



Judith Carman

ABBREVIATION KEY: Diff = difficulty level; **V** = voice; **P** = piano; **E** = easy; **mE** = moderately easy; **M** = medium; **mD** = moderately difficult; **D** = difficult; **DD** = very difficult; **Tess** = tessitura; **LL** = very low; **L** = low; **mL** = moderately low; **M** = medium; **mH** = moderately high; **H** = high; **HH** = very high; **CR** = covers range; **CS** = covers staff; **X** = no clear key center.

NEW SONGS BY AMERICAN COMPOSERS

BISCARDI, CHESTER (b. 1948). "BABY SONG OF THE FOUR WINDS" (Carl Sandburg). Mezzo soprano and piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 1994 (CVR). X; B[#]₃-F₅; Tess: mL-M; 5/4, 7/8, 2/2, 3/2, 3/4, ♩ = ca. 60; ♩ = ♩, etc.; V/mD, P/mD; 3 minutes. Mezzo soprano.

The lullaby text of this song, from Carl Sandburg's *Good Morning, America*, is from the point of view of the baby, who invites each of the four winds to be his companions. South and west winds play with him, the north wind wakes him up, and the east wind brings comfort.

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_____ . "THE CHILD COMES EVERY WINTER" (William Zinsser). Medium voice and piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 1999 (CVR). X; C₄-C[#]₅; Tess: M; 2/4, 3/4, 5/8, 6/4, 7/8, ♩ = ca. 48-52; V/mE-M, P/M; 3 minutes. Medium voice.

This Christmas text speaks of the annual coming of the child, the star, and the three kings, who are "Wise men, wise enough to know/ That the child is the wisest one of all." Every year it is the same story: "Winter's child is born for you."

_____ . THE GIFT OF LIFE (Emily Dickinson, Denise Levertov, and Thornton Wilder). Soprano and piano. Edition Peters, 1996. Tonal, centers on C[#]; B₃-A₅; Tess: mL-mH; changing meters; (♩ = 48-72, varying through-out); 10 min; V/M, P/mD. Soprano. Recording: CRI CD 686.

"Mama never forgets her birds,/ Though in another tree—" (Dickinson)—"It was she/ who taught me to look / to name the flowers when I was still close to the ground, / my face level with theirs; . . . 'I am so tired,' she has written to me, 'of appreciating/ the gift of life.'" (Levertov)—"Soon we shall die / . . . There is a land of the living and a land of the dead / and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning" (Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*). Composed in 1990-1993 for soprano Judith Bettina, this continuous song cycle combining three poems of three different poets into a seamless whole in thought and meaning is reflective and gentle in its treatment of the themes of birth, life, memory, loss, death, and love.

_____ . "GURU" (Allen Ginsberg). Voice and piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 1995 (CVR). Tonal; D₄-D₅; Tess: mL; unmeasured; ♩ = ca. 66-72; V/E, P/E; 1 page. All voices except very high.

The "call of a bell" in the somewhat enigmatic text of this one-page song refers perhaps to a call to meditation, or to some other altered state of mind. Bell-like figures in the piano create the mood for the chanted text of the vocal line.

_____ . "PRAYERS OF STEEL" (Carl Sandburg). Baritone and piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 1998 (CVR). X; B₂-F[#]₄; Tess: mH; 5/4, 5/8, 6/4, 9/8, 4/4, ♩ = ca. 76-80; V/D, P/mD-D; 3 minutes. Baritone.

Carl Sandburg's muscular poem that uses construction imagery as metaphor for the work of the soul—"Lay me on an anvil, O God./ Beat and hammer me into a crowbar" to loosen old walls and foundations, "into a steel spike" that holds girders together; "Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars"—is given complementary musical treatment. The song is dynamically forceful until the final poetic line, which is set more softly as the vocal line soars to a quietly sustained E₄ and F[#]₄ at the end.

_____ . "RECOVERING" (Muriel Rukeyser). Tenor and piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 2000 (CVR). X; D₄-G[#]₅; Tess: M-mH; 3/4, 2/4, 4/4, 7/8, 9/8, 5/8, ♩ = ca. 42-48; V/mD-D, P/M-mD; 6 minutes. Tenor.

This combination of two poems by Muriel Rukeyser seems to describe a person recovering from a debilitating illness. At once depressing and hopeful that “Something again is beginning to be born,” it evokes powerful feelings. Biscardi’s dissonant musical style complements the disjunct elements of the text.

Chester Biscardi, Director of the Music Program at Sarah Lawrence College (William Schuman Chair in Music), has a catalog of numerous instrumental compositions from the 1970s and 1980s. In his own words (“Composer’s Thoughts” on his website), “In the mid-70’s I was concerned with integrating the theoretical and technical elements of music with philosophical and literary ideas.” In the 1980s he wanted “to explore other materials and began to think in different harmonic languages.” In the 1990s he began to turn more to text setting as a way to broaden his sense of “integrating styles and exploring new materials” while continuing “along the path I began in the mid-70s.” There are about fifteen solo vocal works and some choral pieces now in the catalog of his works.

In general, Biscardi’s musical style is rooted in the compositional soundscape of the 1970s. The elements of dissonant harmonic structure, repetition, and the frequent use of the high range of the voice are all here. In addition, he has an unusual fondness for sharps in his harmonic structures and for frequently keeping both hands in the treble clef in the piano parts. Vocal lines are sometimes linear and span the range, sometimes made up of repeated elements: single pitches in a chant-like line, or an alternation of two pitches a third apart, or a chord outline. Rhythms are sometimes linked to word stress and sometimes occur as a part of the musical pattern.

The texts of the six songs above are set in more or less the same musical style. Singers of Biscardi’s songs will need a good ear, and pianists will need good eyes for accidentals.

. MODERN LOVE

SONGS (William Zinsser). Medium voice with piano. Biscardi Music Press (BMI), 1997–2002 (CVR). Tonal, mostly traditional keys; A₃–E₅; Tess: mL–M; regular and irregular changing meters; ♩ = 40–72; V/M, P/M; 15 minutes. Baritone or mezzo soprano.

1. “What a Coincidence.” B^b major; A[#]₃–D₅; Tess: mL; 2/4, 3/4, 6/4, 4/4, slowly (♩ = ca. 40–44); V/M, P/M; 5 pages.
2. “I Wouldn’t Know About That.” Tonal; A₃–E₅; Tess: mL–M; 2/4, 4/4, 6/4, 5/4, Moderately, conversational at first; V/M, P/M–mD; 5 pages.
3. “Someone New.” F[#] major; A₃–E₅; Tess: mL–M; 4/4, 6/4, 2/4, 5/8, 3/16, ♩ = ca. 66–72; V/M, P/M; 5 pages.
4. “Now You See it, Now You Don’t.” Tonal on A; B₃–D₅; Tess: mL–M; 2/2, 3/2, 3/4, 3/8, ♩ = ca. 46 freely; V/M, P/M; 7 pages.
5. “At Any Given Moment.” Tonal; C[#]₄–E₅; Tess: CR; 2/4, 4/4, 4/8, ♩ = ca. 56 freely; V/M, P/M; 5 pages.

This set of songs is in quite a different style from the first six songs above and is the most successful composition from the standpoint of the vocal line in general and text setting in particular. Allowing his fondness for the music of George Gershwin and American popular song to enter the compositional picture completely changes the dissonant soundscape and loosens the strictness that results from dealing primarily with musical materials rather than with poetry. The composer says that

the cycle “sits somewhere between cabaret/standard tunes and art songs” (“Composer’s Thoughts”), and so it does.

The poems, couched in immediate, everyday language, begin with awakening love and end with final disappointment. The vocal line is rhythmically conversational and without extreme vocal demands. The piano part mostly doubles the vocal line, but is musically more complex in texture, rhythms, and form than the usual popular song accompaniment. There are numerous expressive markings to indicate a freer style and enough latitude in the piano part for the singer to take whatever expressive liberties are needed to give the songs appropriate word stress and a relaxed feeling.

These songs would be a nice choice for a mezzo soprano or baritone looking for something accessible to an audience, yet having elements of the art song.

LARSEN, LIBBY (b. 1950). “When I am an old woman” (Jenny Joseph).

Soprano and piano. E. C. Schirmer Music Company (ECS), 2008. X; D₄–A₅; Tess: M–mH; 2/2, 7/8, 3/4, 4/4, Not too fast ♩ = 80; V/mD, P/mD; 6 pages. Soprano.

The famous poem “Warning” by Jenny Joseph, here titled “When I am an old woman,” has been given an interesting setting by Libby Larsen. One might expect a setting of this poem to be perhaps flamboyant, funny, and devil-may-care, but this setting seems to inhabit a strange mood, as if the speaker is mentally drifting just inside the edge of sanity.

“When I’m an old woman, I shall wear purple with a red hat which doesn’t go and doesn’t suit me.” The opening

vocal line spans the staff with a sense of vision into the future. The repeated “bell-like” octave Bs high on the keyboard set up both a sense of the passage of time and the mood of reverie. Sliding dissonant chords in the left hand add to the air of unreality. A snatch of somehow familiar melody in the tenor line of the piano at “summer gloves and satin sandals” calls up perhaps some long forgotten scene that will replay itself under the influence of the brandy on which the woman will spend her pension.

The music changes at “I shall sit down on the pavement when I’m tired” to a much faster tempo, marked “Jaunty, lightly,” as the woman enumerates the eccentric things she will do in what promises to be her second childhood. She plans to “make up for the sobriety of” her youth. A return to *a tempo* brings back music from the beginning, as she decides perhaps she should begin to practice all these things now so that people will not be shocked when she is old.

The vocal line is quite lyric throughout and not particularly difficult in itself. It is also subtly doubled in the piano at places that might be a bit more difficult to hear within the somewhat dissonant harmonic texture.

The ladies of the local “Red Hat Society” might not find this song to their taste, but it would be interesting to program in other venues.

LOCKLAIR, DAN (b. 1949). A TRIP-TYCH OF GRATITUDE TO THE DIVINE.

Three Songs for Soprano and Piano (William Blake, John Hall, Patrick Carey). Subito Music Publishing (ASCAP), 2006. X; B^b₃-C₆; Tess: M-H; changing meters; ♩ = ca. 56-♩ = 92; V/M-mD, P/M-mD; 22 pages. Soprano.

1. “The Lamb” (William Blake). X; C[#]₄-A₅; Tess: M & H; 3/4, 6/8, 5/8, 3/8, 5/4, Gently (♩ = ca. 60); V/mD, P/mD; 5 pages.
2. “A Pastoral Hymn” (John Hall). X; D₄-A₅; Tess: mH-H; 6/8, 9/8, 4/8, 3/8, Moderately fast with gaiety (♩ = ca. 92); V/M, P/M; 6 pages.
3. “Hymn” (Patrick Carey). X; B^b₃-C₆; Tess: M-H; 2/4, 3/4, 5/8, 4/4, Moderately (♩ = ca. 56); V/mD, P/mD; 11 pages.

Dan Locklair, as Composer-in-Residence and Professor of Music at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, has composed a number of works for the voice, some of which have been reviewed in this column. The work here is a cycle of three songs composed in 1976 and revised thirty years later. Not having seen the original score, I have no way of knowing the extent of the revision, but the music itself has the sound of much of the composed music of the 1970s. That is, dissonance is prominent, there is much use of the high range of the voice, and the vocal lines

seem more instrumentally than vocally conceived.

The texts are interesting for their celebration of God in Nature. William Blake’s “The Lamb,” is, of course, very well known, but the other two poems are less so. “A Pastoral Hymn” by John Hall (1627–1656) reminds us that in the song of birds, the creeping of snails, the leafing of trees, and the blooming of flowers, God writes his name. Patrick Carey (1624–1656) observes in nature that God chooses as He pleases to make the dove not a raven, the nightingale not an owl, the rose just herself, the bee’s honey not gall, and the down of the swan not thorns. “All creatures, then, confess to God/ That th’ owe Him all, but I./ . . . Hence, pride! out of my soul!/ . . . I’ll learn this lesson, and escape the rod;/ I, too, have all from God.”

The musical settings of these poems juxtapose the artistic sensibilities of the seventeenth/eighteenth and twentieth centuries. An evaluation of the result probably would be different for different generations of performers, the more romantically inclined

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possibly liking them less well, and the less sentimentally inclined finding them more attractive. In any case, the soprano who chooses these songs must be rhythmically secure and very much at home at the top of the voice at all dynamic levels.

**MABRY, GEORGE L., arr. (b. 1945).
SIX FOLK SONGS OF THE AMERICAS.**

Medium high voice and piano. Roger Dean Publishing Company, 2002. Traditional keys/modes; B^b₃–G₅; Tess: M; regular meters; slow to moderate tempos; V/M, P/M; 38 pages. Medium high voice–mezzo soprano perhaps best.

1. "She's Like the Swallow." Dorian; D₄–F₅; Tess: M; 3/4, Flowing ♩ = 76; V/M, P/M; 9 pages.
2. "Blackbird's Courting Song." G minor; D₄–G₅; Tess: M; 2/4, 3/4, Playful, whimsical ♩ = 96; V/M, P/M; 8 pages.
3. "He's Gone Away." F major/A major; C₄–E₅/E^b₄–F₅; Tess: M; 4/4, Slowly ♩ = 66; V/mE, P/mE; 3 pages (each key).
4. "Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies." [duet] E^b major; B^b₃–G₅/B^b₃–D₅; Tess: mH/M; 4/4, Slowly and gently; V/M, P/M; 5 pages.
5. "The Riddle Song." G^b major; D^b₄–G^b₅; Tess: M; 4/4, Slowly ♩ = 50; V/M, P/M; 4 pages.
6. "Lullaby to the Christ Child" (trans. of Portuguese text). G minor; D₄–E^b₅; Tess: M; 3/4, Andante cantabile ♩ = 63; V/M, P/M; 6 pages.

New settings of American folk songs are always welcome, as singers of all levels enjoy exploring new interpretations of old songs. George Mabry has

chosen four familiar American folk songs, one Canadian folk song, and one unfamiliar South American (Brazilian) folk song for this collection. All of the arrangements are quite different from those currently available, with the exception of "He's Gone Away," the tune and harmonies of which are so familiar and well loved as to merit being kept close to what people expect to hear.

"The Riddle Song" is set quite simply in the first stanza with a melodic change only at the end. The second stanza takes the vocal line up a third, as though singing a harmony part, and the third stanza returns to the original melody, ending with a coda vocalized on "Ah." The piano part supports the voice throughout and also spins out a countermelody much of the time.

"Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies," based on a nineteenth century American ballad, has quite a different melody from other arrangements. In addition, the text is somewhat different and uses a third stanza not commonly found. Setting the ballad as a duet is a nice touch. It seems as if two girls—or two older women—are giving this advice to a group of other "fair and tender ladies." Perhaps the two have even been jilted by the same boy? In any case, they speak from experience.

"Lullaby to the Christ Child," translated from the Portuguese by Martha Williams and George L. Mabry, and in a minor key, is a lovely song in which the mother promises to keep the sleeping child safe though surrounded by the dark night. The melody is simple and haunting, and the piano part makes use of an opening motif in a descending pattern to create the mood. These notes are then spun out into other obbligato figures throughout the song.

"The Blackbird's Courting Song," marked "Playful, whimsical," is a clever setting of this jaunty song about birds seeking a mate. The rhythmic figures in the piano part make visible the hopping about of the birds, and the introduction of the main melody also resembles the blackbird's whistle. The singer gets to use flutter tonguing (breath only) and accented puffs of air in addition to singing the interesting vocal line.

The crown jewel of this collection, however, is the exquisitely beautiful "She's Like the Swallow." This Canadian folk song comes from Newfoundland and tells the sad story of the young girl who was deceived by a faithless lover. She picks roses for him and gives him three, but as they sit on the hill, his heart grows hard. He leaves her alone when he has had his way with her—"When I carried my apron low,/ My love followed me through frost and snow./ But now my apron is to my chin;/ My love passes by but won't call in." She makes a bed of his roses, takes a stone for her head, and lies down to "let her roses fade away." Now she's "like the swallow that flies so high."

The composer has crafted a piano part that is highly expressive of the text. The mood is set at the beginning with soft rolled chords high on the keyboard that continue in the right hand over an eighth note figure in the left that features the lonely sound of the Dorian mode. A new figure in the right hand introduces the second stanza, and the long syncopation figure in the left hand begins to increase the sense of unease. Introducing the third stanza is a mournful falling minor second figure in combination with the figure from the second stanza over a repeated bell-like A₄.

The vocal line, straightforward at first, becomes more elaborate as the girl's anxiety increases. At the fourth stanza, the boy speaks "Brightly" in 9/8, telling her how foolish she is to think he would love her alone. The mournful falling minor seconds transition to the girl's sorrow of the fifth stanza, sung in a tortuous vocal line of altered notes that focus on the minor second. The last stanza returns to the music of the first—the simple vocal line over soft rolled open chords—and finishes with a repeated figure in the right hand that reflects both the suspension of life and the repetitiveness of an old, old story.

This set of folk song arrangements should be excellent material for mezzo sopranos in almost any performing venue.

MOLLICONE, HENRY (b. 1946). "When Diamonds are a Legend" (Emily Dickinson). Soprano and piano. Lone Press (ECS), 2008. Hovering major tonalities; E₄–C₆; Tess: H; 3/4, 6/4, Andante ♩ = 92; V/D, P/M; ca. 2 minutes. High soprano.

This lovely, high floating song was composed "In memory of Beverly Sills." Indeed, it is just the kind of vocal line that Sills made sound so easy, though for all but a handful of high sopranos it would present numerous difficulties. Phrases begin with ascending intervals, including octaves, and often end on a spun-out high tone. Toward the end, the tempo slows slightly for ascending scales that express the lightness of "a Butterfly." Passages that would be fine if they were fast take on the distinct "Sillsian" character of high, slow, soft singing.

"When Diamonds are a Legend,/ And Diadems—a Tale—" suggests the loveliness of things that are no more. Almost all the musical gestures are ascending patterns in both voice and piano, recalling the singer whose ebullience lifted all around her. This is a lovely song for the right singer.

SAMETZ, STEVEN (b. 1954). "I cannot dance, O Lord" (Mechtild of Magdeburg). Soprano and organ. E. C. Schirmer Music Company (ECS), 2008. A major (and other keys); B₃–A₅; Tess: CR; 4/4, 5/8, 3/4, 2/4, ♩ = 126; V/mD, Org/M; 3 minutes. Soprano.

Steven Sametz, Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Artistic Director for The Princeton Singers, has composed numerous works for well known professional choral ensembles, such as Chanticleer, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, and others.

This composition for soprano and organ is an exuberant setting of a text by Mechtild of Magdeburg, a thirteenth century mystic and one of the earliest women to write about spirituality. "I cannot dance, O Lord, unless You lead me . . . Let me see you dance joyfully" sets up the essential dance character of the song, beginning with voice alone for thirty-two measures. The organ then joins the voice as the text is repeated with the same music, first doubling the voice in the right hand over sustained tones in the left, and then becoming fugal in two voices. The organ part becomes gradually more expansive with thicker chords accompanying the entwining melodic lines until an ecstatic climax at the phrase "I will leap into Love and from Love into Knowledge." A short coda using the original melodic material at almost an octave higher for the voice concludes the work.

This would be a wonderful piece for two excellent musicians, the singer having a full lyric (or possibly dra-

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matic) voice to partner the organ. The difficulties are primarily rhythmic (frequent 5/8 measures and word displacement in repeated rhythmic figures) and would take some ensemble work. The song reminds one of Rorem's "Alleluia" in its rhythmic energy, though it is more regular in its patterns.

SISCO, DAVID (b. 1975). DEAR GOD.

Duet for soprano and mezzo soprano (or for solo soprano). Published online by the composer. (Songs can be viewed and purchased at www.siscosong.com.) Mostly traditional keys, a few X; B₃-A^b₅; Tess: CR, M; regular and irregular meters with changes; varied tempos; V/E-mD, P/E-mD; 5 measures-2 pages. Soprano and mezzo soprano or solo soprano. TITLES: I. "Joyce"; II.

"Charles"; III. "Peter"; IV. "Allison"; V. "Barbara"; VI. "Dennis"; VII. "Carrie"; VIII. "Frank"; IX. "Charlene"; X. "Norma"; XI. "Jeff"; XII. "Thomas."

These twelve settings of amusing kids' prayers are an exercise in musical miniatures. With such short texts, the composer must get the musical material just right from the very first note to capture the mood and meaning accurately. David Sisco has been quite successful in creating a short group of songs that move rapidly through the changing moods from child to child. The musical material captures the essence of each text, and expressive markings such as "Prayerfully," "Slightly detached," "Simply," "Angrily," "Mysterioso," "ala Poulenc, tres condescending," "Luminous," "Lovingly,"

and "Awestruck" indicate the variety of attitudes.

Although the texts are childlike, and the music does not overwhelm them, neither are the vocal lines and the piano parts in any way simplistic. Sisco both reflects the moods of the texts and penetrates to the core meaning, which can be simply a child's surface feelings or something more profound, provoking wonder at their powers of observation and understanding. The vocal lines often use the entire range of the song, and the texts are well set for word rhythms. The piano parts reflect both mood and meaning with figurations that seem to match the personalities of the children.

This small cycle would be an excellent choice for giving lightness to a recital program of heavier works and also for a program of songs about children or on texts by children.

"My Best Beloved"

(Francis Quarles). Published online by the composer. G major; E^b₄-G[#]₅; Tess: M; 5/4, 3/4, 4/4, ♩ = 60; V/M, P/mD; 4½ pages. Soprano or tenor.

This charming song is reminiscent of the English romantic composers who were fond of English folk song, specifically of Ralph Vaughan Williams. The composer sets the text in modified strophic form, spinning out a flowing melody that is used for the first two stanzas. At the third stanza, the piano takes the melody, often in canon, while the voice soars above with an obbligate line. The song ends with a brief coda in which the voice floats up to G₅, and the piano flows gently on the closing melody to the final cadence.

Melody dominates text in this song in terms of word rhythms, but the

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melody is so lovely and so well expresses the mood of the text that it does not matter. In fact, the little twists and turns in the melody itself give proper stress to the words, either by a change in direction or in harmony. Otherwise, the text flows smoothly on a rhythmically uninflected melodic line.

The contrapuntal piano texture is quite thick at times (and requires a large reach), so the voice must be large enough to ride above it. This would be an excellent song for a warm lyric soprano or tenor and would be useful in many venues.

. STORIES ON STONE
(Epitaphs of American Men & Women). Published online by the composer. Traditional keys; A₂–F₄; Tess: CR, M; regular and irregular meters with some changes, ♩ = 40–96; V/mE, P/M; 2 measures—2 pages. Baritone.
TITLES: “F. W. Jackson (d. 1799, Plymouth, MA)”; “Major (Aspin Hill Cemetery for Pets, Aspin, MD)”; “David Goodman Croly (d. 1889, Lakewood, NJ)”; “Charles Elliot (d. 1756, New Bern, NC)”; “Sara Ensign (d. 1825, Cooperstown, NY)”; “Olivia Susan Clemens (d. 1896, Elmira, NY)”; “Benjamin Franklin (d. 1790, Boston, MA).”

Another set of musical miniatures, *Stories in Stone* is a small catalog of epitaphs taken from actual gravestones in various cemeteries on the Eastern Seaboard. They range from utterly frank—“He meant well, tried little, failed much”—through unintention-

ally humorous—“Lord, she is thin” (later amended to “thine”)—to Benjamin Franklin’s elaborate and touching literary references.

Again, Sisco has found just the right music for each text, even weaving a patriotic tune (with rhythmic displacements) into the piano texture of “Benjamin Franklin.” The music for “Olivia Susan Clemens” is quite beautiful, as befits the text that requests nature to “shine kindly,” “blow softly,” “lie light” upon the body beneath the sod.

This would be an interesting and useful set for a baritone with a warm sound looking for something short and attractive.

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Dr. Carman has taught yoga with a special emphasis on yoga for singers since 1999 and has conducted numerous *Yoga and Singing* workshops. She presented three sessions on *Yoga and Singing* at the NATS Winter Workshop in Los Angeles (2008) and will teach Yoga for Singers classes at the NATS National Conference in Nashville (2008). Dr. Carman is certified at the 500 hour level (RYT500) by the American Vinyoga Institute and is registered with Yoga Alliance.

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