

***Shakespeare Bitters* (2013)**

I. Full Fathom Five

II. Come Away Death

III. Blow, Blow Thou Winter Wind

Shakespeare Bitters was commissioned by Australian soprano Lisa Harper Brown who premiered the piano-vocal version in Perth on 27 April 2013. It is always a challenge for me to find “settable” poems or lyrics. In my search I am always on the lookout for a number things: poems that are the right length for the tempo of the music, that suggest a musical mood, and that have the right kind of rhythmic and lyrical potential to mesh with my own musical sensibilities. This ususally means reading lots of poems. In the case of *Shakespeare Bitters*, however, this was not the case because I went immediately to Shakespeare’s plays and to lyrics that were orginally designed to be sung. Shakespeare is not only a master of the English language but he is possessed of an incredibly musical ear. The title of the cycle, *Shakespeare Bitters*, reflects the dark, plaintive or bitter aspect of the three songs. Ariel sings “Full Fathom Five” from *The Tempest* to the shipwrecked Ferdinand, describing the “sea-change” of his drowned father. In *Twelfth Night* “Come Away Death”, sung by Feste to Orsino, is the lament of a person who has died from unrequited love (reflecting Orsino’s desire for the unresponsive Olivia). Most straightforwardly ironic and bitter of the *Bitters* is “Blow, Blow Thou Winter Wind” with its cynical perspective on feigned friendship; that cynicism is especially apparent in the way the jarringly “jolly” chorus contrasts with the aggrievement more directly voiced in the stanzas.

Duration: 8:15 minutes