

Libby Larsen

MACHINE HEAD: *TED BURKE POEMS*

Baritone Voice and Piano

Commissioned by Will Liverman and Aspen Music Festival and School

Robert Spano, Music Director

Premier Performance, August 16, 2022, Aspen, Colorado

Will Liverman, Baritone, Jonathan King, Piano

KENWOOD EDITIONS

LIBBY LARSEN

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*COMMISSIONED BY WILL LIVERMAN AND THE ASPEN MUSIC FESTIVAL AND SCHOOL,
ROBERT SPANO, MUSIC DIRECTOR
PREMIER PERFORMANCE, AUGUST 16, 2022, ASPEN, COLORADO,
WILL LIVERMAN, BARITONE, JONATHAN KING, PIANO*

1. REXALL
2. MY FATHER INTERCEPTS MY TRIP TO ANOTHER PLANET
3. MACHINE HEAD

1. REXALL

A man in the front seat of a car
parked in front of
a Rexall drugs
runs his thumb
under his suspenders
and lets the elastic snap
against his pinstripe shirt.

His son cries
that last gasps
of a crying jag
that is only for show,
the boy's attempt
to keep alive
the mania and
rage
that made him seem
powerful in a world
where he only came up
to other people's waist lines.

The father lights
an Old Gold,
turns up the car radio,
smiling as he soundlessly
mouths the words
Patti Page is singing,
dancing in Tennessee
has never seemed so distant
and strange
an idea to him,

and then he cracks the window,
thinking of his wife
who he imagines going up and down
the aisles
reading the labels of every cold medicine
she sees,

He thinks, man this is a great tasting
cigarette,

"All I want is a comic book" says
the son,...

The boy sniffles, Dad
crushes the cigarette in the ash tray,
looking off into the distance and
noticing the color of leaves in the trees,
knowing the days
seem to get shorter
as his work hours get longer,

He reaches over and messes his son's hair,

"Not every drug store sells comic books"
he says dreamily,
"not everything is funny or for fun.
Sometimes you just have to wait..."

- From *sitting in the dark*, pg.4-6.
Old House Press, San Diego, CA,
2002

2. My Father Intercepts My Trip to Another Planet

Deep in the spaces of the garage behind all the bedsprings
And stacks of Life Magazines is the fort I made with a cardboard
crate our refrigerator came in.

Nothing but people's ankles can be seen through the
hole I cut and carved out in the side of the box with a dull
pocket knife, every man was in high pants, pleats up to the waist,
every woman wore plaid skirts, carrying drinks, school books,
other kinds of mysteries.

I closed my eyes and there were the controls to this
ever-evolving ship, race car, airplane, fast train, jet, rocket to the
stars, back in time for Flintstones, before twilight became
darkness and the shade of the trees became a black that wrapped
existence with the whispers of dead things rustling through the
homes of their birth, looking for something that is not in their
hands, contained in their shroud.

I open my eyes again and find myself floating up the
stairs to my room, in my father's arms, who tells me those
adventures in space are tiring for cosmonauts and astronauts
and Argonauts, no matter he says,

My older brother has his head in his palm while he
watches TV, Mom is running water in the kitchen sink,

Dad lays me in bed and pulls up the covers, he sings to
me about why he loves Paris, in the Springtime, when it's
raining.

3. Machine Head

The hippest machines
of our day
does not think
about dealing
with the likes of us
once some one invents
batteries that
never run down,

free from plugs
and the walls of
homes that keep them
predictable and safe
for the family to view,
the hippest machines of the day
will never define time
as something
you had to do “something” with,
something you had to
“kill”
or “spend”
or
“while away”
until the affliction of waiting is done with
and time is
“filled” again, as if it were
a can or a box hungry for
stuff that machines manufacture
or make obsolete.

Machines of gratuitous good looks
just sit wherever they
happen to be
and look pretty as they
purr, utility and logic of design
disguised by gleam
that addresses
a flesh and blood need
for a pretty face
that means nothing
and stands for less.

All my machines are plugged in, of course,
and they reek of English Leather,
or they contemplate major leaps in
technology,
invention before need arises,
genius in
bathroom stalls,
machines that go on and on
and do everything
under the sun
that never seemed to break down before
until some one built a machine, a
goddamned
machine.

The hippest machines
on my block
solicit my opinions
from no-good-reason-to-know
because of a yearning
in their programming
to have some
bytes removed and munched on,
chewed over, mulled and gnawed
like a doubt (*that tags at the end of
all the best wishes you can muster at the end of
the letters you'd write
if you remembered to,
something like
what comes after
"why"?*)

All the bad wiring in the world circles around my
heart when I realize you're still not here, that I'm
talking to
answering machines that tell me everything
except where you are and why we aren't in love
like we used to be.

My machines know all my sounds,
the rhythm of bad habits
they are powerless to match.

- From *sitting in the dark*, pg. 17-19. Old House Press, San Diego, CA, 2002
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REXALL

TED BURKE

LIBBY LARSEN, 2022

Groove ♩ = c. 80-88, smokey blues**

mf

LH groove throughout

4

in the distance

8 *patient vent up*

A man in the front seat of a car

* *The Tennessee Waltz*, Redd Stewart/Pee Wee King
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCvfy6Huyc>

* [youtube.com/watch?v=rRexOLHuRyA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRexOLHuRyA) (Muddy Waters)
[youtube.com/watch?v=WSVqqWUd5dU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSVqqWUd5dU) (Howlin' Wolf)

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11

— parked— in front of a Rex-all—

(shop bell)

p sub. *mf*

14

drugs runs his thumb— un-der his sus - pend - ers— and lets the e -

blue

las - tic— sna - p a-gainst his pin - stripe shirt.

p

20

His son

ff peevish, tantrum

f *mf sub.* *p*

23

cries the last gasps of a

f *mf* *mp sub.*

25

with grit, experience, parental perseverance

cry - ing jag that is on - ly for show, the boy's at - tempt to keep a -

gasp. (*mp*) *p cresc.*

28

live the ma-ni - a and rage

f

p sub. cresc.

mf sub.

30

that made him seem pow-er-ful in a world where he on-ly came

f

p sub. (non cresc.)

33

up to oth-er peo-ple's waist lines.

rit. $\text{♩} = 112, \text{subito}$

p *mf*

(Tennessee Waltz)

Tempo primo, freely

37

The fath-er — lights an

♩ = 112, subito

Tempo primo, freely

42 *

Old Gold, turns up — the

♩ = 112, subito

46

car ra - di - o smil - ing as he si - lent - ly mouths the words Pat - ti Page is

* Old Gold commercial, youtube.com/watch?v=8ZRzBGpLsB8

50 rit.

Tempo primo (♩ = c. 80-88)

50 *rit.* *wistful*
 sing - ing, ———— Danc-ing in Ten-nes-see has
in the distance
p

55

rall. speed up gradually to m. 60
enigmatic

55 *enigmatic*
 nev - er seemed so dis - tant... and then he cracks the win-dow,—
mf sub.

59

accel. ♩ = 112

59 *accel.* ♩ = 112
 think-ing of his wife who he i - mag-ines— go-ing up and down the aisles
p cresc. *mf*

64 rit.

read - ing the la - bels of ev - er - y cold med - i - cine she sees,

68 Tempo primo

(spoken)

He thinks, man this is a great tasting cigarette,

mf *mf*

LH groove to the end

71

(spoken in the son's voice) in the father's voice

All I want is a comic book, says the son,

f *tantrum* *(mf)*

74

The boy sniff - fles,

mp *p* *mf*

sniffle

77

Dad crush - es the cig - ar - ette in the ash - tray,

mf *p sub.*

80

resigned, but still finding his moments...

look - ing off in - to the dis - tance and no - tic - ing the col - ors of

mf sub. *p*

92

dream-i - ly, "not ev-'ry-thing is fun-ny or for fun.

p *mf sub.* *mf*

95

Some - times _____ you just have to wait." _____

p

rit. to end

98

pp

MY FATHER INTERCEPTS MY TRIP TO ANOTHER PLANET

TED BURKE

LIBBY LARSEN, 2022

Slowly

unbound from gravity or progression

pp

7

poco

14

mp

pp

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Suspended in time and space (pulse = c. 76)

21

(*pp*) *poco a poco cresc.*

27 *cherished*

Deep _____ in the spac-es of the ga - rage _____ be - hind all the

8va ossia

p *mp sub.* *poco*

33 *8va ossia*

bed-springs and stacks of Life Mag - a - zines is the fort I made with the

poco

* <https://www.lkife.com>** <https://www.instructables.com/Doctor-Who-Simple-Fridge-Box-Tardis>

Unbound, remain at tempo

37

card-board crate our re - frig-er-a-tor came in.

p *mf sub.*

Suspended

42

Noth-ing but peo-ple's an-kles— can be

p *boyhood curiosity* *lightly*

47

seen through the hole I cut in the box with a dull pock-et knife,—

lightly *poco* *lightly* *p sub.*

loco

Push ahead, excited to m. 56

50

ev-'ry man was in high pants, pleats up to the

mf sub.

mp

Svb

54

wonderously, innocent but titilated

waist, ev-'ry wo-man wore plaid skirts, car-ry-ing drinks,

mf

Sva

57

slowly, wide-eyed

freely

school books, oth-er kinds of mys-ter-ies.

p

pp

(Sva)

pulse = c. 76

62

I closed my eyes _____ and

mf *mp* *smoothly*

65

there were the con - trols to this

4 3 2 1 3 2 4 3 2 1 3 2

6

67

ev - er e - volv - ing ship,

4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1

6 6

pp sub.

faster

accel.

69

Musical score for measures 69-70. The system includes a bass line, a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp sub.*. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

71

like a kid, totally into it *ff*

rit.

pp ff Grandly

proudly

Musical score for measures 71-72. The system includes a vocal line with lyrics "TZCHOO R A C E C A R", a grand staff, and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *ppp*, *ff*, and *mp*. A "Doppler effect" is indicated for the piano accompaniment. The time signature is 3/4.

73

pulse = c. 83

imagining himself with wings . . .

air

Musical score for measures 73-74. The system includes a vocal line with lyrics "air", a grand staff, and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *lightly*. The time signature is 3/4.

75 *p.*

plane,

skim

lightly tr.

77 *mf*

fast train,

p *f* *mp sub.*

79 *f* *mp cresc.*

jet, rock - et to the

molto *p sub. cresc.*

rit.

81 $\sharp\circ$

stars, back in time for

f *p sub.* *smoothly*

84

growing troubled

Flint-stones, be-fore twi - light be-came dark - ness and the

87

shade of trees be-came a black that

mf

* https://cartoons.fandom.com/wiki/The_Flintstones

89

wrapped ex - ist - ence with the whis - pers of dead things

pp sub.

91

rust-ling through the homes of their birth, look-ing for some-thing that is

93

not in their hands, con - tained in their shroud.

p

107 *warmly*

— who tells me those ad-ven-tures in space are tir-ing for cos-mo-nauts and as-tro-nauts and

110 *** *lovingly*

Ar - go-nauts, no mat-ter he says, My old - er broth - er has his

113 ****

head in his hands while he watch-es T V, Mom—— is run-ning wa-ter in the sink,

* <https://pixabay.com/images/search/cosmonaut/>

** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astronaut>

*** <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Argonaut-Greek-mythology>

**** <https://www.istockphoto.com/photos/kids-watching-tv-vintage>

116

Dad lays me on the bed and pulls up the covers, — he

mf

120

drowsy, dropping into sleep

sings to me a-bout why he loves Par-is, in the spring-time, — when it's

125

rit.

rain - ing.

dim. to the end

ppp

MACHINE HEAD

TED BURKE

LIBBY LARSEN, 2022

♩ = 80

hard driving boogie

p

3

The hip - pest mach - ines of our day —

p *mf*

6

does not think a-bout

f

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8

deal - ing with the likes of us once

p *p sub.*

10

some - one in - vents bat - ter - ies that nev - er run

p *p sub.*

12

down,

f *f sub.*

14 *f* free from

p sub.

16 *mf* plugs and the walls of

f *p* *mf*

18 homes that keep them pre - dict - a - ble and

freely, slower

20

safe for the fam - 'ly to view, the hip - pest ma - chines of the

pp

a tempo

23

day will nev - er de - fine time as

murmur, molto legato

mp

pedal liberally m. 23-m.

una corda

26

some - thing you had to do "some - thing" with, some - thing you had to

pp

p

29

"kill" or "spend" or "while" a -

mf

mp

32

way" un - til the af - flic - tion of

p

34

wait - ing is done with and time is "filled" a -

rit.

♩ = 72+-, overly grand

37

gain ————— Ma -

mf *f* *f*

40

chines of gra-tu-i-tous good-looks just sit where-ev-er they hap-pen to

mf

43

be and look pret-ty as they purr-r-r-r... (improvise purring)

p

free of time

parlando

46

u - til - i - ty and log - ic of de - sign — dis-guised by

48

gleam — that ad - dress - es a flesh and blood need for a pret - ty face that means

accel. -----

51

noth - ing and stands for e - ven less. —

♩ = 80

54

All my ma-chines are plugged in, _____ of course, and they

p sub.
LH detached

mf *p*

56

reek _____ of Eng - lish Leath-er, _____ or they

mf *RH detached* *p sub.*

58

con - tem-plate ma - jor _____ leaps _____ in tech - nol - o - gy, _____

f

*English Leather commercial - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAOpPXwYkrs>

61

in-ven-tion be-fore need a-ris-es, ge - nius in bath-room stalls,

mf *mf*

molto rit. *a tempo* (♩ = 80)

65

ma-chine that goes on_____ and on_____ and do

mp *mf*

68

ev - 'ry-thing un - der the sun_____ that nev-er_____ seemed to break down be-fore

p

like calibrated gears

71

un - til some-one built a ma-chine, _____ a

p

74

god - damned ma - chine. The

f

ossia ♩ *freely*

77

hip-pest ma-chines on my block— so-lic-it my o-pin-ions for no-good-rea-son-to-

a tempo

mf

81

know _____ be - cause of a yearn - ing in _____ their

83

pro - gram - ming _____ to have _____ some bytes re - moved and

p sub.

85

munched on, _____ chewed o - ver,

pp *mf*

87

mulled— and gnawed— like a doubt...

89

All the bad— wir - ing in the

p *mf*

91

world cir - cles round my

p *mf sub.*

108

rhy - thm of bad hab - its

110

they are pow - er - less to match.

112

ff