Spitfire Irene

*a song cycle*

for Solo Soprano (with overtones)

Adam Strickson
Edward Caine
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a song cycle for solo soprano

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Words: Adam Strickson
Music: Edward Caine

Duration: 18’

Seven songs tell the life story of a woman who is ninety in the year 2011. At the beginning of the Second World War, like Amy Johnson, she was an 'Attagirl', one of the select ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) female pilots delivering Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancasters to airfields all over Britain. Over the course of a long life, she has experienced many loves and letdowns, but perhaps her greatest love was her Spitfire.

'Spitfire Irene' is a character featured in the full length music-theatre piece, Flight Paths, which has been commissioned by imove and forms part of the Wingbeats project for the Cultural Olympiad. For more information go to www.imoveand.com/p/wingbeats

Spitfire Irene was written as part of the Leeds based composer-poet collaboration project ‘As in waking dream’ (subtitle: A Woman’s Life and Love) in which six poets and composers got together to produce responses to Schumann’s ‘Frauenliebe und Leben’. The cycle was premiered on 23/5/11 at the Assembly Rooms in Leeds by soprano Peyee Chen, in cooperation with Opera North.

Adam Strickson: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/pci/staff/staff_astrickson.html
Edward Caine: http://www.edwardcaine.com/
1. I was my own Wendy.

I was my own Wendy,
all summer froth and loveliness,
a Never-Never girl in a silky dress
with peacock feathers from a fancy ball
who parted curtains on the garden wall.

Oh the staccato of that hurting fall!
Oh the shamefulness of that skirt-up sprawl!

I was my own Wendy:
a spanking for the grass stains,
a week of horrid ankle pains.

I was my own Wendy:
always knew that courage stings,
always knew I’d do great things,
always knew I’d find my wings.

2. Darling of the air

Convent school.
‘Doing an Amy’.
Stuck out my arms.
Flew across the quad.

I was a darling of the air.

Flying lessons.
Went solo.
Took a Tiger high.
Played with clouds.

I was a darling of the air.

War. Joined up.
Air Transport Auxiliary.
Ferried planes to men.
Risked neck.

I was a darling of the air.

Flew unarmed.
No radio. No instruments.
Frontline delivery.
Loved every moment.

I was a darling of the air.


You moved. I moved.
My glorious Spitfire.
How snug! How thrilling!
The tremor in your wings!

You moved. I moved.
My Spit...spit...fire!
With my swept back curls
I was your Attagirl!

You moved. I moved.
My Spitter! My fire!
Your metal loveliness
trembled with eagerness!

Perhaps it was never meant
that I learnt to feel free inside you.

You moved. I moved.
How I learnt to feel free inside you!

4. In such a night.

In such a night

The music at the Lansdowne
The way he put his drink down
My dashing magpie frock
He squeezed my stocking top

In such a night

The scratch of his lapel
The rush in the hotel
My silly need to know
His ardent wish to go

In such a night

He had no music in himself
He had no music
5. Stuck

He cut off my wings, left me with a child in the incessant drizzle of a valley where the sun slept for ten long months.

I never dreamt it would end like that, stuck in a cold mansion above the shoe mills and bowed heads of a Lancashire town.

Sometimes my muscles stretched like seabirds and the wind in the sky of my skin swirled though he threw me onto the stone flags.

He threw me onto the stone flags and never came home.

I looked at my daughter sleeping and felt desperately alone so desperately alone, stuck in a cold mansion above the shoe mills and bowed heads of a Lancashire town.

6. Losing altitude

A woman’s task is the task in hand and that has killed me slowly, day after day, year after year, flying blind against the wind: caught in a bad marriage, briefly happy in a second but always losing altitude, flying blind against the wind.

When I cried at the kitchen sink, I lost altitude.

When a greenfinch died in my hands, I lost altitude.

When my daughter left for Canada, I lost altitude.

I always thought I’d save myself before my plane burst into flames.

7. Woman much missed.

Oh Wendy girl, Attagirl, Spitter girl, sky high girl

Woman much missed

how you call to me

call to me

I’m ninety now, ninety, ninety!

When I pluck the sparrow’s tail, I feel my six stone body fail but woolly sleeves hide hidden wings and deep inside a bird still sings.

I’m ninety now, ninety, ninety!

Oh Wendy girl, Attagirl, Spitter girl, sky high girl

Woman much missed

how you call to me

call to me

I spread my wings, become my love, my life, myself.
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1. I Was My Own Wendy

bright, energetic, fun, excited

I was my own wendy!

All summer froth and loveliness

a never never girl in a silk dress

with peacock feathers from a fancy ball

Who parted curtains on the garden wall

Oh

Oh the staccato of the
tap on opposite shoulders
Oh, the shamelessness of that skirt up, sprawl!

I was my own Wendy!

I was my own Wendy!

I was my own Wendy!

a spanking for the grass stains

a week of horrid ankle pains! ah

always knew that courage stings

always knew I'd do great things, wh wh wh

ah, always knew I'd find my wings
2. Darling of the Air

Pocket Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>take out pocket book</th>
<th>open (any page)</th>
<th>turn individual pages in direction indicated</th>
<th>rifle pages with thumb in direction indicated</th>
<th>snap shut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \searrow )</td>
<td>( \uparrow )</td>
<td>( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \ \vdots \ \vdots \end{array} )</td>
<td>( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \ \vdots \ \vdots \end{array} )</td>
<td>( \searrow )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Soprano

| look in as if reading | \( \searrow \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \searrow \) |
|----------------------| \( \uparrow \)  | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \searrow \) |

| \( \text{mm} \) | \( \text{mm} \) | \( \text{mm} \) |

| look to right reach out right arm | \( \searrow \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \searrow \) |
|-----------------------------| \( \uparrow \)  | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \) | \( \searrow \) |

| \( \text{an A - my}' \) | \( \text{spoken} \) | \( \text{stuck out my arms} \) | \( \text{I was a darling of the air} \) |

| \( \text{con - vent school} \) | \( \text{Do - ing} \) |

| \( \text{mm} \) |

| \( \text{mm} \) |

| \( \text{mm} \) |

| \( \text{mm} \) |
Flying lessons

Look away to the right

Reach arm out

Went solo

Look back to the front

Played with the clouds

I was a darling of the air!

War joined up

Transport auxiliary

Ferried planes to men

Risked neck

Tap book

Hold book up to the light and examine critically

Speak

Whispered

Tap book (R.H. index finger)

Speak

Front

Back

Was a darling of the air!
I was a darling of the air!

Loved every movement.
3. You Moved, I Moved

free tempo, quite slow

\[ \text{pp} \quad \text{1/4 tone gliss.} \]

You \text{mm} - \text{o} - \text{ve} - \text{d}

\[ \text{pp} \quad \text{I mo} - \text{ved} \quad \text{mm} - \text{o} - \text{ve} - \text{d} \]
half-whispered
my glorious spitfire!

whistled
(wh)

How snug!

The
tremor of your wings!

[attacca]
You moved

I moved

Hm - oo - ve - d!

My ss - pit ss - pit ss ss wh - a fire!

whistled

wh - a

with my ss ss wept back curls.

I was your a - tta - girl!
my spitter! my fire!

Your metal loveliness whom.

mm trembled with eagerness whom.

Perhaps it was never meant.

That I learned to feel free inside you?
How I learned to feel free inside you!
4. In Such A Night

slow, sensual, introverted

In such a night

The music at the lansdowne

The way he put his drink down

My dashingly magpie frock

He squeezed my stocking top!
In such a night—mm hmm hmm hmm hmm
doing+

In such(!)

Increasingly anxious

The rush in the hotel

Rushed

My urgent need to know———

His ardent wish to go!
In such a night

exhale

Inhale calmly

inhalo

Hold breath

exhale

Inhale calmly

p

Exhale calmly

Hold breath

mp

Legato

He had no music in himself

He had no music
slow, sad, sorrowful, nostalgic

He cut off my wings left me with a child

In the incessant drizzle of a valley where the sun slept for ten long months

never dreamt it would end like that stuck in a cold mansion above the shoe mills

and bowed heads of a Lancashire town.
Sometimes my muscles stretched like seabirds, mm (oo)

and the wind in the sky of my skin swirled

though he threw me onto the stone flags

He threw me onto the stone flags and never came home

I looked at my daughter sleeping and felt desperately alone

In a cold mansion above the shoe mills

and bowed heads of a Lancashire town
Pensive, fragmented, alternating quick and slow gestures

The woman's task is the task at hand and that has killed me slowly

day after day year after year flying blind against the wind

whispered

whispered

caught in a bad marriage briefly happy

flying in a second killed me slowly in a bad marriage

but always that has losing all is time

flying blind against the wind
when I cried
and
at
ways
to
the
kitchen
sink

killed me slowly I lost altitude always losing

when a green finch died in my hand the task the task

I lost at hand the task in my hand

whispered

whispered

forced

sharp intake of breath

when my daughter left task at hand the task at hand whooo

whispered

to Canada a whooo I main lost task all is the tude

slow, inward

mm I always thought I'd save myself before my plane burst into flames
Notes on 7. Woman Much Missed

Start with the cell indicated by *

- Structure -

Progress through the Cantus Firmus sections, with Improvisation before, after and between each section. Returns to improvisation are marked by arrows pointing upwards. After finishing the Cantus Firmus on one section (no repeats), move onto the next during improvisation.

- Improvisation -

Pass through the cells in any order, feel free to improvise based on the cells, and to interrupt or interlocute one cell with another. Do not include cells from the Cantus Firmus. Length of improvisations are down to the performer. Boxed cells should take prominence over non-boxed cells.
old, but with child-like glee

spoken

I'm ninety now! ninety!

half whispered

I was (ah) wh-wh-wh-

clap

inhale

exhale

hold hands together close to your chest and smile while you breathe

mf

ninety!

d!

wh

wh-wh-

wh-wo-man much missed

mf

my own wh-a

mf

a-tta a-tta a-tta gu wh-

mf

a-tta a-tta a-tta gu a-tta a-tta a-tta gu

improvise around patterns of 2 and 3

mf

the wind

exhale

inhale

mf

how you call to me

wring hands together

p

pp

sotto voce

mm

mm

mm

mm

mm

mm

Oh wh-wen-dy girl a-tta girl spi-tter girl

sky high girl

Contus Firmus

via improvisation
When I pluck the sparrow's tail
I feel my six stone body fail

but woolly sleeves hide hidden wings
and deep inside a bird still sings

to \textbf{C} via improvisation
I'm brightening up

whispered

I'm call to me

whispered

how you call to me

whispered

how you

wring hands

call to me

nine

Oh Wen-dy girl a-tta girl spi-tter girl

sky high girl

to D

I spread my wings become my love my life my self

*optional