CDs of her work, she is highly

sought after for commissions and premieres by major artists, ensembles, and orchestras around the world, and has established a permanent place for her works in the concert repertory. As a vigorous, articulate advocate for the music and musicians of our time, in 1973 Larsen co-founded the Minnesota Composers Forum, now the American Composer's Forum, which has become an invaluable aid for composers in a transitional time for American arts. A former holder of the Papamarkou Chair at John W. Kluge Center of the Library of Congress, Larsen has also held residencies with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Charlotte Symphony, and the Colorado Symphony.

Composer's Note:

To me, Kay McCarthy's Garden Glory quilt exudes joy, generosity, and wisdom. Her vibrant, colorful flowers float on a burnished, warm background. The quilt reminded me of one of my favorite poems, *The Children's Orchard*, by one of my favorite poets, Muriel Rukeyser. "In the full sun. In the fruitfall season" the poem begins, as the poet muses on two "bare-ribbed boys golden and shouting" collecting plums. Like Kay's flowers, captured in color, these boys, captured in poetry exist in the same, ancient cycle of life.

Text: Muriel Rukeyser

In the full sun. In the fruitfall season.
Against my knees the earth and the bucket, and the soft blue prunes
echoing red echoing purple echoing in the silver bucket
sun, and over the flames of earth the sun flies down.

Over my head the little trees tremble alive in their black branches
and bare-ribbed boys golden and shouting stoop here to gather the blue,
the wild-red, the dark. Colors of ripeness in the fruitfall season.
I will remember the last light on the lowest branch.

Will see these trees as they were in spring, wild black rooted in light,
root-deep in noon, the piercing yellow noon of mustard-blossom.
Sun breathing on us the scent of heat, richness of air where my hands know
blue, full summer, strong sun. I tell you harvest.

Gabriela Lena Frank: Sun Quilt

Quilt: Starburst

The composer and pianist **Gabriela Lena Frank** (b. 1972) was included in the Washington Post's list of the thirty-five most significant women composers in history in August 2017. Born in Berkeley, California to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank explores her multicultural heritage in her compositions. Inspired by the works of Béla Bartók and Alberto Ginastera, Frank is something of a musical anthropologist. She has traveled extensively throughout South America and her pieces often reflect and refract her studies of Latin American folklore, incorporating poetry, mythology, and native musical styles into a Western classical framework that is uniquely her own.

Composer's Note

Quilts are frequently wordless yet communicate abundantly in tradition and beauty. In *Sun Quilt* for SATB choir, rising and falling lines of wordless singing/humming is used to convey the mesmerizing pieces of fabric that interweave together in the most skilled quilter's hands. When words do come into play in this piece, they draw on the poetry of Laura Coates Reed, a 19th-century American poetess whose work is featured in historical anthologies of women's poetry. Sensitive to the issues and artistic expressions of women of the day, her own sweet words equate the artistry of quilting to the artistry of nature.

Text: Laura Coates Reed

The sun has such a pretty quilt
Each night he goes to bed,
It's made of lavender and gold,
With great long stripes of red.
And bordered by the softest tints
Of all the shades of gray.
It's put together by the sky,
And quilted by the day.

Ysaje Barnwell: Nearly Insane

Quilt: Nearly Insane

Ysaje Barnwell (b. 1946) was a founding member of the African American a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock from 1979 to 2013. She is a prolific composer, writing many of the group's songs, as well as being commissioned to create music for dance, choral, film, and stage productions. She is also known for being a female bass. Barnwell conducts music workshops internationally, including "Building a Vocal Community: Singing in the African American Tradition." In 1977, she founded the Jubilee Singers, a choir at All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington, DC. Barnwell earned bachelor's and master's degrees (1967 and 1968) in speech pathology from State University of New York at Geneseo, and a PhD (1975) in speech pathology from the University of Pittsburgh. In 1981, she also earned a Master of Science in Public Health from Howard University.

Composer's Note:

At the end of her description of the quilt titled "Nearly Insane," Kay McCarthy asks "Was I nearly insane to make this quilt?" This question really resonated with me musically, but I couldn't put the pieces together as a lyric. I asked poet Mary Moore Easter if she could work on a text, and what she created worked perfectly for me. Her phrases became pieces/patterns of the quilt that I could weave, overlap and stitch together musically. This 'piece' may drive you nearly insane unless you simply listen to the whole in the way that you might first see the quilt at a distance.

Text: Mary Moore Easter

Jumbled diamonds halved and quartered
turned and sorted, smallest angles
all the same.
Does this cutting, folding, stitching,
piecing, pairing, splice of planes
drive me crazy or keep me sane?
Count the sunbursts, crosses, stars.
Count the prisms, ladders, bars. Lock
their union in your eye.

Does this cutting, folding, stitching,
piecing, pairing, splice of planes
drive you crazy or keep you sane?
Thirty-two panels, thirty-two worlds
thirty-two ways to measure our days
our days, our days.
Every diamond bright and cut
every point aligned.
Peace in pattern's harmony
the chaos of the world contained
made shining in my hands
where peace has kept me sane.

Carol Barnett: Most Holy Night
Quilt: Moon River

Carol Barnett (b. 1949) composes for a wide variety of mediums, both for traditional instrumentation and for cross-pollinations such as a mass accompanied by a bluegrass band or a duet for steel pan and organ. A resident of Minnesota since 1970, her work has been funded by multiple regional and national organizations and widely published. Barnett is a charter member of the American Composers Forum and a graduate of the University of Minnesota. She was composer in residence with the Dale Warland Singers from 1992 to 2001, and taught composition at Augsburg College from 2000 to 2015.

Composer's Note:

Myriad tiny triangles assembled into Northwind blocks to make a quilt; dark grey, midnight blue, a bit of lilac, and russet shot through with white: Moon River. Mysterious guardian of sleep, transformer of the day's complaints, conjurer of dreams, The Night embraces us with velvet wings. Inspired by such loveliness from quilter and poet, who can resist responding: *Most Holy Night*.

Text: Hilaire Belloc

Most Holy Night, that still dost keep
The keys of all the doors of sleep,
To me when my tired eyelids close
Give thou repose.

And let the far lament of them
That chaunt the dead day's requiem
Make in my ears, who wakeful lie,
Soft lullaby.

Let them that guard the sacred moon
By my bedside their memories croon;
So shall I have strange dreams and blest
In my brief rest.

Fold your great wings about my face,
Hide day-dawn from my resting-place,
And cheat me with your false delight,
Most Holy Night.

