

Anna Rubín

WHITE SERPENT

for

soprano and piano

Poem

by

Nelly Sachs

(in English translation by the composer)

Nobel Laureate Nelly Sachs wrote many haunting poems documenting the inner turmoil she experienced during and after the Holocaust. She lived in Germany until 1940 when she fled to Sweden and there spent the rest of her life. Reading these poems more than fifty years after they were written, I see also in her nature imagery, a lament not only for the Jewish people, but for the earth and its creatures.

Weisse Schlange or White Serpent contains a wild conflation of images – emptiness and the anger of a grenade, fire and ice along with the strange images of a white snake and ice. All these images roll into the final image of time and eternity on the back of a snail. The relentless quality of that last image gave rise to my use of a pulse that governs the piece, against which melodies and gestures flare. (Typically, Sachs uses the first line of the poem as title.)

Weisse Schlange (original German text)

Weisse Schlange
Polar kreis
Flügel im Granit
Rosa Wehmut im Eisblock.
Sperrzonen Geheimnis Herzklopfen meilen Aus Entfernung.
Wind hängend am Heimweh Flamende Granate aus Zorn –
Une die Schnecke mit dem tickenden Gepäck der Gottzeit.

English translation

White serpent
Polar circle
Wings in the granite
Rose-colored sadness in blocks of ice
Emptiness around the secret
Heart throbbing miles of distance
Wind-chains hanging from homesickness
Flaming grenade of anger –
And the snail
With the ticking luggage of God's time.

Notes on Performance

Permission to use poems of Nelly Sachs granted by Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022, 2023.

Accidentals apply only to the beat.

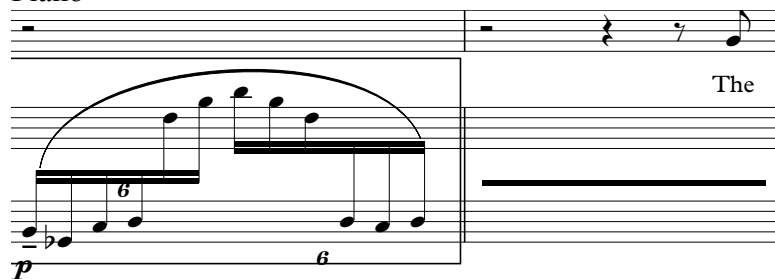
Pedaling indications are frequently shown but pianist should feel free to add pedaling for fluidity.

Soprano



Faster getting slow

Piano



Repeat figure for duration indicated by heavy horizontal line.

White Serpent

Relentless

♩ = ca. 82

First system of the musical score. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time and contains four measures of whole rests. The piano accompaniment is in 4/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The left hand has a steady eighth-note bass line. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *Ped.* (pedal) markings.

Second system of the musical score, starting at measure 5. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The system concludes with a *Ped.* (pedal) marking.

Third system of the musical score, starting at measure 8. The vocal line contains the lyrics "White ser-pent, White ser pent." with musical notation. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of eighth notes and a quintuplet of eighth notes. Dynamics include *poco* (poco), *p* (piano), and *Ped.* (pedal) markings.

11

White _____ po - lar cir - cle, _____ White po - lar

Ped. _____ Ped. _____

13

cir-cle. _____ Wings of gran-ite,

Ped. _____ Ped. _____

16

red sad _____ ness in blocks of ice (ay) sss

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

f

mf

f

Emp - ti - ness a-round the se - cret, the se - cret heart__ heart__

pp

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

24

heart-throb-bing miles of dis-tance. (ss)

8va

allargando

8vb

Ped. Ped. Ped.

28

mf

f

Shack les of wind wind bind me to my long-ing, long-ing

mf

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

32

pp

long ing - (mmm)

8va---| 8va---| 8va---| 8va---|

pp

Ped. _____ ^

34

mf *f*

5 6

Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^

35 *poco rit.*

f

Flam- ing

poco rit.

7 7 7 7

Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^ Ped. _____ ^

17

37

flam - - - - - ing - gren -

f Ped. Ped.

38

ades of fur - y, fur - y, fur - y,

Ped. Ped.

39 **poco rall.**

fur - y. fur - y The snail

poco rall. *gliss.* *mp* *p*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

41

crawls with its tick-ing, tap-ping tick-ing, tap ping

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

44

tap-ping tap-ping bur - den, bur - den of God's, of God's,

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

49

of God's e - tern-i-ty. e-

mf

19
53

rit.

tern-i - ty.

rit.

Ped.

Deeply mournful

56

p

Ah, _____ White ser pent. _____

Ped.