

# **Three Love Songs by Anya Pearson**

**Commissioned by Portland Center Stage  
May 2020**

**An ode,  
a dirge,  
a lament,  
an operatic examination  
of quarantine life**

**To be performed  
as a counter to silence**

**for one or many voices**

**(no formal singing required)**

**but please, please,  
*do* have the dance party**

**and please, please,  
please play a 90's classic  
and lemme see a little cabbage patch  
or gimme a little butterfly  
and record it for me**

## Track One: A Love Song for Survivors

### What it's Like at Night

The night lingers.  
It is thick....  
like  
like.....smoke.....?  
molasses...?  
Like a honey haze.  
Humid.

The silence is humid. Thick  
and potent  
daring you to call out into it.

Will you answer its call?

Does it mean you harm?  
Or is the silence an invitation?

You find ways to ritualize sound.  
To make sound a counter attack to the silence.  
To make sound an act of aggression  
against what lurks in the stillness.

To remind yourself that you have a voice.

There are those of us who have been taught to fear the silence.

There are those of us who have been taught to fear the sound of speaking.  
Of our own speaking voice.

There is no proper way to explain this  
to someone who has always slept soundly.

To lace, a true knowing, into words spoken  
to someone one who has never been taught true fear.

In some houses, children are taught that *lack/fear/loss/less*  
is their birthright  
The way some children are taught that privilege is theirs.

There is no easy reply to:  
why do you have trouble sleeping?

Have you tried melatonin  
have you tried warm milk  
have you tried meditation  
have you tried lavender  
have you tried....  
have you tried....  
have you tried....  
have you tried....

words become nonsense.  
Language fails. It loses meaning.  
People steal its value.  
By co-opting words.  
By co-opting culture.  
By falsifying true meanings.  
By cheapening words with their actions.

Language fails because some atrocities are indescribable. They are born of blood  
fascia wounds cruelty.  
They are of the body in relation to other bodies.  
Language is born of the mind.

the way you say a word over and over  
until it becomes absurd.

You, in your sleep-deprived stillness, (paralysis),  
in the stooped shoulders,  
the skin stretched taught against a weary set of bones  
the muscles seizing,  
leaping across your back  
in a concerto of pain.  
the tears you stream  
down your face

The blue tint of the screen,  
the show you are not watching,  
a plot you cannot follow.

the awkward filling of silence  
with grasps at joy.  
a fleeting moment of joy floats by.  
A memory, a faint thought of the before?  
laughing in the mania of not-sleep  
of exhaustion/excision/exhilaration/exaltation/

at the word dubious  
(this is dubious)  
how if you say it dub-e-ous-lee  
ten times in a row  
trying on a variety of voices  
to add sound and texture to the room  
it alters the tonal vibrations of this room on this night  
and assaults the very silence that menaces you

1. Dubious
2. Dubious!
3. Dubious...
4. Doooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
5. (with a British accent – RP, indubitably) Dubious
6. (with a Jamaican accent) Dubious
7. (with a South African accent) Dubious
8. DUBIOUS
9. DUUUUUbious
10. Dubious?
11. Dubious??!!

as if there are more people  
as if when you hear an intruder  
or you think you hear a strange sound,  
that might be an intruder,  
you pretend to be armed  
equipped for a fight  
able to properly defend yourself against attack  
so you call out and say I have a bat (baseball, not animal)  
a knife (sharp, not butter)  
a blender (it was the first thing that popped into your head)  
this is said dubiously  
but what else can you do?  
in that moment  
to defend yourself?  
so you are laughing manically (does it become maniacal, at any point?) at the way  
dubious sounds  
utterly ridiculous  
when you actually break down the patchwork pieces of sound  
that together to produce the word  
dubious  
and you decide to kill 30 minutes of the night  
(in self defense)  
by researching the etymology of the word  
dubious  
its birth story

because this helps occupy your mind  
and ease a bit of the anxiety  
and dubious  
deserves for its origin story to be sung aloud  
shouted  
or repeated until it becomes quite absurd  
especially if done in an Irish-Jamaican accent

and this is all in service of the way we cope  
the way we fight the night  
to hatchet back and surgically remove  
the most dangerous parts of the silence.

Though it should be noted for those who do not understand  
in the fibers of their fascia  
the silence is not in fact the core problem.  
It is a symptom.  
A secondary issue.  
A co-morbidity.  
A co-existing disorder.  
The problem is what happens when we stop.  
When we are not frantically doing  
in avoidance of what lurks behind the silence  
inside the stillness.  
Whether real or remembered  
it is the contents of the silence  
that we fear most.

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You are not alone.  
Even in the darkest of moments,  
when the silence is deafening  
and feels like a scream in your chest that will drag you, forever, into the darkness.  
You are not alone.

There is courage in the act of speech.  
Call out into the darkness.

Survival is an act of bravery.  
Of defiance.  
Of grace, in its purest form.

Call out into the deafening silence.

I can hear you, from over here,

in my silence.

You are the light.

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## **Track Two: A Love Song for Creatives**

### **The Terror of the Blank Page, The White Space, The Unknown**

If like me, you are staring into the void of the page  
your pending deadlines  
your emails waiting to be returned  
your to-do list  
your dirty house  
your child's eyes waiting to be homeschooled  
The day in general  
and feeling paralysis  
procrastination, panic  
or the need to alliterate.  
Come in, this is the place for you

If you are feeling rudderless  
A bug on its back  
who cannot turn over  
and get moving again.  
Maybe a larger, more terrifying creature is actually flicking you, every time you figure out how  
to get back on your feet, to see what will happen.  
Maybe that larger creature tries to trap you in a glass jar.  
To study you. To see what will happen, if they remove you from your natural habitat. Not really  
considering how this makes you feel.  
Flailing, you cannot scurry away from the danger.  
Drowning on the lack of structure  
the terror of the unknown  
the canceled contracts  
the uncertainty of our livelihood, our futures.  
You come in too.

If you are an empath, enveloped by the empathetic impulse to grieve in a global sense  
for the lost lives  
for reason or communal sanity.  
Come in.

If you are raising children who have questions you cannot even answer for yourselves.  
If you are finding new ways to give of yourself as a parent  
while also discovering how much you are in need

of re-parenting yourself.  
Me too. Welcome.

If you are a creative with children, just come in.  
Just come in and get some love.  
Get all the love you need.  
Being a creative and a parent is hard, y'all.  
We never get enough recognition.  
Creatives who also find time to parent their children, come in and get celebrated.  
Parents who also find time to parent their creativity, you get celebrated too.  
There will be a massive celebration in your honor.  
And childcare is FREE. What?!

If you're still standing by the door, come on in. This place is magic y'all.

If your partner is watching news every minute of every day  
because that is how she/he/they cope  
and you cannot deal with another minute of the incompetence of the "leadership" (language  
breaks down remember? – people misuse words)  
lying to the people  
while people die  
and you cannot scream at *them*  
so you accidentally scream at your partner out of fear  
out of frustration  
out of panic  
or even out of hunger because you forgot to eat today  
because who has a schedule these days?  
you come in too

If you live by yourself and are experiencing loneliness that feels bone-breaking  
come in.  
If you live with others and loneliness still  
feels physical in nature,  
come in too.

If you are choking on platitudes,  
if you are tired of hearing "we are all in this together"  
or "things will go back to the way they were,"  
or if you are afraid that this will come to be true  
because while you realize *there is no going back*,  
you know those who monetize the status quo will try to force-feed "normalcy" like a syrupy  
medicine no one actually needs,  
you come in too.

If you are an essential worker, and you are out there risking your life,  
and you see someone at the beach on the news

and you privately have a violent thought  
but as a good person you just quietly say it to yourself, you come in too

I will say the thought out loud for you. Once you come inside.

If you have lost anyone to anything during this moment, you come in too

If you have lost anyone and it still sneaks up on you  
accidentally, or on purpose, when you hear a particular song,  
or you smell a particular smell,  
and you call up their memory,  
and suddenly,  
you are suddenly in tears,  
you come in too

If you are forgetting the mechanism of breath  
and your nervous system is out of whack  
and you are awake until 4am binge-watching shows  
and then sleeping all day  
you come in too

If you are up all night binge-watching  
and then your kid(s) come wake you at 7am,  
you come in too  
and take a nap.

If what hurts the most is that you now realize how much you are unseen  
by those who you need most to see you.  
Come in and be seen.

If you cannot read books or plays or engage with the creativity that normally realigns the world  
for you  
or helps you cope  
and you find your place in it,  
if you cannot focus on anything for more than two seconds? Five minutes? One hour?  
You come in too.

We'll start a book circle.  
A conversation about all the books you've been meaning to read that you cannot.  
You just CANNOT right now.  
I cannot either. We won't together.

If you are feeling hopeless, like a hole in your chest, because knowledge is as much a burden as a  
joy.  
When you really know what is going on,  
you must live with the hard truths



of that knowledge.

If you are feeling hopeless or enraged  
because you are a person of color and you are tired of having to explain WHY our lives should  
matter,

or because this all could have been handled better so that people didn't have to die,

or because you are a survivor and you live each day waging war on silence and stillness and the  
night

and this whole thing feels so fucking familiar, and yet

the outcome is already assured,

and sometimes you just feel a bit hollow where faith should rest.

Because they are saying just vote for him anyway. He's our only option.

And you are choking on the platitude and the malarkey of backwards thought.

All y'all come in too.

This communal gathering is for those who need a space for being.

A space for dreaming.

For surviving.

For a collective breath.

For a hug or two.

Ask for consent first.

For tears to come if they need to.

For a place to remember the mechanism of breath, if the tears won't come.

Because that is okay too.

Let's breathe together. Theatre is a collective breath.

A human breath. Across difference.

To see yourself and your experience reflected in another.

To meet someone, who is different from you. But the same.

This space is for what we have lost in human connection.

Holding space with others.

With others who see, in the human condition, potential,

always, potential, for storytelling, for painting the world with story.

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For those who have always believed in reinvention.  
That they could recreate themselves in stories.  
Who believed in worlds, they could birth, in their minds, on paper, with a kiss of their mouths,  
that allowed for a better presentation  
of the facts and circumstances of the world.  
Who knew that retreat could be life-saving.  
Who know of goosebumps caused by the arrangement of a sentence.  
Who cried, like legit cried, when Toni Morrison died,  
or who can read the same book or play or poem 25 times because art can alter the composition of  
your soul  
or put it back in alignment when it has fallen out

For those whose life-pieces often needed revision,  
or more seasoning,  
or endless rewrites,  
or recasting,  
or a complete rebranding before social media was a thing.

For the children who grew up watching TV, believing in TV families because they looked happy.  
Or the child who saw their first play and said yes, *THIS*.

### **Track Three: A Love Song for Difference** **Normal is SOOOO Overrated.**

For those of you who have heard:  
"they don't know what to do with you"  
"they don't know what to do with you and your work or how to define you, so they just don't  
invite you"  
"they don't get you"  
"that's just the way theatre is"  
"come back when you're more famous"  
"it will never change"  
"you'll never change it"  
"it's not mainstream enough"  
"it's too black"  
"it's not black enough"  
"we already have a black show"  
"I don't think black people talk like this"

For those who cannot excel in social media  
who are retreating into themselves  
because they are not able to replace human interaction with digital ones

If technology scares you and you think your phone knows too much. Come in.

Lean in to the unknown space.

Play with form.

Breathe with me.

Admit that the AI freaks you out.

I'll go first.

Step forward.

Take space.

Redefine that space in your own image.

Breathe with me.

Let's redefine the playing fields.

Speak to those, like you, like me, who are usually not invited.

You lead this breath.

Come in. This is our party.

Come as you are. Do not apologize for the fullness of your humanity. Its complexity is its beauty. Come in. We've all been waiting.

Together, WE create the change.

We unite.

We repair the fissures.

And then, we go out and fix what is truly broken in the world.

The systems

The structures

that have never truly worked.

Those born of hate fear greed, which still

seek to destroy beauty diversity love

and the freedom for us to have our individuality and uniqueness

but still honor the universality of our humanity.

Side-note: if you are invited to the other parties, you know what I'm talking about, the ones with the cool kids, if you have always been invited,

if you make the tables, or the seating charts, or own the buildings, hold the door open for others.

Don't just say you do, actually do it. You know the difference.

Be what you say.

Make language matter again.

I am hopeful that a dance party will spontaneously ensue.

Let's get some 90's hip hop and R&B playing.

I have a highly curated "Don't Be Cruel" Bobby Brown Pandora station that is EVERYTHING.

End of Play.